

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

Barnfield College

February 1995

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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The Further Education Funding Council has a legal duty to make sure further education in England is properly assessed. The FEFC's inspectorate inspects and reports on each college of further education every four years. The inspectorate also assesses and reports nationally on the curriculum and gives advice to FEFC's quality assessment committee.

College inspections are carried out in accordance with the framework and guidelines described in Council Circular 93/28. They involve full-time inspectors and registered part-time inspectors who have knowledge and experience in the work they inspect. Inspection teams normally include at least one member who does not work in education and a member of staff from the college being inspected.

GRADE DESCRIPTORS

The procedures for assessing quality are set out in the Council Circular 93/28. During their inspection, inspectors assess the strengths and weaknesses of each aspect of provision they inspect. Their assessments are set out in the reports. They also use a five-point grading scale to summarise the balance between strengths and weaknesses. The descriptors for the grades are:

- grade 1 – provision which has many strengths and very few weaknesses*
- grade 2 – provision in which the strengths clearly outweigh the weaknesses*
- grade 3 – provision with a balance of strengths and weaknesses*
- grade 4 – provision in which the weaknesses clearly outweigh the strengths*
- grade 5 – provision which has many weaknesses and very few strengths.*

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FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 06/95

BARNFIELD COLLEGE

EASTERN REGION

Inspected April 1994–October 1994

Summary

Barnfield College, Bedfordshire, offers a wide range of full-time and part-time vocational programmes for school leavers and adults. Efficient governance and management has allowed considerable year-on-year growth to be managed smoothly without reducing the quality of provision. The transfer of courses in construction and engineering from the University of Luton, and the acquisition of special adult learner programmes, have added significantly to the range of courses provided by the college. Teaching and support staff are appropriately qualified and experienced for their work. Students' achievements in the vocational programmes are good, but GCE A level examination results and GCSE results for full-time students are below average for general further education colleges. Most aspects of the support and guidance for students are in place and effective, although arrangements for monitoring the services are undeveloped. There is a commitment to quality assurance, but the framework for continuous review of the quality of curriculum and courses is over complex and incomplete. Staff appraisal and staff development are linked and well resourced. Equipment supplied for students on courses in hotel and catering, hairdressing, and beauty and sports therapy are of a high standard. The college has insufficient information technology equipment to supply the needs of some curriculum areas. The library facilities are inadequate: they have not kept up with the growth of recent years. Most of the college accommodation is good and well managed.

The grades awarded as a result of the inspection are given below.

Aspects of cross-college provision		Grade
Responsiveness and range of provision		1
Governance and management		2
Students' recruitment, guidance and support		2
Quality assurance		3
Resources:	staffing	2
	equipment/learning resources	2
	accommodation	2

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Computing and sciences	3	Health and community care	1
Construction*	3	Hairdressing, beauty and sports therapy	2
Engineering*	3	Art and design	2
Business and professional studies	3	Humanities	3
Hotel and catering	1	Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	2

*Courses transferred to the college on 1 August 1994.

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INTRODUCTION

1 Barnfield College, Bedfordshire was inspected between April and October 1994. A team of eight inspectors spent a week in the college from 17 to 21 October 1994. A further 53 days were used to inspect specialist aspects of the college provision. Inspectors visited over 200 classes, examined samples of students' work and held discussions with governors, staff and students. They also met representatives of local employers, the Bedfordshire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), higher education institutions, schools, and the community.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 Barnfield College, located within the town of Luton, is a general further education college. It is one of three further education colleges in south Bedfordshire, the others being Dunstable College and Luton Sixth Form College which is situated less than a mile away. The University of Luton is located within two miles of the college. These four institutions form the south Bedfordshire federation of colleges which aims, through improved co-operation, to contribute to the government targets for increasing participation in further and higher education.

3 The 1991 census records the population of Luton as 171,671. This figure is expected to grow by nearly 3 per cent by the year 2001. The population of Bedfordshire as a whole, which was 524,105 in 1991, is forecast to increase by about 8 per cent over the same period. The number of 15-19 year olds in Bedfordshire is recovering from the decline of the 1980s and is now expected to rise more rapidly than in the rest of the country. Minority ethnic groups represent almost 20 per cent of the residents of Luton; 13 per cent are Asian and 5 per cent African or Caribbean. The pattern of employment in Luton differs from that found in the rest of Bedfordshire. In Luton it is largely associated with manufacturing, mainly concentrated on the automobile industry. Unemployment is higher in Luton than in the rest of the county. In January 1994 the unemployment rate was 12.9 per cent, compared with an average of 9.8 per cent for the whole of Bedfordshire.

4 The college draws its students from a catchment area covering the town of Luton, and the nearby rural areas of south Bedfordshire and north Hertfordshire. There are 11 high schools in Luton, seven of which are local education authority (LEA) schools and four are grant maintained. With the exception of one voluntary-controlled school, all are for students aged 11-16, and have no sixth forms. There are no independent schools. Barnfield College's largest single group of young people are recruited from the nearby sixth form college to study on vocational courses. The percentage of students staying on in full-time education in Luton has increased from 48 per cent in 1990, to 69 per cent in 1993. This is still at a lower level than for the country as a whole, which has an average rate of 74 per cent.

5 In 1993-94, the college had 2,329 full-time and 10,615 part-time students, making a total of 3,901 full-time equivalent students. Percentage enrolments by age and by level of study are shown in figures 1 and 2. FEFC-funded enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figure 3. The college achieved a growth of 10 per cent in enrolments compared with the previous year, exceeding its target of 8 per cent. This growth was made on the basis of large increases in the number of part-time students. The recruitment of full-time students fell below the target.

6 On 1 August 1994, Barnfield College gained the further education courses in engineering, electronics, motor vehicle engineering and construction, transferred from the University of Luton. These courses enrolled 477 full-time equivalent students. All the staff, students and some equipment from these programmes are now operated and managed by the college. At the same time, the special adult learner programmes were taken over from the LEA. Established in 1974, these were designed to provide educational opportunities and access to training for adults with physical or mental disabilities, and those with learning difficulties. With the absorption of these two new areas of work the college has become the largest single provider of further education in Bedfordshire.

7 In September 1994, the college employed 239 full-time equivalent teachers, of whom 164 were full time, and 146 full-time equivalent support staff, of whom 87 were full time. These figures represent the significant increases brought about by the inclusion of staff from construction, engineering and special adult learner programmes. Prior to the transfer of courses to the college, the college had 172 full-time equivalent teachers and 127 full-time equivalent support staff as shown in figure 4.

8 The aims and objectives of the college are set out in its mission statement. There are five key goals. These are: an 8 per cent growth in student numbers each year, an emphasis on staff potential and equal opportunity for students, responsiveness to the needs of students and the community, the continuous improvement of quality, and provision which gives value for money.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

9 In the 1993-94 session, the college achieved growth well above the average for the region. Increasing competition from local schools and the nearby sixth form college, combined with falling numbers of 16-19 year old students, has reduced the proportion of those attending full time. The college has vigorously marketed its provision to new client groups including adults returning to education, and students wishing to study part time. The number of adult students has increased by 35 per cent in the last year, bringing the proportion of those over 25 years old to 46 per cent of the student population.

10 There is now a wide range of vocational programmes at intermediate and advanced levels covering most occupational areas, and these students

are offered a choice of attendance patterns. There are well-established training programmes leading to National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) levels 1-3 for hotel and catering, retail and business administration, and hairdressing and beauty therapy. Opportunities exist for full-time students to add to their qualifications after they have left college, by taking part-time courses such as the NVQ (level 3) in hairdressing. Modular programmes and flexible starting dates are in place for some NVQ courses. Additional flexibility in the implementation of programmes would enhance the provision and enable more students to develop individual programmes of study. For example, there is currently little opportunity for students to negotiate personal programmes in areas such as retail and business administration.

11 Other vocational courses include business and professional studies; graphic and fashion design; hotel and catering; and hairdressing, beauty and sports therapy. Courses in child, health and social care are offered in a suitable range of modes of attendance and levels, including a modular programme for the childcare courses. A partnership venture with community agencies has resulted in the establishment of the NVQ childcare assessment centre to support the achievement of NVQ competence in this subject.

12 The transfer of construction and engineering courses from the University of Luton, together with the adoption of special adult learner programmes, has significantly added to the range of courses provided by the college. Courses in construction offer a broad range of craft and technician programmes with flexible patterns of attendance. Full-time and part-time courses, including courses for unemployed people, are available in electronics servicing, motor vehicle engineering, and welding and fabrication.

13 General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) programmes are offered at intermediate and advanced levels in art and design, science, leisure and tourism, health and social care, and business studies. Some of the GNVQ programmes include opportunities to gain certification for individual units, and also to move to higher levels. A unique GNVQ in business, specifically aimed at young people who wish to join the fire service, is now in its second year. An initiative to improve the retention of GNVQ students has been introduced this year. More foundation level GNVQs will provide appropriate courses for those students who are unable to sustain intermediate level study. In addition an innovative approach, involving the adaptation of an Open College certified scheme, is being used to provide pre-foundation level programmes. It will also offer modules to support the additional learning needs of any student.

14 Barnfield College provided a range of opportunities for adults who have a variety of experiences and educational backgrounds. Programmes are offered which equip adults with the necessary skills to enable them to enter employment or further and higher education. Women returners and

students from minority ethnic groups are well represented on these courses. The scheduling of courses for adults is designed to meet the needs of those who have family and social commitments. The introduction of sessions timetabled outside the normal working week has increased access. A course on make-up for Asians, running part-time on Saturdays, is helping to address the low numbers of students from the local Asian community on hairdressing, beauty and sports therapy courses. The college also provides non-vocational leisure and recreational courses mainly by evening-only study. Many students taking General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level) courses, do so for recreational reasons.

15 The programmes for 16-19 year old students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have recruited relatively small numbers of students. Full-time courses for these students lead to employment or to entry to other courses. The introduction of a GNVQ foundation course, specifically targeted at students with learning difficulties, has added significantly to the range of programmes available. The provision has well-established links with special schools, social services homes, and day centres. The college also supports a county-wide hearing-impaired unit. The special adult learner programmes provide education and training opportunities for adult students from a wide range of disadvantaged groups. The arrangements for giving learning support to students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities on other college courses are developing.

16 The college operates an open-access policy. Students can enter courses at the intermediate level without any GCSE passes. Entry onto the GNVQ advanced courses is based upon the recommended minimum entry qualifications. The curriculum is not always well matched to students' abilities, particularly on intermediate programmes in business and leisure, and art and design, where there are low retention rates. The newly-introduced foundation level provision with the enhanced support for literacy and numeracy better meets student's needs.

17 Barnfield Business Training Services supplies most of the college enterprise activity. The unit achieved a turnover of over £400,000 in 1993-94, covering its costs and making a significant contribution to the college's overall income. A range of courses and consultancy services are offered to industry and commerce, mainly within the areas of management and supervisory studies. Training is provided flexibly in response to clients' needs.

18 Courses are effectively promoted by well-designed prospectuses, a widely-distributed college newspaper, promotional displays in the town centre, visits to schools and representation at schools' careers evenings. The college is making particular efforts to attract adult students by developing its contacts with community groups. The production of publicity and promotional material has been carefully managed, but there are no community language versions of the college's publications. The

college does not have a marketing plan, and procedures to monitor marketing activities are underdeveloped.

19 The college is promoting the development of vocational routes through its well-established links with local schools. Franchised courses in art and design, business and leisure studies, and health and community care are supported within many of the local schools. However, in some areas, including science, there has been little collaboration with schools to encourage students to enter college courses. The college provides active support for the schools involved in the Bedfordshire education business partnership.

20 There is no overall college strategy for liaison with employers, and the extent and nature of contacts with industry vary across the college. Advisory committees are working well in community care, where organisations provide support for the development of health and caring courses. The governors have recognised the need for a collective strategy to strengthen external liaison across the whole curriculum.

21 There are good links with the local TEC. The principal is the further education representative on the education and training group which provides strategic advice to the TEC. The college training agency meets its targets and provides youth training courses in seven occupational areas. It is the major provider of training in hairdressing in the county. The youth training programme achieves a good level of entry into work and is well regarded by local employers. The college has been less active in developing its provision of adult training sponsored by the local TEC.

22 There is a comprehensive equal opportunity policy which is well understood by college staff, and has been incorporated into the college charter. Procedures for monitoring the implementation of the policy are not explicit. A consultant has been appointed to improve links with the local community and help with the implementation and monitoring of the equal opportunity policy. College enrolments reflect the ethnic profile of the local population. Mature and part-time students form a high proportion of the enrolments, and there are two female students for every male student.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

23 The corporation and senior management have successfully managed the rapid growth and change. The number of full-time equivalent enrolments has quadrupled since 1987. Growth has been achieved with the lowest unit of resource of any college in the further education sector.

24 The governing body of Barnfield College comprises 10 members including the principal. The corporation decided to restrict membership to this number to help develop a cohesive team approach to policy making. The independent members are drawn from major local businesses. Educational interests are represented by the chairman who is from the University of Luton. There is only one female governor. At the time of inspection, there were no members drawn from minority ethnic groups.

25 The college governors recognise that to continue to meet the key aims in the college's mission statement, they must improve co-operation with other education providers. Working with the corporation of Luton Sixth Form College they have commissioned consultants to research a number of options for the future. The governors of the two institutions are jointly considering the development of a partnership to enable them to respond more systematically and completely to the needs of the local population.

26 The corporation has audit, remuneration and academic subcommittees, but none for personnel or finance. Governors decided to adopt a collective approach to all decisions involving major financial and strategic matters. This policy is intended to ensure full participation and to foster collective responsibility.

27 Governors have a clear view of their role and relationship with college management. They have identified their primary functions as developing strategy, acting as ambassadors for the college, and monitoring performance. They are closely involved in the strategic aspects of policy making and financial monitoring. Governors' expertise in finance and estates management has been drawn upon extensively by the college's senior managers. The corporation has had little involvement in evaluating the extent to which the college is meeting its objectives for the curriculum, or in monitoring the quality and effectiveness of teaching and learning.

28 The college has operated a centrally-directed strategic planning process. The key developments and policies for achieving growth have been effectively defined. However, the complexity of the strategic plan has inhibited the senior management team's ability to monitor and review its implementation. In the current cycle, it is intended that the college's planning officer facilitates increased contributions to the plan from programme areas. Further work is required to implement the formal monitoring of plans at all levels.

29 The management structure had been in operation since August 1994. It is based upon clearly-understood lines of authority and responsibility across four tiers of the organisation. The senior management team consists of the principal, vice-principal, chief administrative officer, three assistant principals and the manager of special adult learner programmes. Teaching teams are co-ordinated by course leaders reporting to programme area leaders, who are responsible to assistant principals for all aspects of management in the major curriculum areas. Management teams meet regularly. Meetings are conducted purposefully. Records are kept of action points and these are followed up at subsequent meetings. There is clear direction from the principal about the future development of the college.

30 The main focus of senior management has been on the efficient planning and control of finance and resources. Less attention has been given to developing and evaluating the curriculum, and the effectiveness of learning. Senior management have recognised the need to achieve greater consistency across the college in these areas, and measures have

been identified to evaluate more effectively the curriculum and quality of teaching.

31 There are sound financial disciplines within the college. The staff to student ratio has been employed as an effective tool to target and monitor efficiency. A value-for-money working group is developing additional performance indicators to improve control of expenditure. Effective budgetary and purchasing controls have permitted the devolution of some budgets which are not related to pay, and this has enabled managers to have discretion over expenditure in support of their objectives. The procedures for revenue and capital allocations are clear and understood by all managers. The college's average level of funding for 1994-95 is £15.89. The median for general further education colleges is £18.17. The college's income and expenditure are shown in figures 5 and 6, respectively.

32 The college management information computer system is in the process of being upgraded. It should then benefit from new hardware and software which can accommodate increased information processing demands. The system is used to record student enrolment, withdrawals, course completion rates and examination results drawn from manual records. Whilst some work has been undertaken to define the information requirements of all managers, there is no information strategy to ensure that all users receive the data they require. The college is currently working to analyse and report longer-term trends on enrolments and achievements, to enable the corporation to judge its performance year on year.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

33 Barnfield College has good provision for the guidance and support of students. The accommodation for student services on the north site is welcoming and well designed for its purpose. It is well located by the entrance to the college, which facilitates access for students requiring help. Provision on the south site is less extensive but is based on the same model.

34 There are procedures for the systematic recruitment, placement and guidance of students. Through well-established links with feeder schools the college is able to inform pupils about courses and career routes. Both full-time and part-time students can apply and be enrolled on courses from May onwards. All full-time students are interviewed by programme area staff. At the interview, further careers guidance is available and in some cases an individual learning plan is negotiated. For part-time students, enrolment is conducted centrally by student services. To simplify access, part-time students may apply by telephone, letter or in person.

35 There are induction programmes for all full-time and some part-time students. Although there is a common framework for induction, arrangements for its delivery vary depending on the course attended. The aims of induction are well documented. Students are introduced to the

college services and given detailed information about their own course. There is no tutors' handbook covering induction and personal tutoring and as a result there is some inconsistency of practice.

36 Barnfield College makes good provision for the nursery education of students' children, catering for up to 120 pre-school-age children. The nursery is a recognition that mature students require such services if they are to be able to return to education and training.

37 All students are assigned to a personal tutor who is the key figure in the guidance and support system. Tutorials for full-time students are timetabled for one hour each week, but the provision made for part-time students is variable. Although the conduct of tutorials is outlined in college policy and repeated in the students' charter, quality of tutorial practice varies. Students requiring personal assistance can either be referred to the guidance and counselling staff by their personal tutors, or make an appointment directly. In 1993-94, over 350 guidance and counselling sessions were conducted, most of which students had applied for themselves.

38 In the academic year commencing 1993, all first-year full-time students and some part-time students were given Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit diagnostic screening, to help assess their basic skills competence. This was conducted by programme area teams. Over 1,100 students were tested. Of these, 168 were given additional support for literacy and 240 for numeracy. Students are also able to gain help with projects and coursework through the open-access workshops in information technology, mathematics and communications. Further co-ordination of all aspects of screening and basic skills support are required if students are to gain maximum benefit from them.

39 Most aspects of guidance and support are well established but others, for example the procedures for accrediting students' prior learning, are at an early stage of development. Policy and practice are not implemented consistently across all programme areas, and procedures for monitoring and evaluating the services are weak.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

40 Most of the teaching sessions were valuable, engaging and well planned. Of the 207 classes inspected 125 had strengths that clearly outweighed the weaknesses. Only 14 sessions had more weaknesses than strengths. The following table shows the grades given during the inspection.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
Access/Adult		5	7	3	3	1	19
GCE AS/A level & GCSE		1	8	17	3	1	30
GNVQ		5	9	6	2	1	23
NVQ		4	23	11	0	0	38
BTEC		14	20	16	3	0	53
C & G		2	4	2	0	0	8
Other Voc		5	11	8	0	0	24
SLDD		1	5	4	0	0	10
Other		0	1	1	0	0	2
Total		37	88	68	11	3	207

41 The most successful classes were the result of staff agreeing together the content and timing of the whole programme of work. In many areas, staff used a variety of techniques to ensure that the pace of the work was both challenging and appropriate to the abilities of their students. These characteristics were particularly evident in child, health and social care; hotel and catering; hairdressing, beauty and sports therapy; and classes for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

42 A minority of classes were less successful. Some of these sessions relied too heavily on dictation. Some were marred by the limited use of handouts, teaching equipment and visual materials. In a number of classes, the learning was not sufficiently reinforced. For example, there was little questioning or summarising of information at regular intervals to help students' understanding. Instances of less-effective teaching were mainly observed in GCSE and GCE A level mathematics and sciences, and in programmes for adult returners.

43 In child, health and social care courses there was an atmosphere of industry and enthusiasm, fostered by the use of a wide range of teaching methods. The programmes are vocationally relevant and taught by knowledgeable, skilful and well-prepared staff. In several childcare classes, students' learning was enhanced by their active involvement in class demonstrations and in the production of displays.

44 The teaching in hotel and catering was of a high standard. The aims and objectives of each class were clearly stated at the beginning of sessions. The curriculum is up to date and vocationally relevant. Planning for assessment is thorough. Opportunities are given for students to develop their interpersonal skills with the general public, within realistic working environments. These are supplemented by classes in which students are able to study and discuss video recordings of their own interactions with customers. Work experience is an important part of the courses, and

students are able to undertake supervised work placements in Europe, as well as within the United Kingdom.

45 The quality of teaching and learning in art and design was generally good. Staff help students develop relevant skills through practical teaching sessions, and well-designed project work. Students enjoy their work, and speak highly of the teaching and support they receive from all staff within the department. Lecturers manage well the integration of hearing-impaired students, especially in practical sessions where the lecturer can not always remain within lip-reading sight. A recent project with Britannia Airways enabled graphic design students to produce designs for selection by the company, which resulted in the commercial production of T-shirts. Subsequently, the project included hairdressing and beauty therapy students in the preparation of fashion models for photographs of the garments.

46 In hairdressing, beauty and sports therapy, staff are knowledgeable and enthusiastic about their subjects. While the emphasis is on furthering the development of students' practical skills, there is also a structured and effective programme which enables them to acquire a sound knowledge of theory. Students formulate personal action plans to guide and pace their work. These are regularly reviewed in conjunction with staff.

47 Business, professional studies, leisure and tourism courses are effectively planned to ensure complete coverage of the curriculum. Courses are enriched by projects sponsored by industry, such as the Whitbread Challenge, which enable students to gain experience of working in teams on realistic tasks. The development of students' information technology skills is restricted by limited access to facilities. In business administration, classes are planned so that the pace and levels of work are appropriate to the courses and students.

48 In construction craft courses, teachers effectively use learning packs, models and workshop demonstrations of techniques. In some areas, students are not sufficiently challenged in class, and too much of their time is taken up by copying notes. In engineering, motor vehicle, and electronics courses, the quality of teaching is generally good. Staff are competent and maintain a good rapport with their students. However, homework is rarely set, and students have had little feedback from teachers on their assignments. The production of handout materials to a consistent standard and more consistently-planned schemes of work would provide better support for students. At the time of the transfer of these courses from the University of Luton, insufficient resources, and limited access to library services, had an adverse effect on students' ability to develop research and information gathering skills. Subsequently, access to the university library has been improved.

49 In the programmes devised for adult learners, there is a balance between classes that offer well-promoted learning experiences, and others where the activity is over directed by staff. The good classes involve

Teaching
Programme
GCE AS/A
GCSE
GNVQ
NVQ
Other
Total

teaching that is sensitive to the different skills of the students, and encourages them to participate fully in the work. The poorer sessions fail to encourage the development of personal confidence or the independent learning skills that are essential for adult learners.

50 Some students following GCE A level courses receive insufficient timetabled teaching. In some subjects, the quality of teaching is unsatisfactory, and classes are poorly attended. Although there were some examples of thorough and helpful comments on students' written work, in other areas, insufficient amounts of work were collected, graded and returned.

51 The teaching of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well planned to provide for their individual needs. Liaison between teachers and classroom assistants is good. Examples of good practice included a retail course that involved simulations of shop work: role play enabled all the students to take a full part, practising their skills by using tills, dealing with customers and recognising health and safety issues. Most teaching sessions were sensitive, flexible and effective. In a minority of classes, learning was not sufficiently consolidated. Poorly-focused teaching and the lack of group work limited the opportunities for students' development.

52 The college has recognised that core skills teaching for GNVQ students does not meet the needs of those who have low entry levels in numeracy and literacy. Attendance at core skills sessions was often poor and students reported that they did not find what was covered in the sessions relevant to their other work.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

53 In child, health and social care, students' coursework and notes were at appropriate levels and showed understanding and the ability to order and retrieve information. Adult students' written work demonstrated the appropriate use of texts to support their work and good levels of analysis. Students' notes were well organised and thorough in computing.

54 Within the art and design, and hotel and catering departments, staff consistently assess fairly, and record the information systematically. Assessment feedback is good in computing, and students are closely involved in monitoring their own progress within business GNVQ programmes. On NVQ-based courses in hotel and catering, and hairdressing and beauty therapy, assessment timings are flexible. This allows students to be accredited as soon as they achieve the necessary competence.

55 Students' practical work in art and design, and hotel and catering, is of a high standard. The child, health, and social care and business administration students demonstrated the ability to apply their knowledge and skills effectively in practical sessions. The skills students acquire in hairdressing, beauty and sports therapy, hotel and catering, and vocational

design are supported by background knowledge and understanding of an appropriate professional standard. Students in science and computing displayed their competence and confidence using specialist equipment.

56 The new national diploma in media fosters students' analytical and research skills as well as developing their proficiency in the use of professional media equipment. A student from this course was recently selected from over 100 applicants to work with an Anglia TV crew on a documentary to be screened in December. Another competition success in 1994 was a first-year hairdressing student who was the overall winner of the national men's avant garde styling award.

57 Students' achievements vary across the different courses and subjects offered by the college. Retention rates and examination results are consistently above national averages in hotel and catering, and child, health and social care, but there are poor retention and examination results in other vocational courses such as business studies and accounting. Examination completion and success rates on the full-time GCE A level programme are particularly low.

58 Student success on NVQ programmes is generally good. On the NVQs in craft catering, hotel reception, and hairdressing and beauty therapy, completion rates are high and attainment of the qualifications is above national averages. Part-time business administration students are less successful in achieving their primary qualification goals, but the programmes are not time limited and these students are able to continue to build up units towards the final certificate at their own pace.

59 Tutors responsible for GNVQ programmes are sometimes unsuccessful in matching students' choice to their ability to complete courses and gain the final qualifications. On the intermediate level GNVQ courses in business, leisure, and art and design, there were high levels of student withdrawals. Pass rates in the external tests were generally poor. In the intermediate level business course only 56 per cent of students who remained on the course at the end of the year achieved the qualification. A number of students had difficulty in completing assignments because of poor written communication skills. Initial results from the advanced level programmes were better. The courses are two years in duration and a complete cycle has not yet been completed.

60 The college was responsible for a counting error which resulted in an inaccurate return to the Department for Education on the numbers of students in their final year of advanced GNVQ or Business and Technology Education Council national diploma and certificate courses. As a consequence, the average college pass rate is recorded as 58 per cent in the 1994 performance tables published by the Department for Education, placing the college in the bottom 10 per cent of the further education sector. The corrected figures show that in 1994 students in their final year achieved an overall pass rate of 84 per cent, placing the college in the top third of all sector colleges.

61 The vocational qualifications achieved by students with learning difficulties provided by the awards scheme development and accreditation network youth award resulted in 100 per cent success for those students who were ready for assessment.

62 The courses preparing adults for entry to higher education and adult returners' programmes achieved unusually high completion rates of over 70 per cent, and a high proportion of the students progressed to other courses in further education or to higher education or employment. Students seeking entry to health and social care achieved a 93 per cent success. The achievement of adult and other students on preparatory courses in art and design is particularly commendable as the majority of these students had no previous experience of the subject. At the end of their courses many applied successfully for higher education places in a competitive environment, alongside younger students.

63 In 1994, the overall GCE A level pass rate at grades A-E was 60 per cent. The pass rate for all further education colleges in 1993, was 66 per cent. Twenty-eight per cent of the college's students achieved the top three grades compared with a national figure of 34 per cent in 1993. The full-time students' results were particularly disappointing, some subjects having had a pattern of consistently poor results over several years. However, other subjects, including English literature, French, German, film studies, photography and psychology had overall pass levels above 80 per cent.

64 In 1994, the overall GCSE pass rate at grades A-C was 57 per cent which is above the 1993 average of 50 per cent for general further education colleges. The full-time students' pass rate, however, was very low at 25 per cent. There were no full-time student passes in law and chemistry. The percentage of students passing in eight of the 16 GCSE subjects offered, was below the national averages for those subjects. The college has decided to discontinue the full-time GCE A level and GCSE programmes from 1994, but to continue to offer GCE courses to adults and part-time students. GNVQ students will be able to retake GCSE courses, and sit for GCE A levels as additional studies.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

65 The college has a number of documents which outline policy and progress towards the achievement of a quality monitoring system. However, the large number of documents on quality that have been produced do not provide a coherent framework within which to focus the quality process. Attempts to bring together all the quality strands have resulted in a complex procedural document.

66 A mainstay of the quality assurance process is the use of questionnaires to elicit the views of students on their learning experiences. Course reports contain statistics on outcomes, students' comments and information from external examiners. These are discussed with

programme area leaders and summaries are subsequently provided for assistant principals. Each programme area leader produces a programme report for the academic board which is a synthesis of the relevant course reports. There is no agreed format for these reports and they vary considerably in content and style.

67 Curriculum-based quality standards are being introduced in a pilot study within three programme areas. These state in some detail what course records should include. They are being used to tighten up the processes for record keeping and for ensuring that the curriculum is covered.

68 As a preliminary to the FEFC inspection, two senior members of the college management carried out an internal quality audit assessing the curriculum. This exercise provided useful information and it has been decided to continue the audit process as a method of monitoring quality. Following the specialist inspections, course and programme teams analysed the inspectors' findings and produced detailed responses including proposed actions to remedy weaknesses.

69 The academic board and the corporation have not yet fully taken up their stated roles as strategic quality monitors. The board has an academic subcommittee charged with monitoring curriculum quality but has not yet addressed this issue. There is little evidence of consistent action taken to remedy the quality issues raised by the various processes. The lack of consistent reporting, action and monitoring practices has led to considerable variation in the effectiveness of the procedures.

70 The college has produced a self-assessment report as an internal document based on the FEFC framework contained in Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. The abstract to the report gives a clear and concise overview of the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the institution. While in some areas the college has been objective in its judgements there are instances where developments in practice have not yet reached the level described in the report.

71 The college charter is a well-considered document which includes measurable targets. Many of these targets, derived from the quality service standards which have been developing in accordance with Council guidelines, are well known to the staff. A position paper which includes dates for the monitoring and review of the charter is in place, but it is too early to comment on its effectiveness. Some members of staff and some students are not fully aware of the content of the charter, or its implications.

72 An effective staff-appraisal scheme, which includes observation of teaching, is established for full-time teaching staff and is in pilot phase for part-time teaching and support staff. The appraisal interview results in individual action plans linked to college objectives, and these form the basis of the staff-development programmes.

73 The college has recognised the value of staff development and has made resources available to support the programme for both teaching and

support staff. Current expenditure is some 3 per cent of total staffing costs. The quantity of staff-development activities is impressive, and staff report no difficulty in obtaining the development and training they require. Staff attendance at external courses and conferences is supported, and there is a requirement for participants to disseminate the information gained on courses to colleagues. The commitment to staff development is reflected by the allocation of a common time slot in which all staff are free to take part in these activities.

74 The programme towards achieving the Investors in People award is well advanced. The pre-assessment report has been received and the college hopes to qualify for the award in 1995.

RESOURCES

Staffing

75 The teaching force increased by 67 full-time equivalents and the support staff by 19 full-time equivalents between the completion of the 1993-94 session and the beginning of the current academic year. This expansion has been well managed. The new and transferred staff have been incorporated into the college in an efficient and supportive manner. A mentor system, whereby new full-time teachers are allocated a more experienced colleague to induct them into the college, is helpful. The system does not extend to part-time teaching staff.

76 Teaching staff are appropriately qualified and have relevant industrial and commercial experience to deliver the current courses. They display a high level of commitment to their work. There are sufficient support staff in most curriculum areas and their qualifications and experience are suitable for their roles.

77 The proportion of part-time staff in some areas of the college is high. Part-time staff make an important contribution to courses, but sometimes they are poorly integrated within the programme areas and have difficulty in attending course team meetings.

78 Comprehensive policies and procedures for college personnel are in place and these are set out in the staff handbook, a summary of which is provided for all staff. A large proportion of the teaching staff have agreed to new, more flexible contracts. Relationships with the recognised unions are well developed. The relevant unions are included in the current job evaluation for support staff, which will result in some regrading.

Equipment/learning resources

79 The careful management of resources during periods of considerable growth has been effective. The college has been able to ensure that programme areas generally have adequate access to up-to-date facilities and equipment. Some of the shortcomings in equipment, identified during the inspection, have been addressed quickly. Arrangements for allocating

resources, including capital, are clear and well understood by programme area leaders.

80 Equipment and facilities to support hairdressing, beauty and sports therapy, are of an exceptionally high standard. These, together with new facilities for sports therapy, are often in excess of those available in professional salons and health clubs. There are excellent facilities for hotel and catering students. The areas for food production and service are equipped to high standards and provide realistic work environments for students. There are some areas where there is a shortage of equipment and materials. For example, there is limited apparatus to support some aspects of science courses, and facilities for the recently-transferred work in engineering and motor vehicle technology are barely adequate.

81 There are approximately 235 computer workstations available for students' use. This represents a full-time equivalent student to workstation ratio of 13:1, which is low for general further education colleges. The variety of existing computer equipment does not provide a consistent operating environment for students. An information technology strategy to take account of the needs of all curriculum areas has not yet been completed. However, the college has begun to identify standards for hardware and software.

82 Some areas of the curriculum do not have access to facilities which enable students to develop their information technology skills or complete coursework assignments. There is insufficient access to up-to-date information technology facilities for some management courses, business studies and construction studies. Suitable equipment to meet the needs of the curriculum exists within the art and design department. Hotel and catering students have good access to up-to-date computers. The hairdressing, beauty and sports therapy reception areas have been newly equipped with computer facilities, to enable clients' records to be maintained and retrieved.

83 The overall number of library books on both sites is low and there are particular deficiencies in a number of curriculum areas. For example, in business and leisure, the books and periodicals do not adequately support students' projects and assignment work. Staff have produced a draft library-development plan which includes service standards. Arrangements to ensure that library staff are aware of curriculum and enrolment changes are not yet in place. The systems for cataloguing books, and for the management of loans are not computerised. This restricts the level of service provided to staff and students. The growth in student numbers has not been complemented by an appropriate increase in private study places, which are now inadequate to meet demand at both sites.

Accommodation

84 Until recently, Barnfield College occupied just two sites in Luton; the largest is the north site, and the smaller south site is some four miles away.

Both have good access and parking facilities. The north site comprises 36 acres with buildings providing a gross internal floor area of 11,184 square metres. The buildings on this site were constructed in the 1960s and 1970s, with the exception of those housing hairdressing, beauty and sports therapy and hotel and catering which were built in 1985 and 1990. There are also four temporary huts.

85 The south site measures 19 acres. Buildings were erected in the early 1960s and provide 6,608 square metres of internal space. A dispute with the local authority over ownership of this site is unresolved and is currently with the assets board for adjudication. The Hunter Report indicated that urgent repairs were needed for these buildings and the college has undertaken these. However, the desire to refurbish the exterior of the buildings, and alter the interiors to create more flexible spaces, is being held up by the dispute.

86 The accommodation situation has recently been complicated by the acquisition of further education work from the University of Luton, and the transfer of ownership of special adult learner programmes. Currently the ex-university courses are housed in a variety of spaces that are leased commercially, or rented from the university. Some of this accommodation is of poor quality. The college recognises the need both to improve the accommodation for these students and to bring them all together on one site by the beginning of the next academic year. Negotiations are underway to purchase an existing building to house all these students.

87 Barnfield College has some excellent accommodation, particularly for hotel and catering; hairdressing, beauty and sports therapy courses; and student services. The buildings are well managed and well maintained. Teaching and non-teaching spaces are in good decorative order, and furnished appropriately. Most of the classrooms are equipped to high standards and have a variety of teaching equipment. The college cleaning service is thorough and effective. Security on both sites is excellent, providing a safe environment for students and staff during the daytime, and for those working in the evenings.

88 In 1993, the college employed estates management consultants to review existing accommodation and its utilisation, and to provide advice on accommodating the predicted growth in student numbers. The report concluded that there was some overcrowding on the north site, that library and learning resources on both sites were insufficient, and that the huts were at the end of their lives. The report also commented that 70 per cent utilisation was a significant achievement and that it would be difficult to improve upon this figure.

89 There is limited access and facilities for students and staff with mobility difficulties on both sites. The work to improve wheelchair access to buildings and to enhance library and learning facilities have been delayed by the assets dispute on the south site, and uncertainty over the transfer of the construction and engineering courses.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

90 Barnfield College is a dynamic institution which is achieving significant growth. Despite its lower than average funding it has managed its human and physical resources effectively to provide a satisfactory quality of education and training. Staff have responded positively and flexibly to change. The college has the following strengths:

- effective governance combined with clear strategic leadership and management
- the successful management of rapid growth
- a wide range of courses responsive to the further education needs of students, particularly adults
- well-resourced student services providing a good range of counselling and guidance
- consistently-good students' achievements in child, health and social care; hotel and catering; and hairdressing and beauty therapy
- well-funded staff development and a linked appraisal process
- effective resource management providing programmes with appropriate access to equipment
- excellent facilities for hairdressing, beauty and sports therapy; and hotel and catering
- well-maintained and high-quality accommodation for most students
- enthusiastic and appropriately-qualified staff who show concern for, and commitment to, their students.

91 If the college is to improve its provision it should:

- give greater attention to monitoring the effectiveness of teaching and students' achievement
- implement quality control procedures more consistently
- address low student retention and completion rates in some areas
- raise levels of success in GCE A level examinations
- provide adequate access to up-to-date information technology equipment in some curriculum areas
- improve library and private study facilities
- tackle the small proportion of unsatisfactory accommodation.

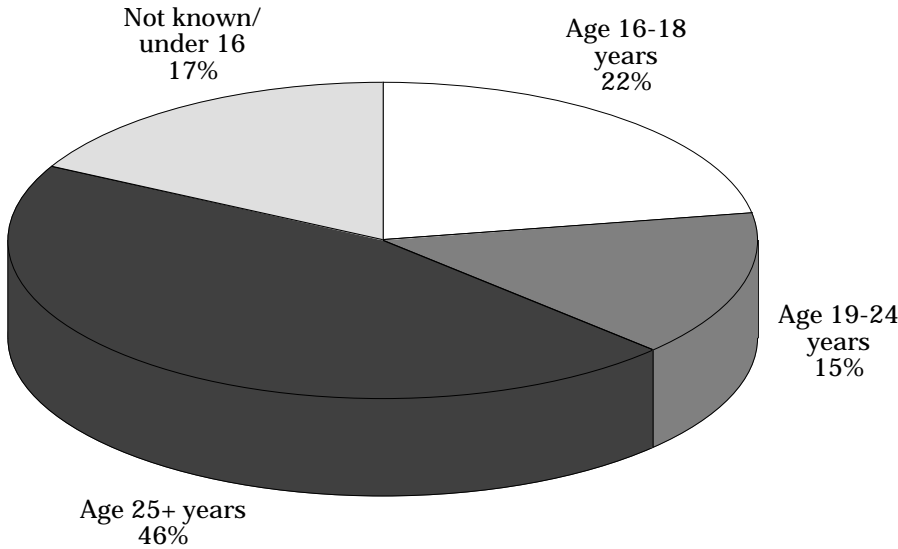
FIGURES

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Note: the information contained in the figures was provided by the college to the inspection team.

Figure 1

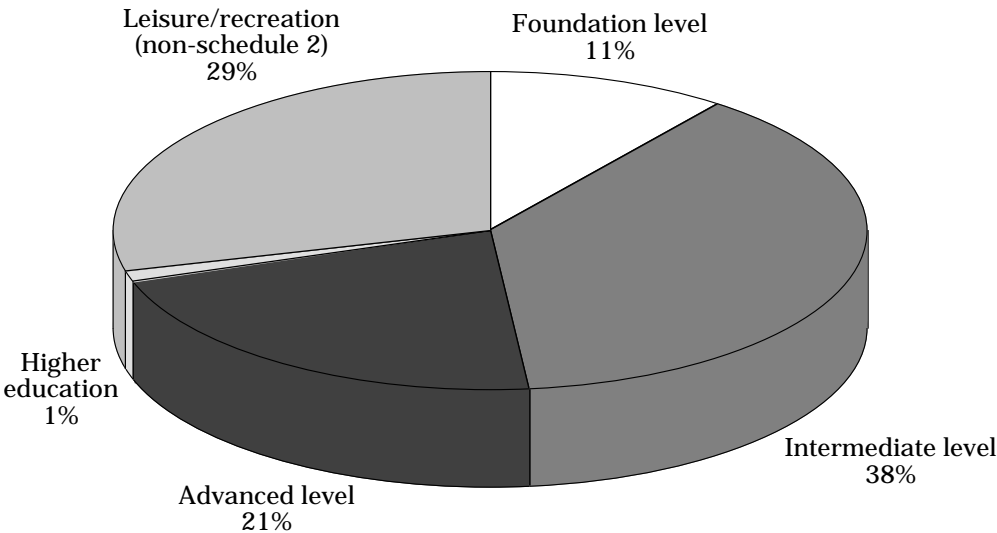
Barnfield College: percentage enrolments by age (1993–94)



Enrolments: 12,944

Figure 2

Barnfield College: percentage enrolments by level of study (1993–94)



Enrolments: 12,944

Figure 3

Barnfield College: FEFC-funded enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1993–94)

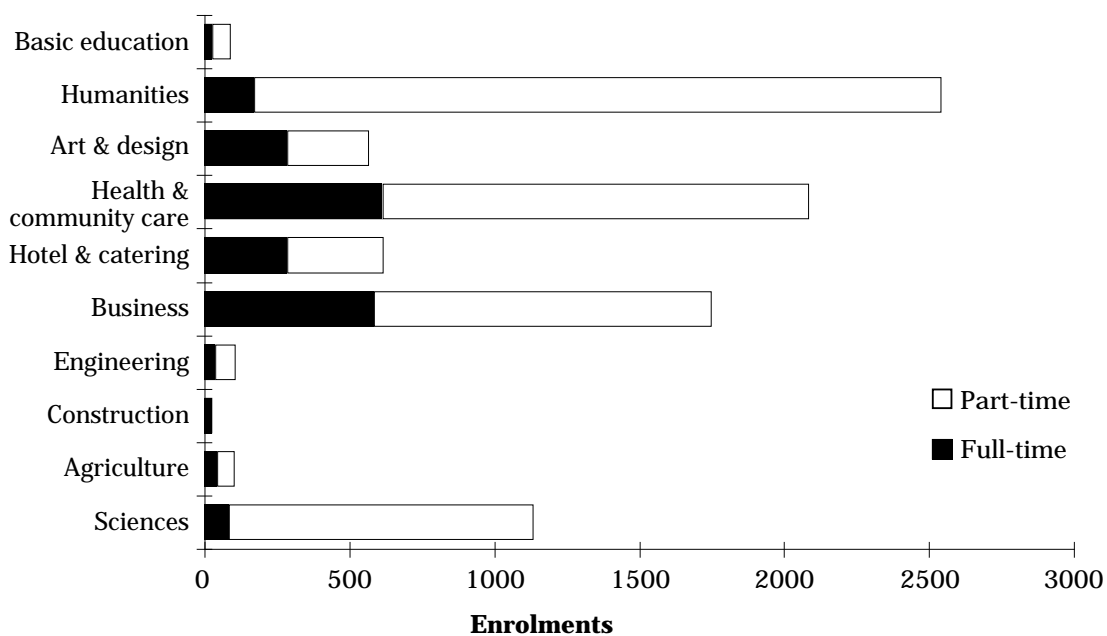


Figure 4

Barnfield College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1993–94)

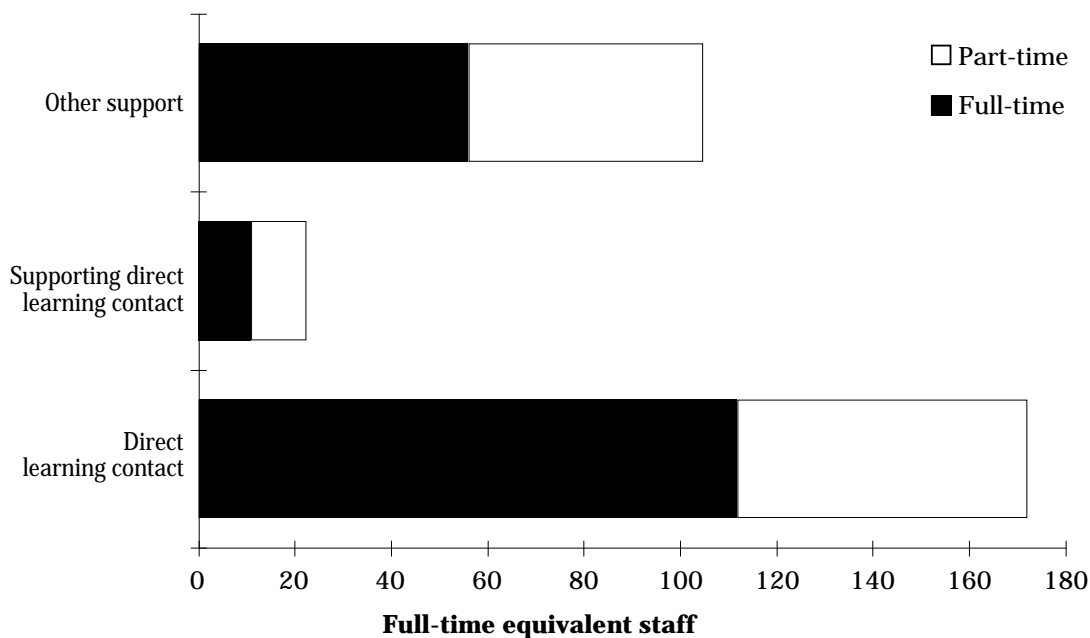
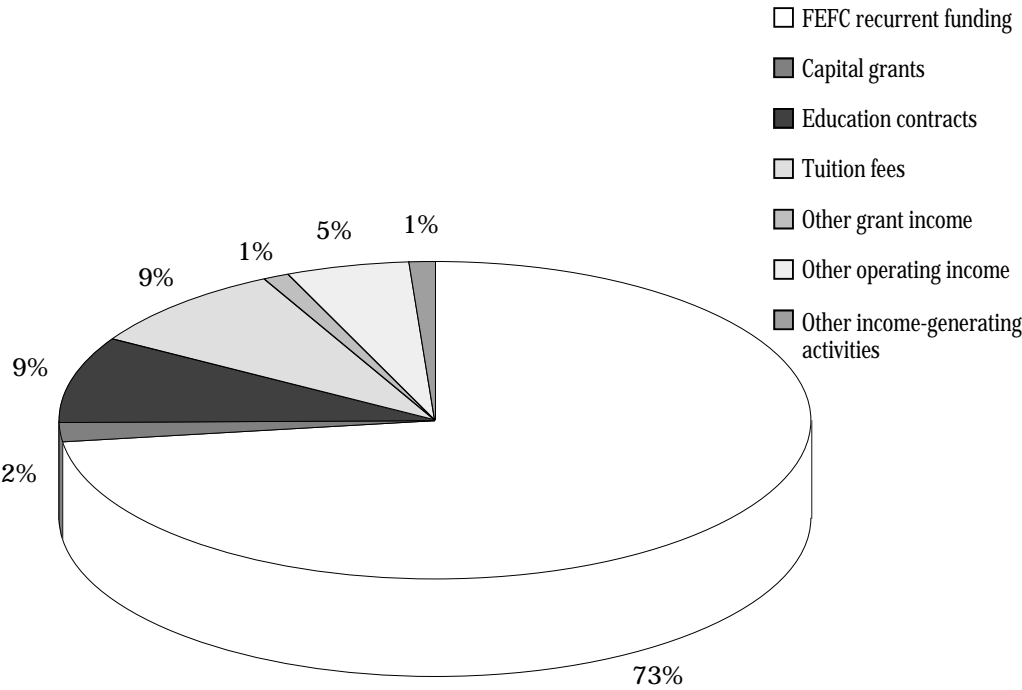


Figure 5

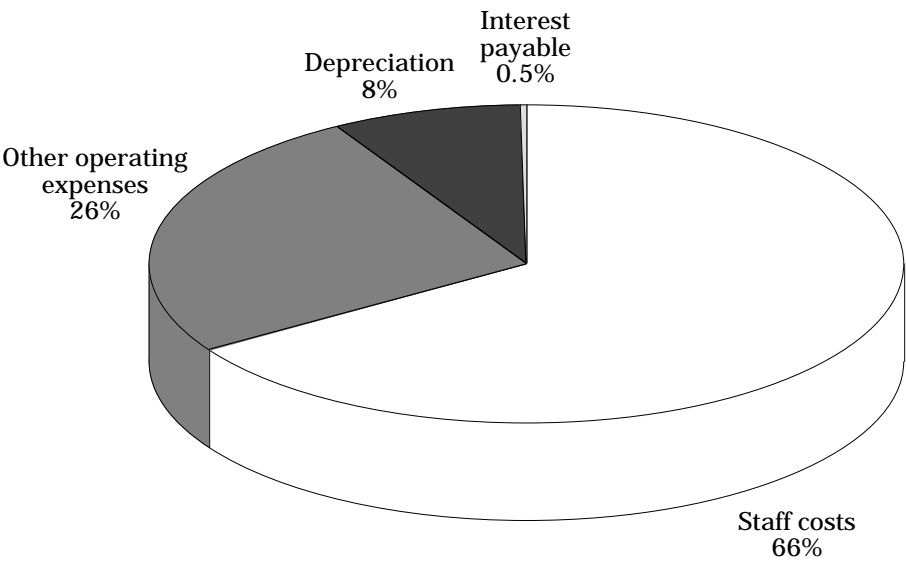
Barnfield College: income (for 16 months to July 1994)



Income: £11,544,000

Figure 6

Barnfield College: expenditure (for 16 months to July 1994)



Expenditure: £10,200,000

