

**REPORT  
FROM THE  
INSPECTORATE**

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# **Plymouth College of Further Education**

**August 1996**

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**THE  
FURTHER  
EDUCATION  
FUNDING  
COUNCIL**

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**THE FURTHER EDUCATION  
FUNDING COUNCIL**

*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 the 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.*

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## **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.*

*By June 1995, some 208 college inspections had been completed. The grade profiles for aspects of cross-college provision and programme areas for the 208 colleges are shown in the following table.*

### **College grade profiles 1993-95**

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Inspection grades</b>				
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Programme area	9%	60%	28%	3%	<1%
Cross-college provision	13%	51%	31%	5%	<1%
Overall	11%	56%	29%	4%	<1%

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# FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 109/96

## PLYMOUTH COLLEGE OF FURTHER EDUCATION

### SOUTH WEST REGION

Inspected March 1995-May 1996

#### Summary

Plymouth College of Further Education, Devon, is a responsive college. It offers a very wide range of general and vocational courses to meet the needs of school leavers, adults and employers. The college is flexible in meeting students' individual needs. Links with employers are extensive. The college is effectively governed and managed. Other strengths include: the impartial guidance-led admissions system, the high quality of provision in hospitality and catering, the overall design of the quality assurance system, the generally well-qualified staff and the high-quality accommodation and equipment. Information technology is used effectively in a number of ways. To improve the quality of the provision still further the college should: improve communication between the principalship and staff; improve the unsatisfactory aspects of provision in leisure and tourism and on separate specialist programmes for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities; address the variations in the provision of support services for students; consolidate the implementation of the quality assurance systems across the college; improve the marketing of courses to, and physical access for, students with restricted mobility.

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

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

<b>Curriculum area</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Curriculum area</b>	<b>Grade</b>
Science, mathematics and computing	2	Health and social care	2
Construction	2	Hairdressing and beauty therapy	2
Engineering	2	Performing arts, media, art and design	3
Business management and administration	2	Humanities and languages	2
Hospitality and catering	1	Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities/adult basic education	3
Leisure and tourism	3		

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## **INTRODUCTION**

1 Plymouth College of Further Education was inspected between March 1995 and May 1996. A team of 22 inspectors spent a total of 100 days in the college. Business, management and administration was inspected during March 1995. Induction procedures were inspected during September 1995. The remaining curriculum areas were inspected during the spring of 1996 and aspects of cross-college provision during May 1996. Inspectors visited 281 classes, examined students' work and held discussions with governors, parents, staff and students. Inspectors attended a meeting of the corporation board. Inspectors also met representatives of local employers, schools, higher education, the community, Devon and Cornwall Careers Service Ltd and Devon and Cornwall Training and Enterprise Council (TEC).

## **THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS**

2 Plymouth College of Further Education is the largest of seven further education sector colleges in Devon. The college serves the areas of West Devon and East Cornwall, although some courses draw students from a much wider area. For example, resettlement courses for armed service personnel recruit nationally. Most of the other further education sector colleges are located over 40 miles from the college. However, Plymouth College of Art and Design is approximately two miles away and St Austell College has a site at Saltash, a distance of approximately three miles. There are 16 schools with sixth forms within the college's main catchment area. In 1995, approximately 72 per cent of school leavers in Plymouth proceeded to further full-time study after the age of 16. This is lower than the corresponding percentage for 1994 of 76.5 per cent. Statistics from the careers service indicate that the college is attracting a growing percentage of school leavers.

3 The population of Plymouth is approximately 250,000. Twenty-nine per cent of the population are over 60 years of age. The local economy has traditionally relied on the defence, tourist, manufacturing, freight, and services industries. The economy has declined as a result of defence cuts, with major job losses at Devonport Dockyard and Royal Naval Engineering College Manadon. The unemployment rate for the Plymouth travel-to-work area in March 1996 was 10.2 per cent. This is higher than the average for the south-west of 7.0 per cent. Devon and Cornwall TEC has identified health and care and leisure and tourism as major growth areas for employment.

4 In May 1996, there were 19,537 enrolments at the college, 3,215 of whom were by full-time students. Enrolments by age and by level of study are shown in figures 1 and 2. Enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figure 3. The college employs 513 full-time equivalent staff, 324 of whom are employed as teachers. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4.

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5 The college's senior management team, the principalship, comprises the principal, the vice-principal, who is responsible for curriculum and quality, and the directors of four cross-college functions, marketing, finance and administration, human resources, and estates and legal affairs. Seven heads of department are each responsible for a major area of the college's teaching programme. These are the departments of art and humanities; computing and electrical engineering; construction; hotel, leisure and beauty; mechanical engineering; science and health; and a department responsible for the business and management centre. Line management of department heads is split between the vice-principal and the director of human resources. The head of the college's open access centre, which provides computer-based training, reports to the director of finance. Most departments are subdivided into specialist sections, with programme team leaders responsible for day-to-day management of courses and students.

6 One campus, Kings Road, is located approximately a mile from the centre of Plymouth. This site houses work in business and management, computing, hospitality and catering, leisure and tourism, engineering, construction and hairdressing. The college has recently rationalised its accommodation and opened a second major site, the Goschen Centre. This site is used primarily for General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level) studies, and for courses in performing arts and media, science, and health and social care. Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities takes place on both main sites.

7 In its strategic plan, the corporation commits itself to a key statement that the success of students is its overriding strategic priority for the period 1995 to 1998. There are 12 broad aims of the college. They cover improvements in the quality of provision and the review and development of programmes to meet the needs of the population of Plymouth. Other priorities identified include achievement of the Investors in People kitemark and further development of the college's accommodation.

#### **RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION**

8 The college is strongly committed to meeting the education and training needs of the Plymouth community. This has resulted in a particularly wide range of vocational programmes. Eleven subjects are offered at National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) level 1, 48 at level 2 and 33 at level 3. Students can complete their NVQs through full-time or part-time study, or through more flexible patterns of learning which allow students to choose when and how they will study. General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) courses are available at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels in a wide range of areas. Some GNVQ provision is offered part time and there are intensive one-year advanced GNVQ programmes in business, and health and social care for mature students. In most departments, a variety of specialist craft, technician and

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professional qualifications complement the NVQ and GNVQ provision. In a few cases, for example, in leisure and tourism, the range of courses could be developed further.

9 GCE A level courses are offered in 33 subjects, including eight GCE advanced supplementary (AS) subjects, and courses in 36 subjects are offered for the GCSE. Some subjects are offered with different syllabuses in order to meet the needs of different students. Access courses for mature students without normal entry qualifications, but who wish to enter higher education, are provided through seven specialist routes. These include science, nursing and arts, humanities and leisure subjects. Higher national certificates and/or diploma programmes are available in business (retailing), hospitality and catering, construction, computing and engineering. A degree course in podiatry is franchised from the University of Plymouth. Consultation with the University of Plymouth and the Plymouth College of Art and Design has ensured that duplication of provision at higher levels is largely avoided.

10 There is one full-time programme for students with severe learning difficulties and a range of part-time courses for adults with learning difficulties. A pre-vocational access course provides a route into employment or progression onto foundation level courses in an exceptionally wide range of vocational areas. However, there are few opportunities for students with severe learning difficulties to progress to other courses. A small programme of adult basic education complements other local provision.

11 The college has an open access centre which offers a variety of training in information technology. The centre is open six days a week, including four evenings, and is used extensively by local employers. Since September 1995, 2,600 students have enrolled on courses run through the centre. Access has been extended to 10 other centres which the college uses in Devon and Cornwall, using video link technology. In a partnership which includes the University of Plymouth, the college has been awarded £2 million of European funding to open a further 40 centres. The system also provides home-based learning for 75 people who are unable to attend either the college or an outreach centre. The college has been involved in the development of computer software to design realistic simulations of work places for training purposes. Thirty multi-media short courses were developed last year.

12 The college offers flexibility in terms of time and place of study in a number of other ways. Some programmes have several starting points during the year. The accreditation of prior learning, supplemented by training in the workplace, allows substantial numbers of students who would not be able to attend normal college courses to gain NVQs and other relevant qualifications. Examples of these include resettlement programmes and a programme for school kitchen managers which leads to NVQ level 2 in food preparation and cookery. Some programmes are



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taught on employers' premises. Provision is made for girls under 16 whose secondary education has been interrupted by the birth of a child.

13 Many employers use the college for training. Employers are regularly involved in advising the college through departmental committees and in attending programme team meetings. The college is an active member of Plymouth Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Plymouth City Council Training Strategy Group and the local Labour Market Network. The college's business officer has a regular programme of visits to employers. Employers who spoke to inspectors were positive about the relevance of the college's courses and the flexible patterns of study which it offers. The college has a close working relationship with Devon and Cornwall TEC. The TEC considers that the college is responsive to labour market trends and to initiatives promoted by TEC managers. Several major collaborative projects with other colleges in the region include a successful competitiveness bid to extend distance learning and a major upgrade of engineering equipment.

14 Two companies associated with the college extend the specialist provision it can offer. Plymouth Training for Commerce and Industry is owned jointly with Plymouth Chamber of Commerce and Industry. It delivers programmes which include TEC-funded training and runs an executive job club. Devonport Training for Quality specialises in engineering and construction training, including the modern apprenticeship scheme. It has also played a significant part in the development of the accreditation of prior learning for armed forces' personnel. Employers interviewed were positive about the speed of response and the quality of service received from these two companies.

15 Where possible, productive links have been developed with other education providers. For example, a compact with two local schools and the University of Plymouth has been formed to raise pupils' aspirations. The college has a key role in the involvement of local schools in national science week and is an active member of the Tamar Valley Consortium which involves 18 local schools.

16 There are extensive links with Europe. The college runs a European information centre in Plymouth. The European officer has been particularly successful in bidding for European funds. Many departments provide opportunities for students to study and visit abroad. For example, catering staff have close links with European hotel schools and students from NVQ level 3 undertake European work experience as part of their course. The college has provided well-planned short courses for students from other countries.

17 The college's marketing plan has clear aims and objectives. The director of marketing leads an effective marketing team. There are strong links with departments. A wide range of advertising and marketing methods are used to target different groups in the community. These include a regular column in a local paper. The value of different marketing

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methods is analysed regularly. Extensive market research including perceptions of employers who do not use the college and reasons for student withdrawal have been undertaken. Information is fed back to departments to improve the quality of the provision. However, the college's marketing is less effective for students with physical or sensory disabilities, few of whom enquire about courses at the colleges. Marketing literature fails to mention the additional support that such students can receive at the college. The college co-operates in joint marketing ventures with other organisations where appropriate. For example, the 'learning for life' promotion of adult learning and work with the Construction Industry Training Board.

## **GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT**

18 There are currently 11 members of the corporation board which consists of the principal, a staff member and nine business members. There is no student member. There are eight subcommittees: finance, personnel, estates, quality, marketing, audit, remuneration and search. The director of estates and legal affairs is clerk to the governors. Board members bring valuable expertise in areas such as law, estates and marketing. The majority of members were on the board prior to incorporation. The chairman and one other member are due to retire this year. Although governors were recruited for their business expertise, they also bring valuable knowledge of the community. Governors have a strong commitment to the college and attend both corporation meetings and college events regularly.

19 There is a constructive working relationship between corporation board members and the principalship. Members of the principalship attend and, where appropriate, participate in all meetings of the corporation. Governors are clear about their roles and responsibilities and, although they sometimes debate operational issues, they are mindful of the need to concentrate on their strategic role. They have conducted an assessment of their own performance and have an established register of their interests.

20 The college is effectively and efficiently managed. The six members of the principalship meet weekly. In addition, the vice-principal and directors meet individually with the principal. There is a clear vision of the college's future and this is translated into an effective framework of targets and controls for all to follow. There is full delegation of budgets to departments. Within this framework, the seven departments and the open access centre are encouraged to operate autonomously and to make their own decisions in relation to the organisation of responsibilities, expenditure, course provision and student support. The structure is particularly effective in terms of financial management, encouraging entrepreneurial activity and responsiveness. It is less effective in some cross-departmental work, for example, in the consistent delivery of the

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tutorial system and in ensuring the collection of data on students' destinations. Programme team leaders are being offered the opportunity to manage delegated budgets. However, the roles of programme team leaders are not consistent or clearly defined and some of them are resistant to taking on such additional responsibilities.

21 The academic board consists of the principalship, heads of department, and elected representatives of teaching departments and of support staff. There is an even balance between elected and ex-officio members. Each department has a board of studies which reports to the academic board. The agendas and discussions of the academic board are not widely known within the college. The principal is in correspondence with the Department for Education and Employment to change the status of the academic board from being an advisory body to being an executive body.

22 The college's strategic plan resulted from an exercise led by the principal at the academic board. The plan incorporates both decisions made by the corporation board and information from departmental plans. Staff in departments are consulted over departmental plans, but do not always recognise the links between departmental plans and the strategic plan. All plans are updated and agreed at an annual residential conference of governors and the principalship. This event is attended for part of the time by heads of department. The attainment of the objectives in the strategic plan are regularly reviewed by the principalship and by the governors.

23 There are several ways in which information is channelled to and from the principalship and heads of departments. Each head of department, in turn, attends principalship meetings for three weeks and there is a regular cycle of meetings of heads of departments with their principalship line managers. Communication to and from the principalship is not always effective. The principalship is perceived by some staff in departments as remote and inaccessible. Some staff were unsure how they could contribute to and influence decision making in the college.

24 Responsibilities for implementing college policies on health and safety, the environment and student support are clearly allocated. In many cases, the implementation of policies is well advanced. The health and safety policy is well documented and there are clear supporting procedures, including regular reviews. The principal oversees the implementation of equal opportunities policies. Each year, a selected member of staff works directly to the principal on initiatives for areas such as racism awareness, harassment, including the establishment of mediators, and the removal of barriers which entry qualifications may cause. There is no policy on access to the college for students with physical disabilities.

25 The college's average level of funding for 1995-96 is £18.35 per unit. This compares with £18.95 for 1994-95. The median for general further education and tertiary colleges is £17.84. The college's income and

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expenditure for the 12 months to July 1995 are shown in figures 5 and 6 respectively.

26 An efficient management information system provides reliable statistical reports for managers and governors on a regular basis. Management information is not readily accessible to programme team leaders and is not fully comprehensive. For example, it cannot provide detailed information to support the monitoring of those courses which have flexible start and finish dates, a growing area of the college's provision.

27 Enrolment targets are set and monitored. Heads of department set targets for enrolment after discussion with programme team leaders and with the director of marketing. These are negotiated with the director of finance and approved by the principal. Overall college targets for enrolment have been achieved. The retention of students on courses is systematically collected and monitored by departments and the principalship. Reasons for students' leaving are analysed and action is taken.

28 The college collects information on the destinations of full-time students by using questionnaires. For 1995, under half the questionnaires issued to students were returned. Many programme team leaders were able to provide inspectors with much more detailed information on the destinations of students through personal contact with them. The information provided centrally on students destinations is incomplete and cannot accurately inform central planning.

#### **STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT**

29 Policies are in place for all aspects of recruitment, guidance and support. These provide a framework within which central services and college departments are required to operate. A central student services team is responsible for admissions, careers guidance, learning support, schools liaison, counselling, welfare, accommodation, health advice and the day nursery. Student services staff have clear roles and responsibilities. Detailed records are kept. Most support services continue to be based at Kings Road and, despite efforts to share staff time between sites, students are not fully aware of the services available at the Goschen Centre.

30 The college has developed an effective central admissions process. This system was piloted in 1994-95 and introduced for all departments this year. All applications for full-time courses are screened by guidance staff. Where additional guidance is needed, interviews are arranged quickly. Screened applications are sent to departments for interviews to be arranged. All applications are recorded on the college's management information system and managers receive weekly reports on the progress of recruitment. Guidance staff have spent time familiarising themselves with the range of programmes offered by the college in order to ensure that they are able to give informed and impartial guidance to applicants.

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Admissions procedures for part-time students are more variable and the process is carried out directly by departments.

31 On most programmes, students receive a thorough and effective induction. The balance between general college induction and induction to course programmes has generally been well managed. On a minority of programmes students commented on the amount of time wasted during induction. In these cases, there is a need to review the length and content of induction.

32 The college policy states that all students enrolled on courses of over 15 hours a week are entitled to one individual tutorial a term to review their progress. This time is in addition to any group tutorial work. Departments have responsibility for implementing this policy. All courses have detailed guides which include information about tutorial support. Students are generally well supported by their tutors and commented favourably on the level of support provided. However, implementation of the college policy is variable. A small number of students are not receiving regular individual tutorials.

33 Awareness of departmental tutorial practice in central support services is mixed. For example, careers guidance staff have strong contacts with some departments but little knowledge of tutorial practice in others. This is reflected in the take-up of services. Tutorial support for part-time students is not systematic. Some departments have a practice of named tutors who are available to provide support for part-time students. Part-time students comment favourably on help provided for assignments and projects but regular tutorial times are not normally arranged. Records of achievement are generally updated at the end of programmes of study but receive little attention at earlier stages. Students' attendance is carefully recorded and monitored and, where necessary, appropriate action taken.

34 Careers guidance is provided by college careers advisers and Devon and Cornwall Careers Service Ltd, with whom there is a service level agreement. Between August 1995 and February 1996 there were a total of 859 guidance interviews, 428 of which were part of the central admissions process. Two hundred and twenty-two guidance interviews were with individuals over 25 years old. Higher education advice is provided by careers staff through individual interviews, group sessions and organised events. This is appreciated by both students and parents. However, more general careers education is not consistently provided.

35 Communications between the college and parents of younger students are generally good. On most programmes, parents receive termly written reports of students' progress and are invited to parents' evenings. On one programme, a coffee morning is organised. A system of regular written reports operates with employers. Employers interviewed by inspectors indicated that, in most cases, they were regularly informed of their employees' progress.

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36 It is college policy that students on full-time programmes up to intermediate level, and other students without mathematics or English at GCSE grade C or above, should be screened to identify their support needs. Responsibility for screening and support lies with departments, and a learning support co-ordinator within central services is available to provide advice and expertise. This year, the screening process has been uneven and the overall number of students currently identified as needing learning support is low. Support is provided in a number of ways, for example, by individual tuition, by small group work or by additional taught hours for a whole group of students. However, the service is limited by the lack of a central resource base for this work on either of the main sites. There is appropriate support for students with learning difficulties. Their needs are carefully assessed and any action is recorded. Good support is provided for students with dyslexia.

37 The college's counsellors provide an effective service to staff and students. Counsellors keep records of the numbers of appointments and of the categories of issues considered, without compromising confidentiality. Between August 1995 and February 1996, 271 students and 13 staff received counselling support. In addition to this, counsellors undertook work with small groups. A separate welfare service gives advice on finance and accommodation and disburses the college's access, hardship and bursary budgets. The college also runs a health care service.

38 Students are advised of their rights at induction. The college charter is explained and they are issued with a handbook/diary which gives details of all college services. It is college practice for students to be involved in a regular review of their programmes through course representatives. The students' association has indirect contact with the principalship through the head of student services. Officers of the students' association regret the lack of opportunities for more direct communication.

#### **TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING**

39 In 64 per cent of teaching sessions, strengths clearly outweighed weaknesses and in 9 per cent of sessions, weaknesses clearly outweighed strengths. The most consistent high-quality teaching was in the areas of hospitality and catering and electrical and electronic engineering. There were good relations between staff and students in most lessons. The following table summarises the inspection grades awarded to the sessions inspected.

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**Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study**

<b>Programmes</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>Totals</b>
GCE AS/A level		8	28	11	2	0	49
GCSE		2	8	8	3	0	21
GNVQ		6	22	23	6	1	58
NVQ		7	29	10	5	0	51
Other*		18	51	25	8	0	102
<b>Total</b>		<b>41</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>281</b>

*\*includes BTEC higher certificates, national certificates and diplomas and craft and professional awards*

40 Detailed schemes of work have been prepared for science, and most lessons observed had been prepared thoroughly. Many teachers used an appropriate variety of teaching methods, including demonstrations of practical work, video and oral questioning. Teachers had detailed knowledge of their subjects. Written work is set regularly and marked thoroughly. The work in some lessons was conducted at too slow a pace and was insufficiently challenging for students.

41 In construction, a project involving the building of five bungalows, provided students with valuable practical experience. Students were particularly well motivated in practical work, but some theory sessions were too long to maintain the interest of students on craft courses. Course files were of a high standard on technician level courses, but the written work of some students on craft courses lacked structure and was sometimes poorly organised.

42 Engineering courses were carefully planned to include a variety of theoretical and practical activities. Examples of good practice were observed across all areas of engineering. For example, in electronics, good use was made of computer simulations. In motor vehicle work, effective use was made of students' previous experience. Students approached practical work with confidence. For example, in a practical session on alarm systems, students worked at their own pace using manufacturers' manuals, calling on support from the class teacher as and when problems arose. In a few cases, work did not challenge students or cater for their different rates of progress.

43 The advanced GNVQ course in business was taught using workbooks prepared by the teaching team. Advice was given and work in progress is checked through a system of regular tutorials. In some cases, tutorials observed were ineffective because of poor planning by teachers and because students had not completed sufficient work. Information technology for business is taught in a large open-plan computer area. Students work at their own pace using materials produced by staff in the centre. Students are well motivated and they receive sensitive and effective

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support from centre supervisors. Teaching on management programmes is generally of a high standard, with the best practice observed on supervisory management programmes. In some cases, management teaching made insufficient use of students' previous experiences.

44 Work in hospitality and catering was well planned. Relations between staff and students were excellent. Practical work provides outstanding opportunities for students to develop skills in food preparation, food service and reception and customer service in a variety of realistic situations which involve them working at speed to meet delivery times. For example, in the bakery, students start at 07.30 two mornings a week, producing bread products and patisserie for the restaurant, the coffee shop, the kitchens, the bakery retail outlet and for specific customers' orders. Guidance given to students by teachers and supervisors in the practical restaurant situation was helpful and unobtrusive.

45 Public service courses prepare students for work in the uniformed services. Students were well motivated and the standard of teaching was high. Work was set regularly, marking was fair and the feedback to students was detailed. Many aspects of the GNVQ leisure and tourism programme were not well planned. For example, some assignments were given out before the necessary class work had been completed and in some cases, assignments were inappropriate for course requirements. Some lessons included unnecessary copying of notes.

46 In health and social care, course content was linked closely to the experience of students on work placements. In most cases, teaching was well organised and allowed students to contribute effectively to discussion. Varied teaching methods were used. In some lessons, teachers did not challenge students' ideas or check that students had understood the material presented. Hairdressing students were trained to cope with the pace and pressure of work in commercial salons. For example, students observed during the inspection were sometimes working on as many as three external clients. In theory and demonstration sessions, teachers used a variety of methods including videos, role-play and discussions. Visits by external speakers, company training sessions and a variety of internal and external competition work are built into the course programme.

47 In media and performing arts, sessions led by the teacher incorporated careful questioning of students to extend their knowledge and check their understanding of the work covered. Assignments were well structured and students understood how they were to be assessed. In some sessions, teachers did not have high enough expectations of the work students could do. On the GNVQ in media and communication, students were behind in completing the work necessary to achieve their qualification.

48 In humanities, subject guides written by staff ensured that students were well informed about syllabuses and teaching approaches. Good



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relations between staff and students encouraged participation by students in lessons. Most lessons incorporated a variety of approaches to learning, including group work, discussion of topics by the whole class, project work and the use of worksheets or handouts. In some lessons, teachers used video, but students were not always adequately prepared for the exercise. In a few lessons, teachers did not involve all students in discussion and gave insufficient guidance to students on when to take notes. In language classes, an appropriate balance was achieved in developing the skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing in the foreign language. Foreign language assistants were used effectively to split classes into groups where the skills of students were wide. In some lessons, teachers gave few opportunities for students to draw their own conclusions from the work covered. Coursework in languages was thoroughly marked to the standards laid down by the awarding bodies.

49 The college has a small provision of adult basic education courses which was effectively taught. For students with moderate learning difficulties and/or disabilities teaching includes the development of students' practical skills for employment, for living more independently or as preparation for further studies. Much of this teaching was undertaken in the relevant college department and was, in most cases, of an appropriate standard. The quality of teaching on separate specialist programmes for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities was more variable. In the majority of cases, students were taught as a whole group. This did not allow students to work at their own pace. In several lessons, the lack of differentiation in the work undertaken by students meant that the most able students finished the task set quickly and then wasted time while the least able did not finish in the lesson time. In some cases, the tasks set did not match the aims of the lessons. For example, in one lesson on washing clothes, students were cutting out pictures of washing machines. For the least able students, the emphasis on literacy, numeracy and information technology is inappropriate.

#### **STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS**

50 Students on vocational courses and adult students are particularly well motivated. Most full-time courses provide opportunities for students to work in groups. Public services courses include team work, group work and the successful development of leadership skills through a wide range of sporting and outdoor activities. In catering, teams of students of different abilities are required to work together in the kitchens and restaurant. Groups worked well together and students were supportive of each other. High priority is given to health and safety in practical workshop and laboratory classes, for example, in catering, bakery, science and engineering.

51 In written work, students generally demonstrated appropriate levels of knowledge and understanding. There were some particularly good examples of high-quality written work produced by students on the GCE A

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level film course and in some areas of business. Course files are generally well organised and provide an appropriate base for students' individual reference and revision. Most assignment and project work is presented neatly. In the areas of media and communication, and business and administration, students make good use of information technology to improve presentation. In some areas, for example in some humanities subjects, little use is made of information technology in the presentation of coursework.

52 Employers interviewed by inspectors were generally complimentary about the knowledge and skills gained by employees attending college part time. In the open access information technology area, part-time students used computers with confidence and made rapid progress towards achieving their desired level of skill.

53 Students on foundation level courses demonstrated appropriate levels of skills, for example in food service and horticulture. In horticulture, the redevelopment of formerly derelict or disused land by students has resulted in areas which are attractively landscaped with grass, plants and rockeries. The achievements of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities on separate specialist courses are more variable. No individual targets are set and students do not always achieve the objectives set out for them in lesson plans.

54 In 1995 there were 581 entries for GCE A level examinations in 28 subjects. The overall pass rate was 68 per cent, which is slightly below the provisional national average for general further education and tertiary colleges in 1995 of 69 per cent. The 158 students aged 16 to 18 entered for GCE AS/A level examinations in 1995 scored, on average, 3.5 points per entry (where grade A=10 points, E=2). This places the college in the middle third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure, based on the data in the 1995 performance tables published by the Department for Education and Employment. Pass rates of over 80 per cent were achieved in a number of subjects, including English language and literature (86 per cent), film studies (85 per cent), history (81 per cent), and across a range of modern foreign languages (89 per cent). In a few subjects areas, for example in theatre studies and in psychology, overall pass rates were below 50 per cent. There were 57 entries for 12 GCE AS subjects. The overall pass rate was 47 per cent, which is lower than the provisional national average pass rate for further education sector colleges of 55 per cent. Good results were achieved in modern foreign languages. There were poor results in psychology (11 per cent) and in applied statistics (8 per cent).

55 There were 915 entries in 35 GCSE subjects in 1995. The overall pass rate for students aged 16 to 18 was 45 per cent and for students aged over 19 years of age it was 65 per cent. These percentages are both above the provisional national averages for general further education and tertiary colleges in 1995 of 37 per cent and 60 per cent, respectively. The two

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most popular subjects were English, with 161 entries and mathematics with 165 entries. These subjects achieved overall pass rates of 67 per cent and 33 per cent respectively.

56 Results of students completing one and two-year full-time vocational programmes were generally good. Eighty-five per cent of the 16 to 18 year old students on their final year of study on the vocational courses included in the Department for Education and Employment's 1995 performance tables were successful. This places the college in the top third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure. Good results were achieved on the BTEC national diploma in public services course where there was a 100 per cent pass rate and in the BTEC national diploma in hotel, catering and institutional operations course where the pass rate was 85 per cent. Most of the students entering for intermediate GNVQ qualifications in 1995 were aged 16 to 18. Pass rates were variable, for example, in business 64 per cent, in health and social care 67 per cent, in hospitality and catering 86 per cent and in construction and the built environment 43 per cent. At advanced level GNVQ students completed qualifications in 1995 in seven different subject areas. The best results were achieved by students in construction and the built environment and in health and social care. In science and in manufacturing, pass rates were below 50 per cent.

57 Students who complete their courses for other vocational qualifications achieve high levels of success. In 1994-95, students achieved pass rates of over 90 per cent on a number of part-time vocational courses, including membership examinations of the Chartered Institute of Building, NVQs in plumbing, catering crafts and software production, the City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) information technology modular programme and the C&G auto computer-aided design course. Five hundred and four students achieved national examining board supervisory management qualifications, a pass rate of 90 per cent. Since April 1995, 133 students have registered to complete NVQs through some accreditation of prior achievement in the areas of cleaning, catering and supervisory management. Of these, 53 had gained their full award at the time of the inspection. Overall pass rates for students who complete higher national certificate courses in information technology and in manufacturing are above 90 per cent. There were a few courses with poor rates of completion, for example NVQs in care and childcare.

58 Retention of full-time students on courses is variable, but is improving overall. Over the period 1994-96, student retention on full-time courses improved from 80 per cent to 89 per cent. Departments report their best and worst performing courses on a regular basis to management. Overall levels of retention on full-time courses in 1995-96 ranged from 83 per cent in computing and electrical engineering to 91 per cent in the management and business centre. No student has yet withdrawn from the following courses: the construction foundation course, the Business and Technology

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Education Council (BTEC) first diploma in public services course and the BTEC national diploma in nursery nursing course. There have been withdrawal rates of above 25 per cent on some courses, including some of the NVQ programmes in construction crafts, GCE A level courses in philosophy and theatre studies, and the advanced GNVQ business express course aimed at adult students.

59 In 1995, 270 students finished their full-time courses and progressed to higher education. Fifty-four per cent of these students chose to continue studying in Plymouth. Eighty-five per cent enrolled for degree programmes, and the remainder for higher national diploma courses. In the vocational areas of hairdressing, beauty therapy, public services and health and social care, many students were successful in obtaining relevant employment on completion of their courses. Many students from hospitality and catering courses were successful in obtaining employment in Europe as a result of the strong European focus of their courses.

### **QUALITY ASSURANCE**

60 The college's commitment to quality improvement is clearly expressed in its mission and its key statement on the achievement of students. The quality assurance system has developed over a number of years. Significant progress has been made in the last two years in consolidating established procedures, introducing new features and drawing together a system for monitoring and review. The vice-principal for curriculum and quality has overall responsibility for the co-ordination of quality assurance procedures. Developments are well led and a central support team provides guidance to programme teams. The system is coherent and is supported by comprehensive documentation. It is generally well understood by staff. However, there is a need for more training for middle managers and programme team leaders to ensure that implementation across the college is consistent.

61 Governors contribute by advising on issues related to the provision of quality, receiving evaluative reports from the academic board and undertaking an annual review of the college's charter. A key statement fund of £20,000 has been established by the corporation to support projects put forward by programme teams which will have a direct impact on raising students' achievements. The academic board is the main college committee with responsibility for quality assurance. It is supported in its work by a quality subcommittee responsible for monitoring and evaluation. Opportunities to widen the work of this committee to include important related matters such as internal verification have not yet been taken up.

62 Programme teams are the key management group in the quality process. They work under the direction of departmental boards of study. Each programme team has a quality file containing information about the course programme, records of meetings and statistical data. Programme evaluation and action plans are produced for all programmes of over

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120 hours per year. These are monitored by boards of study. The quality of action plans is variable.

63 Targets are set for attendance, retention and attainment by programme teams, departments and the principalship. Achievement of targets is monitored and evaluated and poor performance is investigated. Remedial actions may be recommended and funding made available from the key statement fund, if appropriate. Work has started on analysis of students' achievements at GCE A level as compared with their GCSE achievements on entry, as a means of measuring the value added to their achievements by college courses. At this stage it is too early in the process to report on trends.

64 The college uses students' views on courses as a key component of the quality assurance system. Comprehensive student surveys are conducted and reports are prepared under a contract with the Further Education Development Agency. Similar surveys of employers have also been undertaken. Service standards related to charter commitments are being developed and implemented in other areas of the college, including student services and the library. The college has a well-produced charter which meets the main requirements of the government's charter for further education. Some standards are quantitative and there is specific monitoring of the delivery of charter commitments.

65 There is a clear policy and plan for staff development. In an attempt to match priorities more closely to departmental and strategic plans, the staff-development budget has been divided equally to support central, departmental and programme team priorities. The overall success of this approach is being monitored. To date, some programme teams have been slow to respond to this opportunity. Staff-development activities are co-ordinated by the director of human resources. There is strong support from the college's staff development manager. Systems are in place for the dissemination to other staff of skills and knowledge gained from staff-development events, but closer tracking is needed if the system is to be implemented effectively. Staff training is increasingly carried out within the college. The needs of business support staff are reflected in the overall balance of activities offered.

66 The college is working towards the achievement of Investors in People accreditation. Investors in People status has already been achieved by the college company, Plymouth Training for Commerce and Industry. An appraisal scheme is in place and the majority of teaching and support staff have undergone appraisal by their line manager. The system has moved from a two-year to a one-year model and staff comment positively on the new arrangements and the effectiveness of the three monthly follow-up. Classroom observation does not feature as a compulsory component of appraisal, although regular voluntary peer observation takes place. Induction arrangements for new staff, including part-time staff are well established.

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67 As part of the preparatory process for inspection the college carried out a comprehensive self-assessment. The resulting document follows the headings of Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. The structure and level of detail within the document is appropriate. For example, sources of evidence, action points, a system of cross-referencing and an executive summary are included. In many cases, action points contained in the report concurred with the judgements made by inspectors. In a few cases the analysis did not mention identified weaknesses. The process of self-assessment is being updated on an annual basis and will be carried forward by the committee responsible for quality monitoring and evaluation.

## **RESOURCES**

### **Staffing**

68 Full-time teachers are generally appropriately qualified and experienced for the work they undertake. Approximately 70 per cent have a degree, higher diploma or equivalent professional qualification. Twenty-five per cent of staff have higher degrees. Currently, 72 per cent of all full-time teaching staff possess a teaching qualification, but the percentage varies between departments. For example, in the management and business centre, less than half the full-time teachers hold a teaching qualification. From September 1996, new entrants to teaching will be able to undertake professional teacher training. In some cases, this opportunity will be extended to existing staff. Forty-six per cent of full-time teachers have achieved relevant assessor awards. Part-time teachers undertake approximately 14 per cent of the teaching. Their qualifications are comparable with those of full-time staff and many bring knowledge of commercial practice from their current employment.

69 Teachers are appropriately deployed. Eight full-time staff are being supported to undertake study for higher academic qualifications that will enable them to teach on developing programmes. Departments encourage staff to update their awareness of commercial practice through visits. However, with the exception of catering, where staff have been involved in work experience in Europe, few teachers have been involved in longer secondments or in work shadowing. Greater use is being made of teachers who specialise in practical skills, for example, in the open access centre, in the personal study areas at the Goschen Centre and in the management of the bakery, the restaurant and the reception areas. There are currently nine full-time and 12 part-time practical skills teachers in post.

70 Technician staff are well qualified and experienced and provide good support in most subject areas. They are effectively deployed in departments where they work with considerable flexibility. In some cases there are problems with the level of support available, for example, in biology, in plumbing and in media studies. Staff heading cross-college functions and administrative and clerical staff are appropriately qualified and experienced. They provide effective support across the college.

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71 There is a well-established personnel function. All key policies are in place. Procedures for the recruitment and selection of staff are clear and the personnel office provides advice and guidance on reviewing job requirements and job descriptions. There is an effective computer based personnel record system for both full-time and part-time staff that includes staff development records.

### **Equipment/learning resources**

72 Curriculum areas are generally well provided with specialist equipment and learning materials. There is a particularly good range of specialist equipment of industrial standard in hospitality and catering, in hairdressing and beauty therapy, and in health and social care. There is up-to-date equipment in many areas of engineering, for example, in computer-aided design and manufacturing. In a few instances, for example in science and in media studies and in some areas of construction, there are some shortages of equipment. Classrooms are well equipped with overhead projectors and video playback machines.

73 There is strong central organisation and management of information technology which has resulted in good access for most students. There are over 500 workstations for students' use. The two main sites are linked by a communication network to which most of the computer workstations are connected. This provides access to an appropriate range of modern software. In addition, the open access centre is equipped with over 100 computers. There are interactive video links to 10 outstations with a total of 90 computers. The staff of the centre have developed self-study packs of high quality for computer users. A successful pilot programme of compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) based language programmes has recently been completed.

74 The library and learning resources service provides a range of cross-college facilities including the library, in-house printing and reprographics, and open access computing. On the main sites, the service occupies central locations which have well-maintained, large, pleasant spaces for study. Study spaces in libraries are supplemented by resource bases in departments and an innovative layout of personal study areas at the Goschen Centre. The college librarian is supported by five professionally qualified librarians and seven resource assistants. They provide a friendly and efficient service. A designated member of the library staff is linked to each curriculum department. This enables the library to provide a high level of curriculum support. The library includes CD-ROM and video facilities. There are also 86 computers in the two libraries for students to use. There has been a major investment in the provision of learning resources at centres on both main sites, at the small specialist library and at North Road West. Reprographic services include desktop publishing. The service is efficient and well regarded by staff and students.

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## **Accommodation**

75 The Kings Road site was purpose built during the 1970s. The college acquired the Goschen Centre, a former training centre for dockyard apprentices, during the early 1990s. This building has undergone a major refurbishment programme. The new facilities include centrally positioned information technology suites surrounded by a series of well-appointed classrooms, a compact suite of science laboratories with preparation rooms, and an attractive dance studio with associated changing rooms of professional standard. Further development of parts of the ground floor to complete the accommodation for performing arts is planned for the summer of 1996.

76 Throughout the college there is a high proportion of good, purpose-designed, specialist accommodation. The specialist teaching areas for hospitality and catering, health and social care, business studies, media, arts and most of the humanities and science subjects are of a high standard. In most curriculum areas teaching rooms are logically grouped together and many individual courses or subjects have their own baseroom. In a few cases, accommodation is unsuitable. For example, the temporary mathematics workshop and the construction information technology suite are too small for the sizes of groups using them.

77 General purpose classrooms are well appointed. Teaching areas are predominantly light, spacious, well laid out and appropriately furnished. Many classrooms are freshly decorated with imaginative colour schemes; comparatively few are in immediate need of redecoration, though some could benefit from wall displays. The premises are very clean, tidy and well maintained.

78 There are large, light, centrally-positioned refectories at ground level at the Goschen Centre and Kings Road, supplemented at the latter by a coffee shop and restaurant associated with the catering courses. There is a book and stationery shop, a bank and a floristry shop in the main Kings Road entrance area. Reception areas are bright and welcoming; circulation routes are clean and uncluttered. Some are smartly presented and have bright modern prints on the walls, though some corridors at Kings Road are stark. Most teaching and supporting staff have bright, well-furnished, comfortable offices.

79 A good proportion of the buildings are accessible to wheelchair users. However, some parts of both the Goschen and Kings Road Centres remain inaccessible. For example, there is no access for wheelchair users to the Devonport Annexe. This prevents students with restricted mobility participating in many business and secretarial programmes. The college has no plans to address this problem, though some efforts are made to improve access by timetable adjustments.

80 The college runs a free daytime bus service half-hourly between the Goschen Centre and Kings Road, on routes which also provide convenient transport into the city centre. There is ample parking for staff and students



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at both these sites. Attractive, thoughtfully landscaped amenity areas, including the college's nature reserve, enhance the environment at Kings Road and the Devonport Annexe. Students at the Goschen Centre already make good use of the provision of outside tables and seating. A further project for landscaping at the Goschen Centre involves horticultural amenity students.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES**

81 The strengths of the college are:

- the wide range of courses and services available to meet the needs of school leavers, adults and employers
- the high level of flexibility in the patterns of study and attendance allowed to students
- extensive links with employers and external groups supported by effective marketing and market research
- effective governance and management of the college
- impartial guidance-led admissions systems for full-time students
- exceptionally high-quality provision in hospitality and catering
- the overall design of the quality assurance system
- generally well-qualified staff
- the development of the Goschen Centre into teaching accommodation of high quality
- the high levels of equipment and learning resources available to support students
- the effective use of information technology to increase access to courses, to support teaching and to improve the skills of students
- the progress made in improving the retention of students on courses.

82 The quality of the provision would be improved still further if the following issues were addressed:

- communication between the principalship and staff in order to overcome the perception of remoteness
- some weaker teaching and learning, for example in leisure and tourism, and on separate specialist programmes for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- the variations in the provision of support services for students
- the need to consolidate the implementation of the quality assurance systems across the college.
- the need to update the industrial experience and professional qualifications of some staff
- the limited marketing of courses to, and physical access for, students with restricted mobility.

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## FIGURES

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- 1 Percentage enrolments by age (as at November 1995)

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  - 2 Percentage enrolments by level of study (as at November 1995)

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  - 3 Enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at November 1995)

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  - 4 Staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1995-96)

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  - 5 Income (for 12 months to July 1995)

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  - 6 Expenditure (for 12 months to July 1995)

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

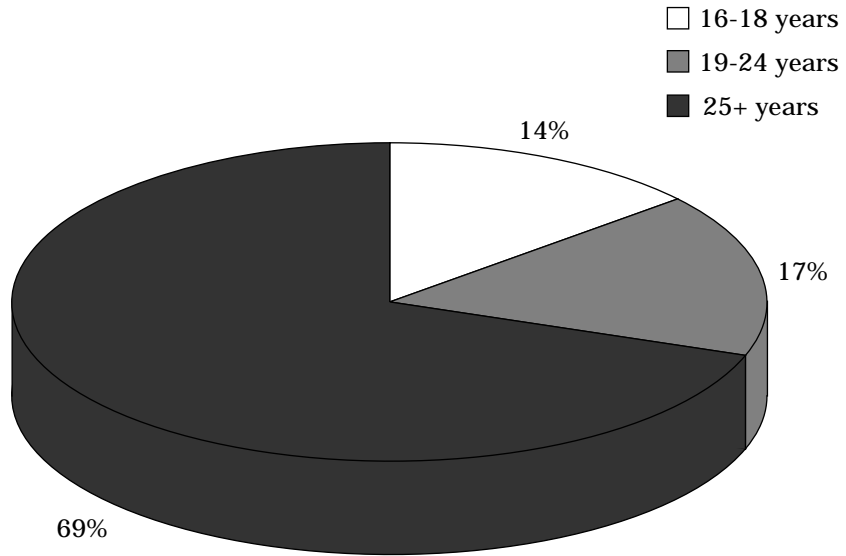
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**Figure 1**

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**Plymouth College of Further Education: percentage enrolments by age (as at November 1995)**



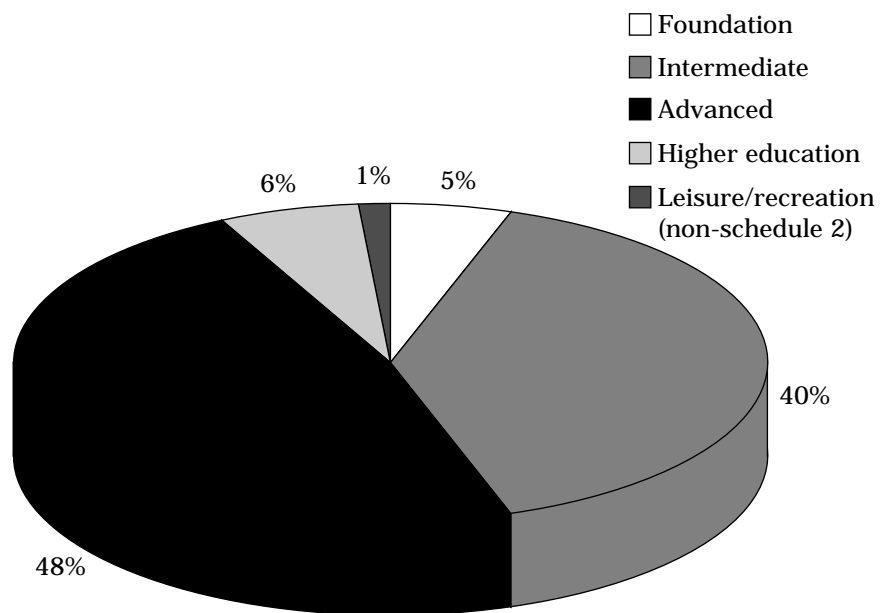
Enrolments: 19,537

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**Figure 2**

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**Plymouth College of Further Education: percentage enrolments by level of study (as at November 1995)**



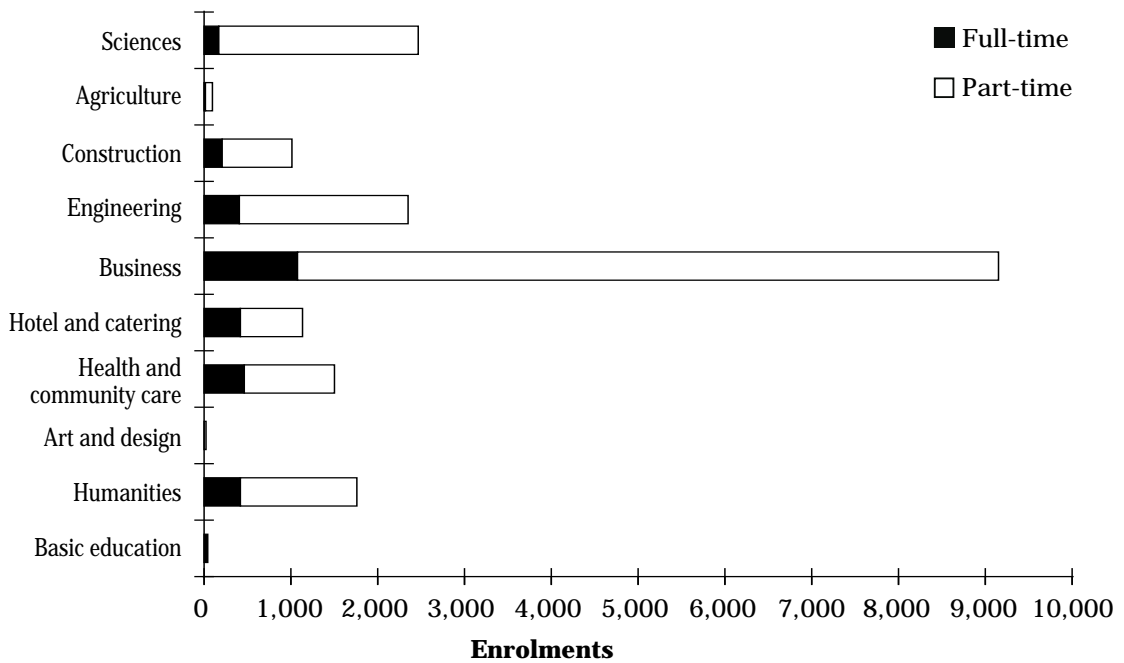
Enrolments: 19,537

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**Figure 3**

**Plymouth College of Further Education: enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at November 1995)**

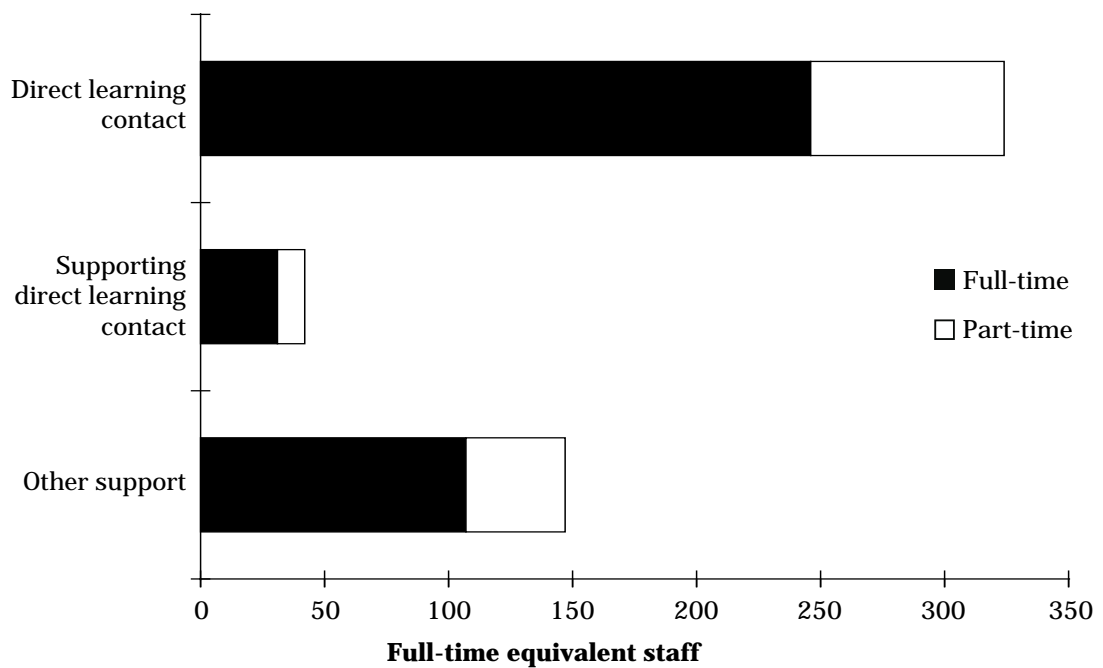


Enrolments: 19,537

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**Figure 4**

**Plymouth College of Further Education: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1995-96)**



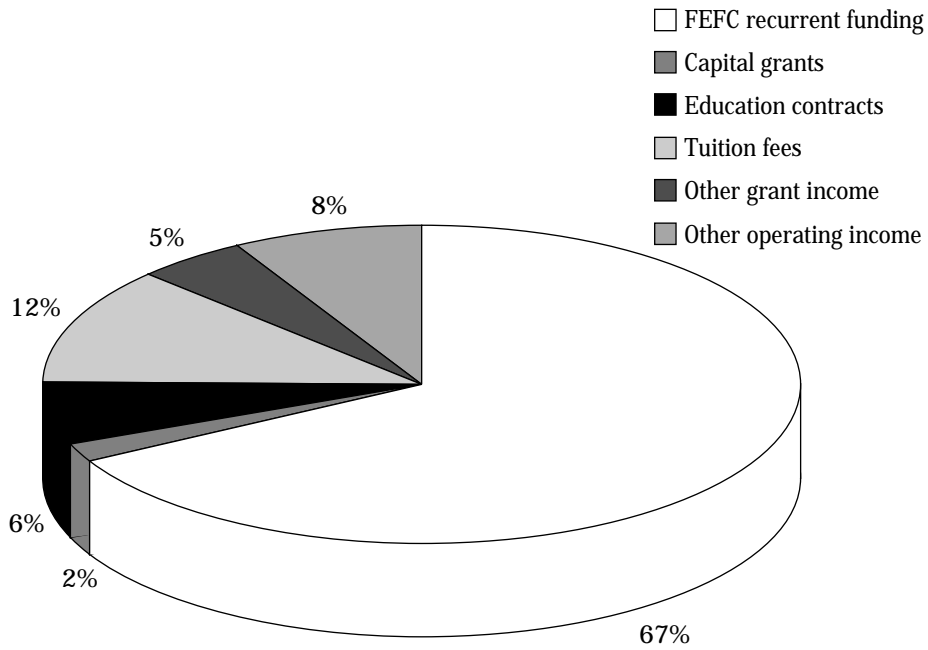
Full-time equivalent staff: 513

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**Figure 5**

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**Plymouth College of Further Education: income (for 12 months to July 1995)**

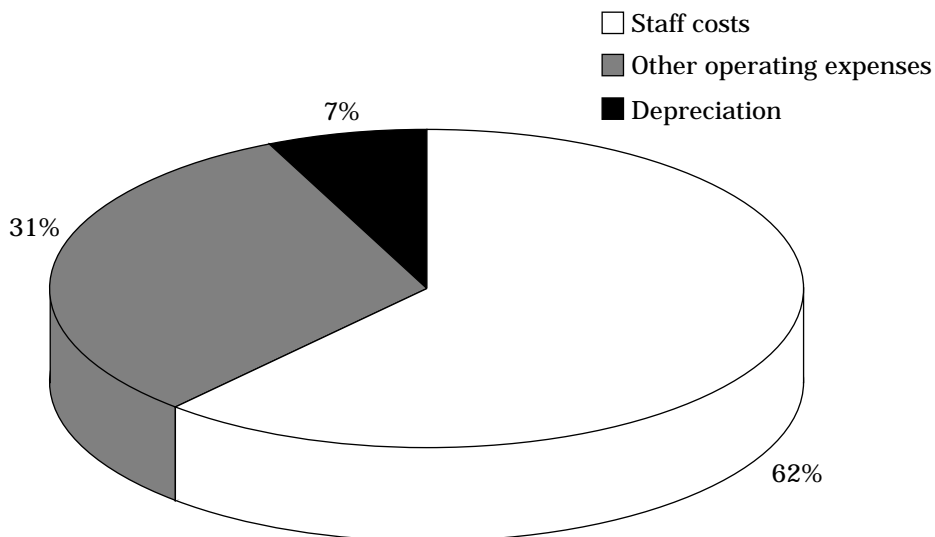


Income: £16,268,000

**Figure 6**

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**Plymouth College of Further Education: expenditure (for 12 months to July 1995)**



Expenditure: £17,245,000

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