

# Barrow-in- Furness Sixth Form College

REPORT FROM  
THE INSPECTORATE  
**1999-00**

THE  
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FUNDING  
COUNCIL

***THE FURTHER EDUCATION  
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## Grade Descriptors

Inspectors assess the strengths and weaknesses of each aspect of provision they inspect. Their assessments are set out in the report. They use a five-point scale to summarise the balance between strengths and weaknesses.

The descriptors for the grades are:

- grade 1 – outstanding provision which has many strengths and few weaknesses
- grade 2 – good provision in which the strengths clearly outweigh the weaknesses
- grade 3 – satisfactory provision with strengths but also some weaknesses
- grade 4 – less than satisfactory provision in which the weaknesses clearly outweigh the strengths
- grade 5 – poor provision which has few strengths and many weaknesses.

Audit conclusions are expressed as good, adequate or weak.

Aggregated grades for aspects of cross-college provision and curriculum areas, for colleges inspected during 1997-98, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1	2	3	4	5
	%	%	%	%	%
Curriculum areas	10	53	30	7	–
Cross-college provision	14	54	23	7	2

Source: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1998-99: Chief inspector's annual report*  
Sample size: 104 college inspections

## Student Achievements

Where data on student achievements appear in tables, levels of achievement are shown in three ways:

- as number of starters, which is the number of enrolments on qualifications where the student was expected to complete the qualification that college year. For example, a student on a two-year programme who began their programme in October 1995, would appear in the results for 1996-97 because this is the year in which they expected to complete their qualification
- as a retention rate, which is the percentage of qualifications which students have completed as expected or where they are continuing their studies beyond the expected end date of the qualification. For programmes of study of two years or more, retention is calculated across the whole programme, that is, from the start to the end of the qualification
- as an achievement rate, which is the number of qualifications students have fully achieved as a percentage of completed qualifications with a known outcome. Partial achievements are not included.

# Summary

## Barrow-in-Furness Sixth Form College

### *North West Region*

#### **Inspected May 2000**

Barrow-in-Furness Sixth Form College is the only sixth form college in Cumbria. It is one of two sector colleges, the other a general further education college, providing post-16 education for Barrow and its hinterland. The college produced its second self-assessment report for this inspection. The process involved teachers in all subject areas, but there were fewer opportunities for support staff to contribute. The report was clearly set out and provided a useful basis for planning and carrying out the inspection. Inspectors agreed with two of the curriculum grades and partially agreed with the other two. In some curriculum areas strengths had been overstated and weaknesses in teaching and learning and some students' achievements ignored. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment grade for general resources but awarded lower grades than those proposed by the college for support for students, quality assurance, management and governance.

The college offers courses in six of the 10 programme areas funded by the FEFC, although 87% of students take courses in the programme areas of humanities, science and business. Inspectors awarded four grades in three programme areas. Of the lessons observed, 57% were judged to be good or outstanding, which is considerably lower than the national average of

71% for sixth form colleges in 1998-99. However, only two lessons were less than satisfactory. In the areas inspected, students' achievements are very good in GCE A level and GNVQ intermediate business, in government and politics and in mathematics. There is a strong commitment by staff to provide support for students and review students' progress regularly. The tutorial programme is well structured and the careers guidance for students is of a high quality. The college accommodation provides a safe, welcoming and attractive environment. There is a well-stocked library which is a popular study base for students. There is a sound framework for quality assurance and staff development is closely linked to college priorities. Governors have a wide range of experience and keep themselves informed about curriculum development. Management arrangements are clearly understood by staff and internal communications are good. The college should improve: the standard of teaching and students' achievements in some curriculum areas; inadequacies in learning support; the underdeveloped use of IT; the use of accommodation; the effectiveness of course reviews and action-planning; data management; the rigour of operating plans; and aspects of governance.

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

<b>Curriculum area</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Cross-college provision</b>	<b>Grade</b>
Mathematics and information technology	2	Support for students	2
Business studies	3	General resources	2
English and general studies	3	Quality assurance	3
Social science	2	Governance	3
		Management	3

# Context

## The College and its Mission

1 Barrow-in-Furness Sixth Form College was established in 1979 following the reorganisation of secondary education in the town. Originally built to accommodate 400 students, the college was extended in 1993, by which time there were over 650 students. In November 1999, the college provided for 758 full-time and 251 part-time students.

2 Barrow-in-Furness is a small industrial town with a population of 61,000. Manufacturing accounts for 50% of local employment. Shipbuilding and engineering are still major industries, although the workforce of the major employer has declined from about 14,000 in 1989 to less than 5,000 now. The local unemployment rate is 7.1%, compared with an average of 5.1% for Cumbria. Only 59% of adults of working age in the town have jobs compared with the national average of 78%. The remainder of the Furness and South Lakes area is largely rural, much of it in the Lake District National Park.

3 The college has six partner schools within the borough of Barrow-in-Furness. Of 16 year old leavers from these schools, 39% entered the sixth form college in 1999. These students made up two-thirds of the college's student intake with most of the remainder drawn from further afield in the South Lakes area, including two 11 to 16 schools over 20 miles away. About 10% of the sixth form college intake is drawn from pupils leaving schools in the independent sector. The overall participation rate for school-leavers in full-time education in Barrow is 64%. This figure includes first year apprentices. The low staying-on rate along with other indicators of disadvantage, such as general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) pass rates of between 18% and 52% in Barrow schools, has led to a successful application for an education action zone in Barrow.

4 The college offers 32 subjects at general certificate of education advanced level (GCE

A level), three subjects at general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) advanced, 13 subjects at GCSE, three subjects at GNVQ intermediate and a BTEC art foundation course. Short courses in modern languages are provided for one local company and the college has provided information and communications technology training for other local employers. Evening class provision has remained stable at around 250 enrolments a year. The college has a franchise arrangement with a high school outside Barrow to provide information technology (IT) and outdoor pursuits courses for adults.

5 The college employs 35 full-time and 19 part-time teachers, in addition to the principal and deputy principal. A further 18 members of staff, nine of them full time, provide the support functions of finance and administration, teaching support and site management. There are eight faculty heads and two curriculum co-ordinators with cross-college responsibilities. Student support is provided through a tutorial system led by four senior tutors. The senior management team comprises the principal, deputy principal and the directors of finance, management information systems, personnel and students, respectively.

6 The mission of the college is 'to provide post-16 education which is of high quality and sensitive to the needs of the community and the aspirations of individual students'. Its strategic objectives for the current year include a commitment to encourage students to realise their full potential through learning experiences which promote questioning, critical review, independence and self-reliance. It aims to achieve this through a wide-ranging curriculum within a supportive and caring environment.

## The Inspection

7 The college was inspected during the week beginning 2 May 2000. The inspection team had previously evaluated the college's self-

# Context

assessment report and information about the college held by other directorates of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). Inspectors used data on students' achievements drawn from the college's individualised student record (ISR) returns to the FEFC for 1997 and 1998. The college submitted its own data on students' achievements for 1999 which were checked by inspectors against primary sources such as class registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies. The data proved largely reliable when checked against these sources. The inspection was carried out by 10 inspectors and an auditor for a total of 38 days. Inspectors observed 54 lessons, assessed students' work and examined college documentation. Meetings were held

with governors, managers, other college staff, students, and representatives from local schools, Cumbria Careers Service, local business and voluntary organisations, Cumbria County Council and Cumbria Adult Education Service.

8 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1998-99. Of the lessons inspected, 57% were good or outstanding and 4% were less than satisfactory compared with the national averages for 1998-99 of 65% and 6%, respectively. The corresponding averages for sixth form colleges for 1998-99 were 71% and 3%, respectively.

## Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	4	15	10	0	0	29
GCSE	0	8	1	0	0	9
GNVQ and other vocational	0	2	3	1	0	6
Other	0	2	7	1	0	10
Total (No)	4	27	21	2	0	54
Total (%)	7	50	39	4	0	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1998-99 (%)	20	45	29	6	0	100

Source for national average: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1998-99: Chief inspector's annual report*

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9 The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1998-99. The average level of attendance is below the national average of 83% for sixth form colleges. The average class size of 14.6 is above the sixth form college average of 12.8.

## Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Barrow-in-Furness Sixth Form College	14.6	76
National average, all inspected colleges 1998-99	11.2	78

*Source for national average: Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1998-99: Chief inspector's annual report*



# Curriculum Areas

## Mathematics and Information Technology

### Grade 2

**10 Inspectors observed 10 lessons in mathematics, computing and IT. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report.**

#### Key strengths

- much good teaching and learning
- excellent resources for the teaching of mathematics
- effective additional support provided in mathematics
- good achievement and retention on mathematics courses

#### Weaknesses

- lack of variety and rigour in some computing and IT lessons
- inadequate written feedback on some students' work

11 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the college offers a broad range of full-time and part-time courses in mathematics and IT. In 1996, the college decided to adjust its programme to match more closely the needs of its students by introducing GCE A level and GCE advanced supplementary (AS) IT, a move which has proved to be popular with students. They now have the choice of either GCE A level computing or IT. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that teachers give students good advice to enable them to make the right choice of course.

12 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment report that the quality of most teaching and learning is good and that some in mathematics is outstanding. Students enjoy their lessons. The relationship between teachers and students is excellent. Teachers use

directed questions effectively to involve students in discussion. Teachers carefully review the progress which students make and provide them with constructive feedback. However, there is a lack of detail in the written feedback which students receive to enable them to identify what they need to do to improve. Students value the extra support available to them through mathematics workshops and from teachers who make themselves available outside timetabled lessons. In mathematics lessons there are clear lesson plans which relate to well-constructed schemes of work. The activities planned cater for the different ability levels of students who receive careful guidance and support to enable them to complete their tasks successfully. In mathematics lessons teachers explain key concepts and then set students problem-solving exercises to enable them to develop and practise their skills. In computing and IT lessons students make good use of material available on the college network. However, in a minority of lessons teachers do not always ensure that all students are engaged in the tasks set. They sometimes require the whole group to work at a common pace which is inappropriate for some individuals.

13 In mathematics and IT retention rates are above the national average. Students' achievements compare favourably with national averages except in GCE A/AS level computing, which the college acknowledges in its self-assessment report. The college has set targets for improvement which staff fully understand that they have to meet.

14 Mathematics courses are well organised and well managed. The management of IT provision has been adversely affected by the long-term illness of one member of staff and the pressures arising from the cross-college responsibilities of another. The classrooms used for mathematics teaching contain display materials that are up to date, assist the students' learning and are of interest to students. Textbooks and other materials are available in

# Curriculum Areas

the classrooms for the students to use. The resources for staff and students are excellent. However, some of the rooms are too small for the number of students who use them. The college is at present piloting the use of the college intranet to provide notes to IT and computing students. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the teachers are well qualified and experienced.

## A summary of retention and achievement rates in mathematics and information technology, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GCSE mathematics	2	Number of starters	156	135	135
		Retention (%)	60	79	85
		Achievement (%)	32	53	53
GCE A/AS level mathematics	3	Number of starters	105	144	71
		Retention (%)	83	69	79
		Achievement (%)	84	89	96
GCE A/AS level further mathematics	3	Number of starters	14	18	8
		Retention (%)	86	78	50
		Achievement (%)	100	100	100
GCE A/AS level computing	3	Number of starters	30	25	14
		Retention (%)	87	76	71
		Achievement (%)	54	63	70
GCE A/AS level IT	3	Number of starters	*	24	23
		Retention (%)	*	71	83
		Achievement (%)	*	67	84

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)

\*course not running

# Curriculum Areas

## Business Studies

### Grade 3

**15 Inspectors observed 13 lessons, including full-time GCSE, GCE A level, GNVQ courses at advanced and intermediate level, day and evening provision in integrated business technology and computer literacy and information technology. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements made in the self-assessment report but identified some additional weaknesses, particularly in relation to teaching and learning.**

#### Key strengths

- high levels of achievement and retention on GCE A level business and GNVQ courses
- the good quality of feedback provided on students' work
- vocationally relevant assignments and well-researched coursework

#### Weaknesses

- some lacklustre teaching and learning
- low achievement and retention on some business IT courses
- ineffective management of amalgamated year groups in GNVQ advanced

16 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment report that there is a good range of provision in the curriculum area. Courses include GCE A level business studies, GCE A level and GCSE accounting, GCSE office applications and provision in computer literacy and information technology, and business technology. The college offers business IT provision through franchise arrangements with Dallam School's Adult and Community Centre. Recruitment to some courses has resulted in some barely viable group sizes such as those in GNVQ advanced and GCE A level accounting. All courses have well-documented schemes of

work. There are some good examples of collaborative working, but there are no formal mechanisms to share good practice and jointly develop learning materials.

17 Inspectors identified good teaching on most courses but did not observe evidence of outstanding or distinctive practice. The quality of teaching and learning was uneven across the curriculum area. Teachers conducted GCE A level business studies lessons at a challenging pace and included a good mix of learning activities. Case studies were well chosen to reinforce the vocational relevance of theory and concepts. Students participated well and were questioned regularly by teachers to check their understanding. Where on the GNVQ advanced course lessons combine year 1 and 2 students in order to ensure their viability, often teachers do not use teaching and learning methods which meet the needs of all the students. In some accounting lessons teachers did not explain the concepts involved sufficiently clearly to enable students to make progress in the subject. Solutions to accounting problems were not routinely worked through with the whole group to consolidate students' understanding. The college's own lesson observation grades were too generous and the strengths of teaching and learning were overstated. The self-assessment report failed to identify any specific weaknesses in teaching and learning.

18 Students on the majority of courses produce a good standard of coursework. A particular strength noted by inspectors was the vocational relevance and quality of much of the coursework and assignments. There is good emphasis on research and investigative activity which requires students to use a variety of sources in their assignment and project work. Teachers mark students' work thoroughly and provide detailed feedback which is constructive and critically evaluative. Students receive clear guidance on how they can improve the quality of their work and improve their assessment grades.

# Curriculum Areas

19 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that pass rates and retention rates are high on GCE A level business and GNVQ intermediate courses. Achievements on these courses have been consistently above national averages over the last three years. On the modular GCE A level course in business, two-thirds of students gained passes at the higher grades A to C. Above average pass rates were also attained in the newly introduced GCSE office applications course. The small cohort of GNVQ advanced students completing their course in 1999 achieved well. Although the recruitment to this course has improved, in the current year, retention has already been poor with six of the 16 students leaving early. The college acknowledges in its self-assessment report that there has been some low achievement on the integrated business technology level 3 course, and the Dallam School's Adult and Community Centre franchise provision, and that the number of students entered for GCE A level accounts is small. To

redress the weak outcomes on the integrated business technology course the college took action to review the recruitment to this course. However, evidence from the new intake for integrated business technology shows that a significant proportion of students are not well matched to the demands of the course.

20 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that staff have shown flexibility in introducing new courses. Resources are generally adequate for the range of courses on offer. The IT facilities in the office applications room have recently been upgraded. The GNVQ base room provides a good learning environment. Students make good use of the IT facilities in this room but the hardware and software are now dated. Most classrooms are fit for purpose but the room used for GCSE is too small for the group size. There is no technical support for the integrated business technology and computer literacy and information technology evening provision.

## A summary of retention and achievement rates in business studies, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
OCR computer literacy and information technology	1	Number of starters	54	101	279
		Retention (%)	54	83	75
		Achievement (%)	19	67	59
Integrated business technology	2	Number of starters	*	38	25
		Retention (%)	*	76	96
		Achievement (%)	*	26	64
GNVQ intermediate	2	Number of starters	11	8	18
		Retention (%)	82	75	94
		Achievement (%)	100	100	100
GCE A level business	3	Number of starters	43	39	40
		Retention (%)	98	69	80
		Achievement (%)	88	100	97
GNVQ advanced	3	Number of starters	12	12	7
		Retention (%)	83	75	86
		Achievement (%)	100	100	80

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)

\*course not running

# Curriculum Areas

## English and General Studies

### Grade 3

**21 Inspectors observed 12 lessons in English language, English literature and general studies. They considered that the self-assessment reports overstated strengths in teaching and learning and they identified an additional strength and weakness.**

#### Key strengths

- good attention to the needs of individual learners in lessons
- effective assessment of students' work
- innovative use of staff development opportunities

#### Weaknesses

- inadequacies in general studies provision
- some low achievement rates
- lack of formal learning support for students

22 Most teaching is satisfactory or good. Lessons are well planned. Students are made aware of the purpose of each lesson and there is an emphasis on developing the skills needed for the examinations. The best lessons build effectively on the students' own knowledge and experience in a methodical and structured way. Teachers manage group work well and often find opportunities to encourage students to think for themselves. In some weaker lessons, the students lacked motivation and teachers failed to set sufficiently demanding work. In a general studies lesson, students were presented with an oversimplified view of the British constitution and set work at a level which was below their abilities. In some lessons, the work was not sufficiently related to the requirements of the syllabus. Teachers often use an appropriate variety of methods in lessons, but rarely use IT in their teaching. The self-assessment report

overstates the strengths in teaching and learning.

23 English teachers work well as a team. They hold regular formal meetings, in which they consider key issues such as teaching and learning and students' achievements. The team does not monitor closely enough its progress against the operating objectives it has set itself. The GCE A level general studies course is taught by staff drawn from different faculties. A co-ordinator ensures the efficient organisation and administration of the course. However, general studies is not subject to the same quality assurance and management arrangements as other courses. Faculty heads do not attend meetings to plan or monitor performance in the subject. Students are not invited to comment on the course as a whole. Attendance and retention are poor, though absence is followed up. Teachers do not always provide effectively for the wide range of ability and knowledge of students in the classes. Not all students value taking the course. The self-assessment report recognised some of these weaknesses.

24 English students appreciate the high level of individual guidance and support they receive which helps them to improve their work. Teachers regularly and carefully assess students' work in English. Moderation and standardising processes are rigorous. The feedback on written work is detailed and often refers to explicit marking criteria published by the awarding bodies. Students are able to get extra support from teachers on an informal basis. Although the English team has identified some underachievement by students through its reviewing processes, more formalised arrangements for learning support are not available within the faculty. The self-assessment report did not identify this weakness.

25 Teachers are well qualified and experienced. The college supports their professional and personal development and has encouraged teachers in their various activities, as a residential poet, in attending a Shakespeare

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summer school and in attending literary lectures. Students also benefit from a programme of theatre and university visits. Lessons for all courses take place in appropriate and well-furnished rooms, with attractive displays of students' work. Teachers have easy access to audiovisual equipment. There is a good range of texts and videos in the library, both specifically for English courses and of a broader literary or linguistic interest. There are few study aids to enable students to study on their own outside the classroom.

26 Over the three years 1997 to 1999, pass rates on GCE A level English language courses and the proportion of grades C or above on the GCSE English course have been rising to meet

the national averages. In the GCE A level English literature course, achievements have been well below the national average for two of the three years. Retention rates on GCE A level English courses were good in 1999. Overall, GCE A level achievements fall slightly below the level predicted by students' GCSE scores. The percentage of students who attain grade C or above for GCSE English has risen from a low of 38% in 1997 to just above the national average in 1999. Both retention and achievement on the GCE A level general studies course are poor. The self-assessment report took insufficient account of these factors in its judgements of strengths and weaknesses.

## A summary of retention and achievement rates in English and general studies, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GCSE English	2	Number of starters	88	56	74
		Retention (%)	72	70	76
		Achievement (%)	38	54	56
GCE A level English language	3	Number of starters	56	59	51
		Retention (%)	86	78	84
		Achievement (%)	62	85	91
GCE A level English literature	3	Number of starters	99	78	63
		Retention (%)	81	76	87
		Achievement (%)	85	90	76
GCE A level general studies	3	Number of starters	179	236	176
		Retention (%)	87	58	62
		Achievement (%)	76	79	65

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)

# Curriculum Areas

## Social Science

### Grade 2

**27 Inspectors observed 10 lessons covering GCSE and GCE A/AS level subjects in psychology, sociology and government and politics. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report, although they considered that one weakness and one strength were overstated.**

#### Key strengths

- much good teaching
- consistently high achievement rates in GCE A level government and politics
- consistently good rates of retention in GCE A level sociology and psychology
- high standard of student response in oral and written work
- good range of subject enrichment activities

#### Weaknesses

- lack of detail in written feedback from teachers on students' work
- little use of IT in sociology and psychology
- failure to ensure that all students have sufficiently demanding work

28 The courses offered include GCE A/AS level psychology, sociology, government and politics and GCSE sociology. Most GCE A level courses are offered over two years and the GCSE course over one year. GCE AS students generally attend the first year of the GCE A level course. Regular formal team meetings are productive as are the more informal subject exchanges between staff. Subject teams have recently started to set targets for retention, attendance and achievement and to monitor performance against these targets. However, the monitoring of progress made towards achieving targets and

of the implementation of agreed actions is not rigorous enough.

29 As identified in the self-assessment report the majority of the lessons observed were good or outstanding. Teachers use question and answer techniques effectively to develop students' knowledge. In a psychology lesson, the teacher used question and answer techniques to interrelate theories, approaches and therapies in an effective manner. The results of this exercise were then used to illustrate revision techniques and the structuring of essays. Teachers use examples of current events imaginatively to illustrate concepts. Students are encouraged to contribute to class discussion by drawing on their own experiences. Students are responsive, attentive and hardworking, often contributing effectively to lessons. Students' files are invariably well organised and this promotes their learning. They are enthusiastic and frequently show a good understanding of the subject. In a sociology lesson, students were able to discuss the causes of crime with reference to current events and theory. Teachers do not ensure that all students have sufficiently demanding work. Teachers set homework on a regular basis and return it to students within seven days. There are detailed criteria for awarding marks, which are shared with students so that they understand the standards they must reach in order to complete the work successfully. The written feedback on students' work sometimes does not have enough detail to enable students to understand how the work could be improved. In government and politics and sociology, students participate in a wide range of enrichment experiences, including visits to the European Parliament, universities and conferences and receive visits from external speakers. Students speak enthusiastically about the support given by staff. Extra revision sessions and support sessions are offered to students outside timetabled lessons. As

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identified in the self-assessment report, there is little use of IT to enhance teaching and learning in sociology and psychology. Schemes of work in psychology and sociology only identify subject content and lack detail of the skills which students should be developing.

30 GCE A level retention rates are at or above national averages. As stated in the self-assessment report, there have been 100% pass rates in GCE A level government and politics for the past three years with good proportions of students achieving the higher grades A to C. Achievements in GCE A level psychology and sociology have improved and, in 1999, were

approaching national averages. Achievement of high grades in GCSE sociology was good in 1999, although retention rates are lower than the national average.

31 Resources for psychology, sociology and politics are good. All classrooms are attractive and well decorated with appropriate resources. There are good displays of students' work. All students are supplied with at least one copy of a textbook and additional textbooks and resources are available in classrooms. All teachers are appropriately qualified. Teachers are enthusiastic about their work and they have good knowledge of their subjects.

## A summary of retention and achievement rates in social science, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GCSE sociology	2	Number of starters	19	11	11
		Retention (%)	79	73	73
		Achievement (%)	57	43	88
GCE A level psychology	3	Number of starters	43	73	62
		Retention (%)	88	79	77
		Achievement (%)	68	84	83
GCE A level sociology	3	Number of starters	71	33	36
		Retention (%)	86	76	78
		Achievement (%)	51	67	83
GCE A level government and politics	3	Number of starters	11	16	12
		Retention (%)	45	75	75
		Achievement (%)	100	100	100

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)



# Cross-college Provision

## Support for Students

### Grade 2

**32 Inspectors agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report but identified one additional strength and two additional weaknesses.**

#### Key strengths

- strong staff commitment to support for students
- effective recruitment and school-college transition arrangements
- well-structured tutorial programme
- good systems for reviewing and recording progress and action-planning
- high-quality careers education and guidance

#### Weaknesses

- inadequate learning support
- shortcomings in teaching of the tutorial programme

33 Barrow-in-Furness Sixth Form College is a friendly, supportive and close-knit community. The team of link tutors, who play a key role in the recruitment and transition arrangements, forge helpful relationships with students long before they enrol. Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement in the self-assessment report that link tutors are highly effective. Each is attached to one of the college's partner schools. They arrange a preliminary interview with each applicant and also conduct the enrolment interview. However, students with poor attendance patterns or with personal problems that might put them at risk of not completing their courses are not identified at this early stage. The link tutors successfully adapt activities to take account of the needs of individual schools. The 'Experience Day' offered to year 10 pupils is particularly useful in

enabling pupils to sample lessons of their choice.

34 Some students who need support with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are not always identified on entry, a weakness identified in the self-assessment report. The college is not doing anything different this year to overcome this weakness. Though the college has a number of ways of identifying these students, these do not include screening or diagnostic testing. Not all key staff are clear about what systems are used. In the current year the college provides additional support for 35 students. These include students with dyslexia. Students are positive about the support they receive.

35 The tutorial system is managed by four senior tutors, each responsible for a set of group tutors. Since the last inspection, the college has developed a structured tutorial programme leading to a certificate in contemporary studies. This has given a stronger focus to the tutorial hour. This strength was not identified in the self-assessment report. Students, particularly those in their first year, find the tutorial programme helpful though they do not value the qualification. The lessons are well supported by a series of well-thought-out booklets containing lively, appropriate and up-to-date material. A particularly well-designed exercise on prejudice and its consequences, part of the personal and social awareness unit, effectively used the television character of Ali G to stimulate reflection and debate. However, though the college's intention is that an active learning approach should be used, in the majority of tutorials observed by inspectors the students were attentive but passive recipients of tutor-dominated activity. There are inadequate arrangements for tutors to meet together to plan and monitor the tutorial programme.

36 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that individual student progress is closely monitored through a well-documented system of

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progress reviews and action-planning. Students have the opportunity for self-assessment and are well trained in action-planning, so that they record specific targets rather than vague aspirations.

37 Though individual college staff respond well when students ask for help with their academic work, there are no systematic and comprehensive cross-college arrangements for supporting learning outside the classroom. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report. There are no workshops in study skills and the take-up of the support offered in mathematics and English workshops is poor. Their availability is not publicised in the weekly college bulletin nor in the student diary. Opportunities are missed for adding value to students' achievements because of the lack of a coherent approach to learning support. Though some subjects provide additional revision sessions and remedial sessions, others do not. There are few arrangements for providing more demanding work to extend the more able students.

38 Students value the support on personal issues given by their tutors and senior tutors. There is an inter-denominational chaplaincy team which provides an additional resource for students. There is no student representative on the chaplaincy support group. Students appreciate the financial service provided through the registry.

39 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that students benefit from high-quality careers education and guidance. College staff and the Cumbria Careers Service work together productively. A careers education programme takes place through the tutorial system. Tutors use the progress review interviews to encourage students to make careers appointments with the careers adviser. The careers adviser has recently provided training for tutors in interview skills. There are very good arrangements for students applying to higher education to receive appropriate

information and guidance. The college identified careers guidance for other students as a weakness in the self-assessment report. Action has been taken and students now have access to sessions in the spring term on job search skills, curriculum vitae production and interview technique. The careers library is housed in a bright, airy and comfortable space. It is well stocked with booklets, videos, and interactive computer programmes, and has Internet access. Students are given website addresses during careers education sessions.

## General Resources

### *Grade 2*

**40 Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report. However, inspectors considered that the report understated the weakness in IT provision.**

#### **Key strengths**

- a safe, welcoming and attractive environment
- well-managed site maintenance
- well-organised and welcoming library
- very good sports and recreation facilities

#### **Weaknesses**

- inefficient room utilisation
- insufficient development of information and communications technology
- overcrowding and restricted opening times in the student refectory

41 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that the quality of accommodation is good. The college is located on a single site in pleasant, well-maintained grounds. The main building provides purpose-built and attractive accommodation with specialist facilities that include laboratories, art and design studios, a

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sports hall and a small lecture theatre. Classrooms and corridors are in good decorative order and most parts of the building have good access for wheelchair users. All the buildings are clean and well maintained and provide a safe and secure environment which is conducive to learning. Site management is good and repairs and refurbishment are undertaken quickly and effectively. There is a maintenance budget linked to a 10-year rolling programme of repairs. Public areas are welcoming, suitably located and accessible.

42 Progress has been made since the last inspection with alterations to some classrooms, refurbishment of the sports hall and development of the art and design suite. Most classrooms are suitably furnished and equipped and there are excellent examples of well-configured displays of students' work in corridors and in classrooms. However, some of the original design features of the building provide spaces which are no longer appropriate for the teaching. Some room usage and occupancy rates are poor. There are weaknesses in timetabling arrangements which result in the ineffective use of teaching space. Classrooms are frequently allocated on the basis of historical occupancy rather than the requirements of current student cohorts.

43 The college has improved the provision of IT equipment for the use of staff and students since the last inspection. In 1995, the ratio of computers to students was 1:14 and is now 1:10. Although most curriculum areas use IT in some form in their teaching, students have too few opportunities to use IT resources to develop their IT skills in a subject context. This weakness was understated in the self-assessment report. Student access to the Internet is confined to five machines based in the college library which can only be accessed with tutor authorisation. Computers are available for use in rooms across the college but the specification of several is dated. The college intranet is still in the early stages of

development and the fragmented distribution and variable quality of machines is not sufficient to support learning effectively. The college has recently appointed a specialist IT technician, and a cross-college IT co-ordinator will take up post in September 2000.

44 The library is well managed and provides a pleasant study environment for students. It has a wide range of books and periodicals which are well matched to the courses on offer. All students are provided with a library induction programme which provides basic training in information retrieval skills. At present, the library is only open in the daytime, although evening tutors can arrange for their students to use the facilities by pre-arrangement. There is effective communication between the librarian and teachers which ensures that library stock is up to date and provides students with an appropriate range of resources for their studies. Many curriculum areas also keep additional resources within departments, from which students may borrow materials. The library incorporates the central reprographics section which provides the main source of photocopying and desktop publishing for both staff and students.

45 The college has good sports and recreational facilities which it encourages students to use. The college encourages the local community to use its lecture theatre and sports hall and frequently hosts events for schools such as the Young Engineers' Technology Competition. The open-plan refectory is combined with a designated social area but is often overcrowded. The cafeteria is only open until 13.15 hours which prevents some students from using its facilities. Vending machines are available, but are an unsatisfactory alternative to the provision of a main meal. The students' union has its own office and operates a coffee bar in the communal social and refectory area.

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## Quality Assurance

### Grade 3

**46 Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report, but they identified additional weaknesses and considered some strengths to have been overstated.**

#### Key strengths

- staff commitment to continuous improvement
- well-defined structure and framework for development of quality assurance
- strong internal verification procedures in GNVQ and NVQ courses
- staff development closely related to college priorities

#### Weaknesses

- lack of thoroughness in course review and action-planning
- uneven impact of quality assurance arrangements on teaching and learning and students' achievements
- quality assurance processes not applied to all aspects of the college's work
- some inaccuracies in the college's self-assessment

47 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that there is a strong commitment throughout the college to quality improvement. Since the previous inspection there has been a number of changes to quality assurance arrangements. Developments have been led by the self-assessment review group and a new quality team led by the head of quality assurance. Staff understand the system and the role they have in the processes.

48 The college has a well-defined structure for the development of quality assurance. The quality assurance framework document includes both quality statements and quality targets. The

college's self-assessment report informs faculty and college annual operating statements and staff individual development plans. The framework is applied to teaching departments and cross-college functions. The processes for the verification and validation of the college's self-assessment report are carefully thought out. Verification involves focus groups of students, individual staff interviews and inspection of documentation. Validation is by two quality team members, a member of the self-assessment review group and the author of the report. The chair of governors participates in the validation of the sections on management and quality assurance. A weakness only partially acknowledged in the self-assessment report is that some aspects of provision are not fully incorporated into the quality assurance framework. The responses of adult students to questionnaires are not effectively analysed nor are their achievements monitored in relation to their learning goals. There is insufficient quality assurance of the cross-faculty provision of general studies. Business support staff have yet to be brought into the quality assurance framework, but they have recently begun to produce quality standards and statements to add to the framework.

49 Inspectors agreed with the college that internal verification procedures for GNVQ and NVQ courses are a strength. Internal verification is well planned, systematic, effective and has a clear structure. Similar processes are being applied to key skills and to the contemporary studies programme. There is also good practice in the internal moderation of GCE A level and GCSE courses.

50 There is a programme of lesson observations, the outcomes of which are used by some departments to identify examples of good practice which are circulated and discussed within their teams. As acknowledged in the self-assessment report, however, there is no systematic approach to the sharing of good practice. A system of focus groups and college-

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wide questionnaires has been established to canvass students' views. However, there is no mechanism for feedback of the results to the students.

51 Several aspects of the quality assurance system are quite new and have yet to have an impact on some key aspects of the work of the college. The three-year trends in retention and achievement at different levels and for both 16 to 18 year old students and those aged 19 and over, offer a mixed picture. There is no general trend of year-on-year improvement. However, the trend for achievements for 16 to 18 year olds at level 3 is distorted by the inclusion of the contemporary studies award in 1999. In that year, the overall GCE A level achievement rate was 86% and for the GNVQ advanced course 94%. In several GCE A level subjects, students' achievements compared with their attainment on entry do not compare favourably with national benchmarking data produced by the FEFC. Lesson observation grades awarded by inspectors were below the sector norm and below those obtained by the college in its previous inspection.

52 There is a clear link between staff development arrangements and strategic and operational plans. A staff development plan is produced annually and each individual has their own development plan produced in discussion with their line manager. However, appraisal is a separate system, not necessarily conducted by the line manager. The college acknowledges the benefit that could be gained by drawing these disparate strands together. The college was re-accredited as an Investor in People in 1999.

53 The college's self-assessment report is a straightforward document, openly identifying strengths and weaknesses. Course reviews have been incorporated into the subject self-assessment reports. Some focus on achievement but pay insufficient attention to teaching and learning. Some of the action plans resulting from self-assessment are too vague in setting dates and identifying milestones. There

is no formal procedure for managers to monitor action plans. The college has not yet developed formal procedures for monitoring or reviewing charter commitments. These weaknesses were identified in the college's self-assessment. In many areas, the college has overstated its strengths and understated weaknesses. Two-thirds of the grades awarded by inspectors were below those awarded by the college.

## Governance

### *Grade 3*

**54 Inspectors and auditors agreed in part with the college's assessment of governance but identified some additional weaknesses.**

#### **Key strengths**

- wide range and appropriate level of experience within the corporation
- governors well informed on curriculum development and students' achievements
- clear governance framework for college collaborative strategies

#### **Weaknesses**

- unsystematic arrangements for induction and training of governors
- corporation's self-assessment process undeveloped
- inadequate reporting from committees to the corporation

55 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is weak. The corporation does not conduct all of its business in accordance with the instrument and articles of government. It also does not substantially fulfil its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC.

56 The corporation has a determined membership of 16 and there is currently one

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vacancy. Good progress has been made towards addressing the composition requirements of the modified instrument and articles of government. However, the search committee has not established criteria to consider the re-appointment of governors to second and subsequent terms of office and there are a number of long-standing governors due for re-appointment in October 2000. Although the corporation has not agreed formal attendance targets, attendance at corporation and committee meetings is good. Governors possess an appropriate range of skills but they have only recently recognised the need for a skills audit. There is no systematic identification of governors' training needs. The training which governors currently receive is mainly restricted to briefings by managers at corporation meetings. The corporation has recently introduced an induction evening. These weaknesses were not fully recognised in the self-assessment report.

57 The independent, external clerk to the corporation was appointed to the role in 1997. He has a clear job description. The time allowed for this role is insufficient. Corporation and committee agendas and supporting papers are sent out in good time, in advance of meetings. The agendas do not indicate clearly the nature of the items and the minutes are often too brief. Confidentiality in corporation and committee business is appropriately used. The corporation has approved a 'whistleblowing' policy and a combined code of conduct and ethics. Standing orders have not yet been established to guide the conduct of corporation and committee business. The register of interests, updated during 1999, is not comprehensive and does not extend to senior managers.

58 The corporation has established an appropriate range of committees. With the exception of those for the audit committee, terms of reference are insufficiently detailed. The corporation receives the minutes of

committees but does not approve, when required, some specific items within the minutes. The audit committee re-appointed the college's auditors without recourse to the corporation. The audit committee, rather than the corporation, receives reports on franchising. The finance and general purposes committee meets three times a year to consider detailed management accounts. This committee considered the 1997-98 financial statements and the 1999-2000 annual estimates but these documents were not formally approved, as required by statute, by the corporation. Neither this committee nor the corporation considers the three-year financial forecasts before these are submitted to the FEFC. The corporation does not receive its own termly financial reports. The reports provided for corporation members are of good quality. Governors rely on them and feel well informed and confident. An exception has been the slow response by the corporation to reports on student data which indicate some inaccuracies relating to the operation of the management information system.

59 Inspectors agreed with the strength claimed in the self-assessment report that the corporation is well informed on curriculum and student achievement issues. Members have attended lessons, visits and field trips, and receive presentations from senior staff. They also give talks to students about their professional work and their role as governors and some contribute to the college careers programme. A standards committee has been formed to set student achievement targets. Members are familiar with national benchmarking data and comparative information on achievement. They are knowledgeable about achievement in the college and what remedial action the management might be able to take. Student retention issues are regularly reported and their resource implications clearly understood.

60 Governors contribute to the strategic planning process by considering the draft

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three-year plan and responding to the prompts of the management team. The corporation has set a clear strategic framework around the development of collaboration with Furness College. It is committed to retaining the sixth form college as a separate institution. Individual governors use their skills and experience appropriately. One member, formerly employed by a training and enterprise council (TEC), has advised the corporation on a cautious approach to franchising.

61 The chair conducts the appraisal of the principal, deputy principal and clerk on an annual basis. The context is developmental with no performance review or remuneration implications. The principal's appraisal also involves on a reciprocal basis, the principal of another college. The documentation is available on request to members of the corporation. Governors monitor their own attendance but otherwise appraisal of their own performance is unsystematic. A group exercise to identify strengths and weakness has been undertaken but not developed into a formal scheme.

## Management

### Grade 3

**62 Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report but considered that some strengths were overstated.**

#### Key strengths

- effective management structure and lines of communication
- good links with external organisations
- effective links between planning and self-assessment

#### Weaknesses

- insufficient rigour in annual operating plans and the use of performance indicators

- underdeveloped accommodation strategy
- problems in data management

63 The college has successfully addressed weaknesses in the management structure that were identified at the last inspection. Staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities. There is an open style of management which encourages staff involvement in committees and cross-college working groups. The health and safety and equal opportunity committees meet regularly and have a clear remit and reporting structure. The curriculum committee is chaired by the principal, involves all heads of faculty and other key staff and provides a useful forum for progressing initiatives, such as curriculum 2000. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that communication in the college is good.

64 There are good links between self-assessment processes and planning. Staff are effectively involved in the planning processes. Each member of staff has an individual development meeting annually with their line manager. They are aware of the overall college objectives. Through faculty and other team meetings there is review of the previous year's performance and this, together with outcomes from self-assessment processes, are used to inform future developments.

65 The self-assessment report recognises that there are weaknesses in the annual operating plans. The quality of plans produced by some teams across the college is poor. The overall college annual operating plan is poor. It lacks clearly defined goals against which progress can be monitored. Success criteria in the 1999-2000 plan include better room utilisation, sharing good practice in each faculty and increased use of the management information system. The strategy to achieve these aims is not always clear and the implementation date is often vague. The college lacks a clear accommodation

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strategy which is driven by current curriculum needs. Some classrooms are too small to accommodate the group size allocated to them and there is no up-to-date strategy to address this. Senior management team minutes do not indicate a clear calendar of how college objectives will be monitored. Heads of faculty do not meet regularly with the principal and quality manager to review their progress against targets, and formal records are not kept of the ad hoc meetings which do take place.

66 The use of performance indicators is not well developed in the college. The 1999-2000 plan states the need to identify a range of indicators, but progress on this has been slow. In 1998-99, the GCE A level programme had a pass rate target of 86%, but there were no overall targets for GNVQ or GCSE. Retention targets were set for advanced and intermediate programmes last year but individual course retention targets have been introduced for the first time this year. There is insufficient use of other quantifiable performance indicators.

67 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is adequate. The college is financially sound, having significant cash balances and income and expenditure reserves. The college has a small but appropriately qualified and experienced finance team. Detailed management accounts are considered on a monthly basis by the senior management team and quarterly by the finance and general purposes committee. The 1998-99 annual internal audit report expressed concerns over the student records system. The college identified errors in the student data returns for 1996-97 and 1997-98 and these were recently re-submitted to the FEFC. The external auditors have not yet signed off the 1998-99 student data return. Internal audit coverage is not extensive.

68 The college is aware of the need to strengthen its data management systems. There have been improvements this year, for example,

in the reports in attendance produced by the system. However, systems for checking the accuracy of the ISR are underdeveloped and there is a lack of regular reporting to the senior management team of data derived from the ISR. Managers across the college are insufficiently involved in reviewing the adequacy of the data management systems.

69 The college has good links with a range of external partners. The college collaborates closely with the local further education college and through a number of local and regional structures, such as the Furness Education Consortium and other widening participation and lifelong learning projects. The college readily engages with initiatives aimed at increasing the numbers of school-leavers staying on in education and others such as that with Age Concern to bring together young people and older adults.

70 Marketing to traditional client groups is good, although the college has identified that it needs to carry out further work to identify catchment areas from which it is under-recruiting. It is not successful in attracting students with disabilities. A small number of adults enrol on main college courses and there is a small programme of adult evening classes. An access course aimed at adults is no longer running owing to lack of numbers.

## Conclusions

71 The college produced its second self-assessment report for this inspection. The report was clearly set out and provided a useful basis for planning and carrying out the inspection. It was well supported by evidence which was readily available to inspectors. Action plans identified who was responsible for making improvements and by when, although some deadlines expressed as 'ongoing' are far too imprecise. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified but



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considered that some strengths, especially in teaching and learning, were overstated and weaknesses ignored. Inspectors disagreed with most of the cross-college grades in the self-assessment report and partially with two of the curriculum grades, awarding lower grades than those claimed by the college.

72 Strengths and weaknesses identified during the inspection are listed under each section of this report. The main strengths and weaknesses are identified in the summary.

# College Statistics

## Student numbers by age (November 1999)

Age	%
Under 16	0
16-18 years	77
19-24 years	4
25+ years	17
Not known	2
Total	100

Source: college data

## Student numbers by level of study (November 1999)

Level of study	%
Level 1 (foundation)	0
Level 2 (intermediate)	30
Level 3 (advanced)	69
Level 4/5 (higher)	1
Non-schedule 2	0
Total	100

Source: college data

## Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (November 1999)

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	244	68	31
Business	78	67	14
Hotel and catering	19	0	2
Health and community care	25	2	3
Art and design	53	25	8
Humanities	339	89	42
Total	758	251	100

Source: college data

## Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 22% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

## Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (November 1999)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	46	0	0	46
Supporting direct learning contact	5	0	0	5
Other support	13	0	0	13
Total	64	0	0	64

Source: college data, rounded to nearest full-time equivalent

# College Statistics

## Three-year Trends

### Financial data

	1997	1998	1999
Income	£2,477,000	£2,262,000	£2,178,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	£19.33	£17.76	£17.24
Payroll as a proportion of income	74%	73%	76%
Achievement of funding target	112%	97%	98%
Diversity of income	4%	6%	4%
Operating surplus	£70,000	£34,000	-£3,000

Sources: Income – Council Circulars 98/43 (1997), 00/10 (1998), college (1999)

ALF – Funding Allocations 1997-98 (1997 and 1998), Funding Allocations 1998-99 (1999)

Payroll – Council Circulars 98/43 (1997), 00/10 (1998), college (1999)

Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1997-98 (1997 and 1998), college (1999)

Diversity of income – Council Circulars 98/43 (1997), 00/10 (1998), college (1999)

Operating surplus – Council Circulars 98/43 (1997), 00/10 (1998), college (1999)

### Students' achievements data

Level	Retention and pass	Students aged 16 to 18			Students aged 19 or over		
		1997	1998	1999	1997	1998	1999
1	Number of starters	8	29	225	198	118	42
	Retention (%)	0	59	76	59	74	74
	Achievement (%)	0	80	78	100	77	55
2	Number of starters	505	356	403	390	168	162
	Retention (%)	72	75	83	62	63	75
	Achievement (%)	40	93	92	88	63	50
3	Number of starters	1,365	1,348	1,437	370	359	529
	Retention (%)	84	76	82	69	56	64
	Achievement (%)	76	85	77	61	54	40
4 or 5	Number of starters	0	0	0	0	16	22
	Retention (%)	0	0	0	0	81	86
	Achievement (%)	0	0	0	0	80	*
Short courses	Number of starters	17	41	100	49	251	65
	Retention (%)	76	93	72	69	78	82
	Achievement (%)	n/a	53	77	17	55	82
Unknown/unclassified	Number of starters	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Retention (%)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Achievement (%)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Source: college

\*data not reliable

n/a not applicable

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