

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

**Newbury
College**

March 1996

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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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 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

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

FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 25/96

NEWBURY COLLEGE SOUTH EAST REGION

Inspected May-December 1995

Summary

Newbury College is the major provider of further and adult education in western Berkshire. The considerable ability of corporation members, the open style of management and good financial planning are helping the college to develop from a previously low base of achievement. Newbury College has markedly improved its public image and has achieved significant growth over the last two years. The commercial divisions have created a lively entrepreneurial culture and, together with some service areas, they are leading the way in quality improvement. Students are well supported by the student services unit and other learning support systems. The quality of teaching for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is especially good. Students and staff benefit from a well-organised learning resources service. There are a significant number of matters still requiring attention. Teaching was undistinguished in over 40 per cent of the classes inspected, and tutorials are of uneven quality. More clarification of the relationships and responsibilities in the new management structure is necessary. Managers and corporation members need to communicate more clearly to the staff the developing mission and ambition of the college in order to achieve more unity of purpose and to improve risk assessment. The management information system is inadequate in providing reliable student achievement, destination and personnel data. Quality assurance is weak and does not include work observation or contribute to sharing the good practice which exists in a number of programme areas.

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

Aspects of cross-college provision		Grade
Responsiveness and range of provision		3
Governance and management		3
Students' recruitment, guidance and support		2
Quality assurance		4
Resources:	staffing	2
	equipment/learning resources	3
	accommodation	3

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Science	3	Health and community care	2
Computing	3	Art and design, including media studies	2
Engineering	3	Humanities	3
Business	3	Learning support, including SLDD	1
Catering, leisure and tourism, including sport and outdoor education	3		

INTRODUCTION

1 The inspection of Newbury College, Berkshire, took place in three stages. The college's guidance, enrolment and induction procedures were inspected for two days during September 1995. During the weeks beginning 15 May and 9 October 1995, three full-time and seven registered part-time inspectors spent 35 days on specialist subject inspections. They visited 137 classes involving approximately 1,500 students and examined a broad sample of students' work. In the week beginning 4 December 1995, three full-time inspectors and four registered part-time inspectors spent a total of 27 days assessing aspects of cross-college provision. During the inspection there were meetings with members of the corporation, the senior management team, programme area managers, cross-college managers, teachers and support staff. Discussions took place with students, parents and representatives of local community organisations, industry and commerce and of Thames Valley Enterprise, the local training and enterprise council (TEC). Inspectors also attended a governors' meeting, a business breakfast meeting, and examined college policy statements, minutes of committees, working papers and documents relating to college organisation.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 Newbury College was founded in 1948 as the South West Berkshire Evening Institute. It has grown considerably over the years and is now the principal provider of further and adult education for the western half of the Royal County of Berkshire. From its base on a single campus in Newbury, it offers a wide range of courses for the community at day and evening centres across west Berkshire. The local economy is strong, although the area is rural in character. Newbury is the base for the national and international headquarters of several major telecommunications, chemical and computing companies. Unemployment in the town is low at 3.9 per cent.

3 In the immediate locality of the college, there are four 11-16 schools, three 11-18 schools and a specialist 11-18 school for the deaf. The population in the area is about 137,000, of whom 108,000 are over the age of 16. The college has more than 14,000 enrolments each year. Participation in courses as a percentage of the population aged 16 or over is 13 per cent, compared with a national average of 6.9 per cent. In order to continue to expand and extend the range of its provision and student participation, the college has developed a franchise with an 11-16 school for post-16 students, started new access courses and encouraged greater adult student participation, particularly in full-time courses. In 1994-95, there were 1,058 full-time and 13,729 part-time enrolments. Of all students, 74 per cent were over 25 years of age. Enrolments by age, by level of study and by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figures 1, 2 and 3, respectively. The work of the college is carried out by 137 full-time equivalent teaching staff. A staff profile, with staff expressed

as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4. There are seven teaching programme areas, supported by cross-college managers with responsibilities for learning support, finance, administration, student services and corporate development.

4 The mission of the college is to be a centre of excellence for post-16 education and training. Central to the achievement of this aim is the development of a new purpose-built campus on a greenfield site in Newbury, for which outline planning permission has been granted.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

5 Senior management and programme area management have a detailed knowledge of the national targets for education and training but staff are aware of them only in general terms. Over the past two years, the college has achieved student growth of 10 per cent and 20 per cent. It offers a broad range of vocational and general education courses on a full-time and part-time basis. They include 19 subjects at General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level) and 14 at General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) level. Programmes of study for General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) at intermediate and advanced levels are provided in six areas. Equivalent awards are available in a further four areas and National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) are provided in seven occupational areas. Full-time provision for GCE A level subjects is under threat from competitors and vocational catering courses find it difficult to recruit viable numbers. Some programme areas are still building their portfolios of courses, whilst some are at a more advanced stage of development. There is a limited range of open-learning opportunities.

6 The college is one of only three centres in the country offering training and qualifications for outdoor pursuits. An access to higher education course in humanities and science, and return-to-learn courses provide flexible study opportunities. The college offers nearly 600 adult courses, both vocational and recreational, dispersed over the whole of west Berkshire. In addition to the main college site, there are five outreach centres and approximately 30 other places where courses take place. Basic numeracy and literacy courses are available at all these centres. The college provides a wide range of courses to meet the needs of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. There is effective liaison through the west Berkshire further education and community care planning forum, with the local education authority and with social services, the TEC and special schools.

7 The college has two commercial divisions. Kennet Training Services delivers government training schemes for the local TEC and is the largest contractor for training for work in the Thames Valley region. It has offices in Reading and Wallingford, as well as in Newbury. The courses at Wallingford are run in association with the Heart of England TEC. In response to the needs of local employers, the college established a separate

training division, Kennet Management and Technology Centre. This is one of only 10 premier autocad centres in the country. The two divisions are successful and have significantly increased their turnovers. Both have produced distance and open-learning materials to extend their activities nationally. Closer integration with the rest of the college is now needed to promote a greater awareness of business.

8 The West Berkshire Consortium, which brings together all the post-16 education providers in the area, has survived institutional competition and issues a common application form for year 11 pupils to make first and second choices of their preferred institutions. The college has opportunities for direct contact with pupils in most of the schools. A 16-plus partnership with John O'Gaunt School is effective in securing collaborative provision of academic courses. Strong links exist with the universities for the purpose of validating the access to higher education course. Other links are informal and exist only at programme area level.

9 Links with the TEC are strong as far as the two commercial divisions are concerned, but less so with the rest of the college. Representation on various committees and working groups ensures regular contact, but projects which require the involvement of teachers are less successful. Partnership arrangements with other organisations have worked well in a number of areas. Examples include the Royal County of Berkshire Assessment Centre for Care, the Jockeys' Education and Training Scheme, originally at Lambourn and now also at Newmarket and York, and the Newbury Motor Project which is run in association with the police. Responses to the needs of local industry have been made by some programme areas, for example, by providing full-cost language tuition. These initiatives are not widespread and more could be achieved.

10 The deputy principal (corporate development) leads the college's marketing effort, assisted by the student services manager and the publicity and promotions officer. They inherited a poor image of the college in the local community and have succeeded in improving it. Good publicity materials and promotional activities, good timing and close links with the media have helped considerably. The college roadshow reaches rural areas, and other sites, such as supermarket car parks, have been visited to good effect. During the inspection, roadshow staff were giving advice and guidance in the local employment offices. Attempts to raise the awareness of teachers and spread the work through the marketing forum have been hampered by irregular attendance by some representatives from programme areas. Although careful analysis of demographic and other data has been used to target some sections of the population, more systematic market research is required. Four advisory committees have been established recently to cover community needs, parents and schools, adults, and employers. These are formal consultative channels for the local community and it is intended that they should influence the content of the college's strategic plan.

11 The college has a long-established commitment to ensuring equality of educational opportunities. The original focus was on students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Staff across the college show their awareness of equal opportunities issues as they carry out the procedures for pre-entry guidance, interview and induction for both staff and students, but the college now needs to concentrate on monitoring its practices more carefully.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

12 The corporation board has 18 members. Ten are independent, two are co-opted, one is from the local community, one from the TEC, and two are staff members. The principal and a student are also members. Four of the independent members and two others have retired from full-time work. Governors have a broad range of senior managerial experience in industry, commerce, the public sector and local government, but there is a lack of experience in law. The board meets four times a year. It has five committees; finance and general purposes, audit, remuneration, strategy and equal opportunities. Four advisory committees chaired by governors have been established recently and they report through the strategy committee. The committee structure is effective. There is no search committee to identify new members and to oversee the composition of the board.

13 Clerking of the board and its committees is inconsistent. The clerk to the corporation serves the main board and the audit committee, and also provides secretarial support for a deputy principal who clerks the finance and general purposes committee. One other committee is clerked by a second deputy principal and the principal clerks the remuneration committee. The clerk to the corporation is at third-tier management level, and is responsible to a deputy principal for financial matters and to another for management information.

14 Corporation board members are committed to the college and have a clear understanding of their role. Attendance at meetings is reasonable at 73 per cent. Governors focus on strategic matters and do not, in general, deal with detail or operational issues. Their deliberations are helped by good documentation. Training for governors is provided in a structured way. Relations between members and senior managers are warm and supportive. Senior managers are on performance-related pay, but whilst the corporation board considers their performance indirectly through a review of college targets, it does not set individual goals or appraise their work systematically.

15 The inspection took place at a time when the college was facing financial difficulties. It had a relatively high average level of funding of £23.50 per unit in 1993-94, which has been adjusted to £21.33 per unit in 1995-96. The median for general further education and tertiary colleges in 1995-96 is £17.84 per unit. To deal with this reduction in the average level of funding and the national drive towards greater efficiency, the

college is reducing staffing costs through a programme of voluntary redundancies and is diversifying its activities into new income-generating areas. These measures, which were launched by senior managers in the autumn of 1994, have yet to be brought together in a coherent plan. Corporation members and senior managers are aware of the seriousness of the college's position and have devoted considerable time to financial matters, but other issues of importance have received less attention. In particular, there is an urgent need to give further consideration to the developing mission of the college so that all staff can more readily commit themselves to its new direction. The college's estimated income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1996 are shown in figures 5 and 6.

16 The process for producing the college's strategic plan is effective. The framework and targets are established by the corporation. Staff have the opportunity to contribute to the plan through meetings with managers. Managers at all levels contribute by drawing up curriculum area plans. The resultant college plan is considered by the academic board and then by the corporation. An associated business plan and operating statement set out objectives for individuals. These are subject to review by managers and, ultimately, by the corporation board.

17 The college has recently moved into less traditional areas of activity, partly in order to resolve its financial difficulties. A lively entrepreneurial sense among senior managers has been successful in building up this work to a turnover of £817,000 this year and in producing a surplus to support other work. Many teachers are unenthusiastic about this work and have little confidence that it will provide a long-term solution to the college's difficulties. Staff morale has been dented by a dispute over employment contracts which the college is seeking to resolve.

18 The senior management team consists of the principal and three deputies. They are joined by programme area managers and by managers of cross-college services to form the college management team which has a membership of 17. Each team meets weekly. Minuting of meetings is satisfactory. These arrangements, which required some changes in responsibilities, started this year. A clear definition of responsibilities and terms of reference has yet to be agreed, although responsibility for the management of major college policies is clear. The revised arrangements reflect the principal's commitment to an open and consultative system which, in the longer run he believes, will produce better results than the smaller, more tightly-controlled structure he inherited. Middle managers value this new approach and welcome the opportunity to contribute.

19 Financial data, including unit costs, are readily available. The good quality of data has helped the college to understand its financial position and to deal with it appropriately. Accurate data are provided regularly for budget holders and the budget is subject to regular scrutiny. The college has done much to develop its computer-based management information system and has contributed to the development of commercial software

which calculates earnings from the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) funding tariff. Basic student data for applications, enrolments and general course matters are recorded, but examination results, retention rates and students' destinations are not available on the system. There are plans to add them this year. The data produced are used in reviewing courses against targets. There is a separate personnel system which cannot yet provide the college with the necessary reports.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

20 The college has a central student services unit which is housed in pleasant accommodation close to the college reception area. It is staffed by a manager, two information officers, a general and a higher education guidance officer, two careers advisers, a full-time personal counsellor and two adult guidance officers. The admissions office is welcoming and there are adequate information and guidance materials. The office is open late for one evening a week. Services include educational and careers guidance, counselling, welfare, and learning support. Practical care is provided by the accommodation service, the student-support fund and the drop-in health workshop. Childcare is available through the unit. There is specialist adult guidance and an adult support group has been formed to help students adjust to college life. The personal counsellor provides both an individual service and one for groups on such topics as raising self-esteem and improving social behaviour.

21 The admissions procedure ensures that most applicants to full-time courses receive impartial guidance. They are well informed by the prospectus and course documentation. There are explicit guidelines for admission interviews and standard documentation on which to record outcomes. Parents are invited to accompany students at initial interviews for full-time courses and many take up the offer. Students and parents value the recruitment procedures. The college organises regular events to report on students' progress and arranges a special briefing evening for those contemplating higher education. Other contacts with parents through the programme areas are more variable and the college should seek to ensure greater consistency. The college offers a range of guidance for school leavers and adults, including presentations at local schools, college open days, Saturday schools and a mobile information and guidance unit. The college responds quickly to enquiries. All local secondary schools and the college use a common application form for 16-18 year old applicants.

22 Enrolment is well organised and continues to emphasise advice and guidance for prospective students. Induction is valued by all students, but it is better for full-time students than for part time. Expert guidance is provided for students wishing to change their course after enrolling. About 20 per cent of students receive learning support and student services staff work closely with personal tutors to provide a coherent service. Support

needs are identified through pre-entry guidance and counselling, screening during induction and adult literacy and basic skills unit tests for all full-time entrants. Methods to evaluate the effectiveness of learning support have been improved recently.

23 The college has a tutorial entitlement policy for full-time students. Tutorials and action planning are co-ordinated by student services. Every full-time student has a personal tutor and a timetabled weekly tutorial. Tutorials include the opportunity to update national records of achievement, although only 37 per cent of students do so. The quality of tutorials is uneven. There are no means to enable student services staff to communicate with the 50 tutors on a regular basis. The news sheet 'Tutor News' is a useful compendium of events, but its information is often out of date. Training is available to tutors but participation is voluntary and not all staff take part. Part-time students do not have tutorials but they are supported by subject teachers.

24 There are college careers service advisers and, in addition, some advisers who are employed by an external organisation to work at the college for three days each week. A higher education guidance programme, which includes activities ranging from the promotion of awareness to a post-examination results service, is well established and operates smoothly. Guidance for employment is less good and it suffers from a lack of co-ordination. Careers advisers depend on tutors to ensure that students register with them, but the interest in employment issues among tutors is very uneven.

25 A new system for monitoring student attendance has been in use since 1994. It was augmented in 1995 by a student contract which set out the responsibilities of both students and the college. All full-time students have signed the contract. The monitoring system can lead to action by the deputy principal (operations) in cases of persistent absenteeism. Common documentation for reporting absences and student withdrawals is used across the college. All students who leave the college are interviewed by careers staff. Destination data are collected by student services through a telephone survey during the autumn term. Lists of destinations have been compiled but have not been analysed in a systematic way.

26 There is a college student association. It has an office and liaises closely with the student services unit. It has organised a number of successful events, but still has difficulty in involving most students. Only a small number of societies and clubs are active. The college has a 16-place nursery on the campus, managed by a specialist agency. In any one week, it cares for up to 25 children. Some students receive financial support from the college to enable them to use the nursery.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

27 Of the 137 sessions inspected, 55 per cent had strengths which outweighed weaknesses. Less than 5 per cent of classes had weaknesses

which outweighed the strengths. The following table summarises the grades given to each of the teaching sessions inspected.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE AS/A level		2	7	15	1	0	25
GCSE		1	2	5	1	0	9
GNVQ		6	16	11	2	0	35
NVQ		7	5	7	0	0	19
Access to higher education		2	2	1	0	0	5
Basic education		7	1	1	0	0	9
Other vocational		3	11	9	2	0	25
Non-schedule 2		2	0	3	0	0	5
Other		1	1	3	0	0	5
Total		31	45	55	6	0	137

28 The average attendance in the classes inspected was good at 88 per cent and the highest was 91 per cent, in health and care. Courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities had the poorest attendance, at 72 per cent. Engineering, and art and design had the lowest attendance among vocational courses at 81 and 82 per cent, respectively. In engineering there was some poor punctuality, which passed without comment by teachers, some of whom were late for classes themselves.

29 Most courses have well-developed schemes of work, but the quality of planning for individual classes varies considerably. In art and design it is good, but in computing, some individual lessons are not planned in detail with little reference being made to learning objectives. Teachers have good working relationships with students and high expectations of them. In science and mathematics, some teachers produce well-conceived schemes of work with closely-integrated theory and practical work, including field studies. The combination of individual work and whole-class teaching was very effective in a modular GCSE course. Sessions had a sense of purpose, the work had continuity and learning proceeded at a steady pace. Able students were given greater scope for individual work and each student was encouraged by the teacher. There is much teaching which is sound but uninspired with little variation in style and inadequate use of visual aids. There is a widespread assumption among staff that practical work in itself provides adequate stimulus and variety. There is little use of computers to support teaching. Written tasks set by teachers are normally of an appropriate standard and are fairly marked, although not entirely consistently. On occasion, marking fails to correct errors of spelling and grammar. Some assignments are rather narrow and unambitious.

30 Computing courses are well structured and theory is often well taught. In a GCE A level class, students were introduced to ideas about information technology and business. Brainstorming was used to list items on the whiteboard, to prompt students to answer questions about basic business principles, and to test their knowledge. The class was lively and new concepts were introduced naturally. Most students contributed throughout. Practical teaching is sometimes poorly managed and sessions are ill-disciplined, with inadequate control from teachers. For example, during a second-year Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) national diploma session, three students listened to music while working and, although some students were working hard, half the class was talking loudly and moving around.

31 Engineering classes benefit from good organisation and planning which provides a basis for some sound teaching and learning. There are detailed course programmes, schemes of work and lesson plans. Individual and group working is encouraged. Recording of common skills in BTEC programmes is given a high priority. Clear aims and objectives are set by teachers and shared with students, but there is often too little variation of teaching method, particularly in craft workshop classes. During several of these, teachers presented the task and then left students to their own devices. Too much reliance is placed on prescriptive NVQ workbooks that demand very little of students.

32 In catering, leisure and tourism classes there is some good teaching. Lesson plans are clear and include a variety of teaching methods. One lively intermediate group, in the early stages of their programme, gave short presentations. They used their own material to explain the effects of tourism on the environment. The class was carefully managed, built on previous teaching and was enjoyable. More formal teaching methods worked satisfactorily, but often achieved less. Practical teaching in catering was often not sufficiently challenging. Core-skills teaching was well integrated with specialist topics.

33 In outdoor pursuits and sport and recreation, the quality of teaching is particularly good. Teachers have up-to-date knowledge and an obvious commitment to achieving the highest professional standards. Sport and recreation course documentation is comprehensive. The structure of the sport and recreation NVQ full-time programme is an effective mix of workshops, evidence collection, core skills, GNVQ units and work for professional awards. Documentation for the outdoor pursuits programme is confusing and of little practical use. In one session, outdoor pursuits students accompanied students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to enable them to undertake adventurous activities. This gave an outstandingly successful opportunity for both groups to benefit from new experiences.

34 The standard of teaching in art and design is competent and on a significant number of occasions is of a very high standard. Practical and theoretical sessions are capably delivered by teachers who are expert in

their fields to students who want to learn. The atmosphere in all classes is friendly and productive. Course schemes and class plans were available at every lesson and some are of outstandingly good quality. There is general use among teachers of undirected question and answer techniques, but no use of directed questioning which would involve the quiet or less capable students. During a lesson on broadcasting, a small group of mature students were allowed to answer every question. On occasions, this developed into debate between them to the exclusion of the other students and the teacher. In performing arts and media studies the teaching benefits from an emphasis on live projects such as local theatre performances, production of an annual tabloid newspaper, touring a theatre company to Poland, and organising and financing the visit of a Polish contemporary dance company. A lecture on directing for film and television was given by an eminent television director. This gave the large audience of performing arts and media students a vivid insight into the making of well-known programmes. The lecture was recorded on video and was followed by several practical workshops where student actors were directed in short scenes by the guest lecturer.

35 Humanities classes are uneven in quality. There are some good examples of skilful teaching, but also some poor practice. In the better classes, there is thorough planning, clarity of structure and alertness to students' needs which results in adjustments to plans where necessary. In an access to higher education programme for adults, students were asked to frame a personal response to a passage of text. The teacher worked with energy and passion, illustrating points from a variety of texts without losing sight of the topic and the need to provide students with clear guidance. The bulk of teaching is not necessarily ineffective, but it lacks inspiration. Poor planning sometimes leads to confusion. One modern languages session brought together students of an unusually wide range of experience and ability. Difficulties arose through the attempt to tackle speaking and spelling at the same time and the class lost momentum and direction.

36 In health and caring most teaching is good. There is careful planning and a clear structure to sessions, and learning is often carried through at a brisk pace. In one session, first-year National Nursery Examinations Board (NNEB) students were learning how to observe and assess children. They were asked to illustrate their findings. A drawing of a flower was made, with petals showing the various perspectives of the task. Skilled questioning challenged the students to think for themselves. The teacher ensured that the context was understood, and supplemented students' notes with a helpful handout.

37 Business studies classes provide instances of a range of teaching styles. Some facilitate students' learning, whilst others prevent students from making any contribution. In one class of full-time students, an inappropriate teaching style combined with lack of control, led to the session disintegrating. More usually, aims and objectives are set and

understood and relationships between staff and students are founded on mutual respect.

38 For students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, lessons are usually well prepared and conducted. Relationships between staff and students are excellent. There is a heavy emphasis on practical activity and a real attempt to integrate students with the wider college community. The majority of lessons sustain the interest of students and are pitched at a suitable level. Detailed records of students' achievements are kept and used to monitor progress. In one class, an adult student with impaired vision was being instructed in wordprocessing; a large type font was used and keyboarding was made easier by the use of coloured discs. An adult evening class in basic literacy was supported by four voluntary assistants so that students could work on a variety of tasks suited to their individual needs.

39 The college has a good work-experience programme. The West Berkshire Education Business Partnership is based at the college. It offers a student work-experience service for all schools and colleges in its area and provides about 600 placements a year for the college. Tutors monitor and assess students' experiences. In health and social care courses, work experience is particularly valuable and in outdoor pursuits it is extensive and well organised.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

40 Most students enjoy their courses and speak highly of them. Generally, they have a good understanding of their work and are able to talk about its implications and its applications. There are many articulate and well-informed discussions. Students work effectively in groups and most develop appropriate levels of technical knowledge and skills. Employed students are encouraged to relate their experience to their studies.

41 Students aged 16-18 taking GCE AS/A level examinations in 1994 scored on average, 2.7 points per entry (where A=10, E=2). This placed the college in the bottom third of colleges in the further education sector, according to the performance tables published by the Department for Education (now the Department for Education and Employment). The Department's tables for 1995 show an improved score of 3.7 which lifts the college into the middle third of the sector. In 1994, 87 per cent of students in the final year of study on the vocational courses included in the Department's tables were successful. In 1995, 81 per cent were successful. In both years, this placed the college in the middle third of colleges in the sector on this performance measure.

42 In 1995, there were poor examination results in most GCSE and GCE A level mathematics and science subjects. With the exception of the two-year biology course, all GCE A level results were below the national averages. Pass rates for chemistry, mathematics and the one-year course

in biology were particularly poor. The number of students entering examinations was often very small, in many cases the result of poor retention. Computing results for much of the GCE A level and GCSE work are poor and student retention is low. In humanities, GCE A level examination results were variable. In the last two years results have been above the national average in English, and this year they were above average in geography. They were below average for French and German. Results in psychology were particularly poor, with a 33 per cent pass rate in 1995. GCSE results are similarly variable. Compared with national averages in 1995, students in French, sociology and English performed poorly. Retention rates for both GCE A level and GCSE students are often poor, and are sometimes not known. Of the students on access to higher education programmes in 1995, 83 per cent progressed to higher education, which was an improvement over the previous year.

43 Vocational courses often have higher student retention and good examination pass rates. BTEC national diploma students in computing achieved pass rates of 100 and 89 per cent in 1994 and 1995, respectively. Pass and retention rates for the BTEC first diploma over the last two years have been above national averages. Students on the City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) modular programme in computing achieved a 93 per cent pass rate over the last two years. In BTEC engineering courses, part-time students did better than full-time students. In the national diploma in mechanical engineering, the pass rate has not exceeded 57 per cent for the past three years, but achievements on the part-time BTEC national certificate in mechanical engineering improved consistently over the last three years, with pass rates rising from 67 per cent to a creditable 83 per cent. In the BTEC higher national certificate in electronics, pass rates have not fallen below 82 per cent. There have been good retention rates of 95 per cent or more for both full-time and part-time courses in engineering.

44 Students of leisure and tourism previously achieved good pass rates on BTEC national diplomas. In 1995, the final year of these courses, pass rates as a proportion of those enrolled were 75 per cent in tourism and 79 per cent in leisure. The advanced GNVQ, which replaced the BTEC national diploma course, enrolled 41 students in 1994, of whom only 32 proceeded to the second year. Outcomes will therefore almost certainly fall below those achieved on the national diploma. There were also poor student retention and pass rates on the corresponding GNVQ at intermediate level with only 38 per cent of those originally enrolled passing. Results in NVQ catering for one-year full-time students have been generally good. For outdoor pursuits, students have achieved a variety of national sports-body awards in areas such as canoeing, mountaineering and power-boat racing. With a constant enrolment over the last three years, the number of successful assessments has increased from 73 in 1993-94 to 105 last year. Completion rates are high.

45 Students in art and design achieve results in public examinations which are generally above national averages. There are good examination results and at least satisfactory retention rates in all areas, with the exception of GCE A level media studies. Full-time advanced GNVQ business studies students achieve poorer results than those who previously followed the BTEC national diploma. The advanced GNVQ for the period 1993-95 retained only 58 per cent of its original students. Only 36 per cent of those who first enrolled achieved the full award. Student retention rates for NVQ business administration, levels 1-3, have been very poor over the last three years and, with the exception of students at level 1, the pass rate has become consistently lower. Results in most RSA Examinations Board (RSA) typewriting and wordprocessing examinations have been good.

46 In health and caring, results appear to be generally satisfactory but, as yet, all the current full-time courses have only completed the education of one cohort of students. Intermediate GNVQ health and caring students achieved a reasonable range of merits and distinctions.

47 For students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities considerable work is being done to develop basic skills in literacy, numeracy and information technology. Practical activities are carried out with a high regard to health, hygiene and safety. Many courses are accredited and students achieve high success rates in examinations.

48 There are a number of sporting and leisure activities, including a college football team. Students have access to the local recreation centre. Over the last two years, students have achieved success in the national 'strongest schoolgirl' award, and in judo, shooting and weightlifting. Others have competed at county level in table-tennis, swimming, lacrosse, tennis and netball.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

49 The college's quality assurance system is at an early stage of development. Between 1992 and 1994, the college had a quality manager who endeavoured to introduce a system which was imposed by management. The more gradual introduction of a new system is designed to win acceptance by all staff. It is being promoted by the academic board and its subcommittees. Quality standards have been prepared by all programme areas and by many cross-college service areas.

50 A new course review and evaluation system was introduced in 1995. The first summaries of course reviews are not consistent. In some areas, reviews take account of students' examination and retention rates but it is rare to find analysis to reveal trends. Some reviews contain action plans and many summarise the results of student questionnaires.

51 Students' examination results are discussed by the academic board. Those which fall below an agreed benchmark pass rate of 50 per cent are passed to programme areas for further analysis. In a few instances, the outcome is thorough and identifies appropriate courses of action, but in

several others it lacks any substance. Students' views about the quality of their courses are rarely sought, except through end-of-course questionnaires. Several programme areas do not include students as regular members of course review teams, nor are they represented on the academic board. No attempt has been made to compare practice across programme areas to improve course review. There are a limited number of student surveys for full-time students. These run every other year to seek students' views on induction and recruitment. There was an early-leavers survey in 1994. Feedback to students is slow when it takes place at all.

52 The college's charter was issued to all students in September 1995. In the previous year, a summary was issued and the full document was available in three central points. The current charter does not include measurable performance targets, although these were previously included. There is little evidence that students understand the charter. Some are unaware of the complaints procedure it highlights.

53 The college's self-assessment report has been developed through gathering evidence from both the service sectors and the programme areas. Information is not analysed in terms of strengths and weaknesses. There are sections set out under each of the headings of the Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. Several contain realistic assessments but there is a lack of self-criticism and the report is couched in cautious terms. While it was distributed to many staff and all corporation members, the report's style and lack of realism makes it unlikely that it will prove to be a useful tool to prompt improvements.

54 There is a well-developed staff-development policy. It is managed by a full-time teacher, who is also the staff-development officer. All requests for development have to be clearly linked to the college's strategic plan. Funding for staff development is approximately 0.4 per cent of the college's total budget for 1995-96. Although the staff-development programme is monitored, it is not systematically evaluated and opportunities to develop links with the quality system are often missed. The induction programmes for teaching and support staff are comprehensive and effective. They include the acquisition of teaching qualifications for new teachers and encouragement for support staff to gain a teaching qualification. There is a college appraisal policy for teachers. Because of the contractual dispute only 21 teachers have been appraised. The quality of appraisal documentation is poor. The college should consider whether introducing the observation of teaching might help to spread good practice and identify developmental needs. A system of staff appraisal for support staff is being developed.

55 Quality systems are in place for the two commercial operations of the college. Kennet Management and Technology Centre achieved International Standards Organisation (ISO) 9002 certification in August 1995 and Kennet Training Services is working towards it. The college

made a commitment to achieve the Investors in People award over two years ago, but it has made little progress. The proposed date for assessment is now in 1997. Some staff do not see the value of this commitment and there is little momentum towards its achievement.

RESOURCES

Staffing

56 The college has 137 full-time equivalent teachers, of whom 83 are on full-time contracts. Of the 85 full-time equivalent support staff, 67 are full time. Part-time staff make a valuable contribution to the work of the college. There are more women than men employed, and one of the four senior managers is female. Ten of the 18 middle managers are female. Staffing levels are determined as part of the strategic planning process. The deputy principal (operations) works closely with programme area managers to examine course income and costs, including the staffing that can be afforded. Expenditure is reviewed at the beginning of each term and the necessary adjustments to staffing levels are made.

57 The personnel office provides a professional service and works closely with the principal and governors. Policy statements and procedures have been developed in a number of areas, including recruitment and selection, disciplinary and grievance matters, maternity and sick pay, and equal opportunities. The college has a computerised personnel database, but its operation is neither flexible nor rapid.

58 Teachers are well qualified and appropriately experienced for the work they do. Some have recent industrial and commercial experience and 42 per cent of the permanent teaching staff have a first degree or equivalent qualification. The remainder have appropriate professional and vocational qualifications. Seventy-nine per cent have a teaching qualification, as do 15 per cent of the support staff. There have been opportunities for teaching staff to acquire Training and Development Lead Body awards, as assessors or verifiers. Some 57 have already acquired these and a further 26 are seeking to do so. The number who have the Training and Development Lead Body internal verifier and assessment of prior learning awards is low; 11 out of the 28 who registered have achieved the award. Support staff are appropriately skilled. The ratio of support staff to teaching staff is 1:1.6. Support staffing levels are generally adequate, but administrative assistants to the programme areas are under particular pressure.

Equipment/learning resources

59 General teaching and learning aids, such as whiteboards, overhead projectors and screens are to be found in almost all classrooms. Specialist equipment is generally satisfactory in quantity and quality. There are deficiencies in some curriculum areas, such as the design section of creative studies, in the motor vehicle section of engineering, and in some aspects of

computing. A policy for planned replacement of equipment has been adopted only recently.

60 The college has invested heavily in computers to increase the number available and to improve their standard. The ratio of computers to students now stands at 1:7. The computers that are available to students on an open-access basis are heavily used and, at peak times, students have to wait for a machine to become available. Notwithstanding the recent acquisition of 15 new machines, demand continues to outstrip supply. Of the 340 computers available, 88 are connected to the college network.

61 Some two years ago, in the absence of effective co-ordination of information technology equipment and consumables spending, the college decided to amalgamate audio-visual aids, reprographics, the library, and open-access computing facilities, under the direction of a learning resources manager. The learning resources service is now well organised, efficient and responsive. Its reprographics team is able to produce documents, teaching notes and overhead transparencies efficiently. It has a good reputation for a quick response and good-quality work. The level of demand means that some equipment, such as televisions and video, are in short supply at peak times. Thought has been given to deploying the service at strategic sites around the college to make access easier and keep the need to move equipment to a minimum.

62 The library is housed in the college's newest building. Although sited on the first floor, a lift ensures that it is accessible to all students. It provides an attractive and welcoming environment which is divided into group-working, quiet, and silent-study areas. It also has a video-viewing room and another equipped with networked open-access computers. The library is open on four evenings a week. A card index system is currently used. Funds have been made available to purchase a computerised library system; about one third of the 22,000 items of library stock are now entered on the new system. The conversion process has been used as an opportunity to update bookstock. Last year over 2,500 items were withdrawn and some 1,300 added. The result is a leaner but more modern book collection. The computerised system will offer a number of benefits, including a facility to monitor library use.

Accommodation

63 The college operates on a single site of 3.2 hectares, half a mile north of the town centre. It is bounded to the north and east by residential housing and to the south and west by busy roads. The majority of the permanent buildings were built between 1959 and 1964. The latest addition was completed in 1988. An Edwardian house has been converted to accommodate senior managers and the administrative offices. The permanent buildings are supplemented by 15 temporary classrooms. The college also uses widely-dispersed accommodation to deliver its adult studies programme.

64 A programme area manager has responsibility for buildings and estates. There is a procedure for allocating rooms which is run by two members of the administrative staff. Room utilisation is maximised and is flexible. Currently, frequency of room use is measured but not levels of occupancy. The system is labour intensive and would benefit from computerisation. There is a detailed accommodation strategy, which examines the possibilities for development of the existing site as well as options for the construction of a new college on a greenfield site. The college is now pursuing plans for the building of a new college and has recently gained outline planning permission for its proposals. In the meantime, a long-term maintenance strategy is designed to ensure that the fabric of the college is cared for. The campus is cleaned regularly and there are few signs of vandalism or graffiti.

65 Although the college has made efforts to facilitate access, for example by installing ramps and through the use of a stair crawler, students with restricted mobility find some of the buildings difficult to negotiate. Only one of the buildings has a lift.

66 Not all rooms in the college provide a stimulating learning environment. More could be done, for example, by mounting wall displays and changing them at regular intervals. Some curriculum areas have particular problems, such as the lack of rehearsal rooms for performing arts. The refectory also serves as a social area for students who no longer have a separate common room. The compact college estate offers no open-air sports facilities. There are good features in some curriculum and service areas. Notable examples are the business skills workshop, the health studio, the languages centre, the polytunnel provided for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and the student services facilities. Students are able to take advantage of off-site learning and sports facilities. Creative arts students have access to two local theatres. Outdoor education students use a number of campsites and outward-bound centres. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have taken advantage of the local Kennet and Avon Canal to pursue their activities.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

67 The particular strengths of the college are:

- the student services unit
- the learning support systems
- the quality of teaching for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- the entrepreneurial culture of the two college businesses
- the skills of corporation members
- the open style of management
- good financial awareness, planning, and reporting

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- the strategic planning process
 - quality benchmarking in service areas
 - the learning resources service.

68 Weaknesses which the college should address in order to improve its service are:

- standards of teaching and poor examination results in some areas
- inconsistencies in the clerking of the corporation board and other committees
- the lack of clarity in relationships and responsibilities in the new management structure
- the absence of well-developed risk assessment to contribute to planning
- the poor management information system in respect of student achievement and retention, destinations, and personnel matters
- the limited understanding of the business market among some staff
- the inability to identify through, for example, work observation, existing good practice and use it to develop continuous quality improvement
- the lack of support for quality assurance among some staff
- inconsistencies in tutorial practice.

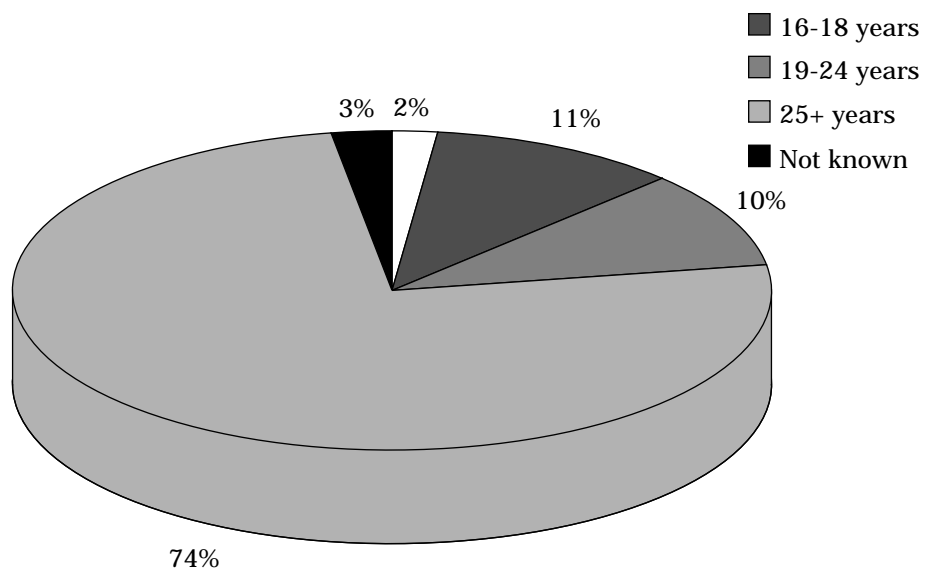
FIGURES

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| 1 | Percentage enrolments by age (1994-95) |
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| 4 | Staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1994-95) |
| 5 | Estimated income (for 12 months to July 1996) |
| 6 | Estimated expenditure (for 12 months to July 1996) |
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Note: the information contained in the figures was provided by the college to the inspection team.

Figure 1

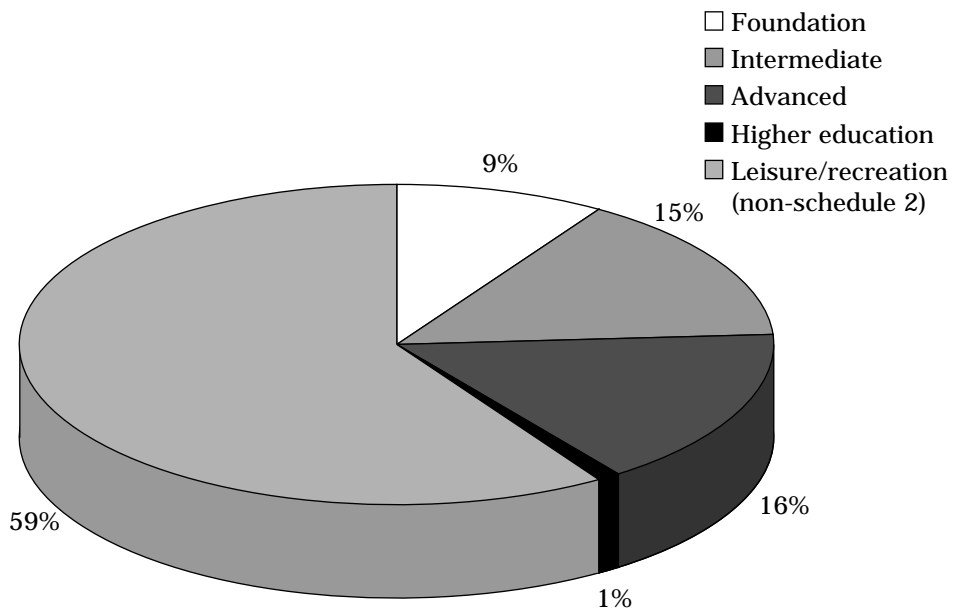
Newbury College: percentage enrolments by age (1994-95)



Enrolments: 14,787

Figure 2

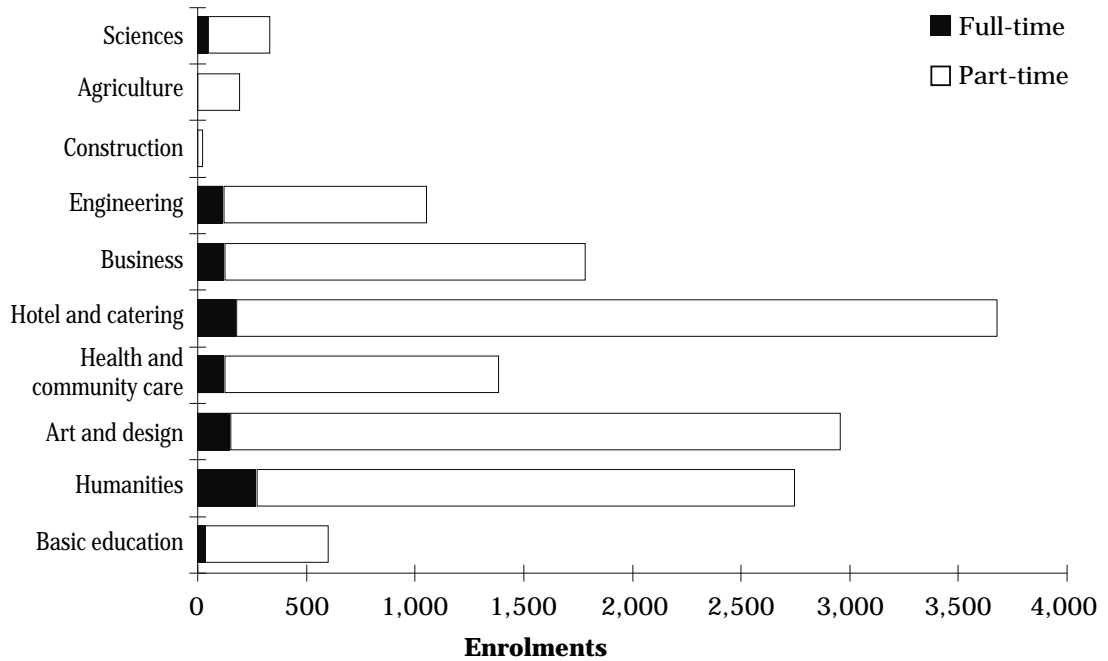
Newbury College: percentage enrolments by level of study (1994-95)



Enrolments: 14,787

Figure 3

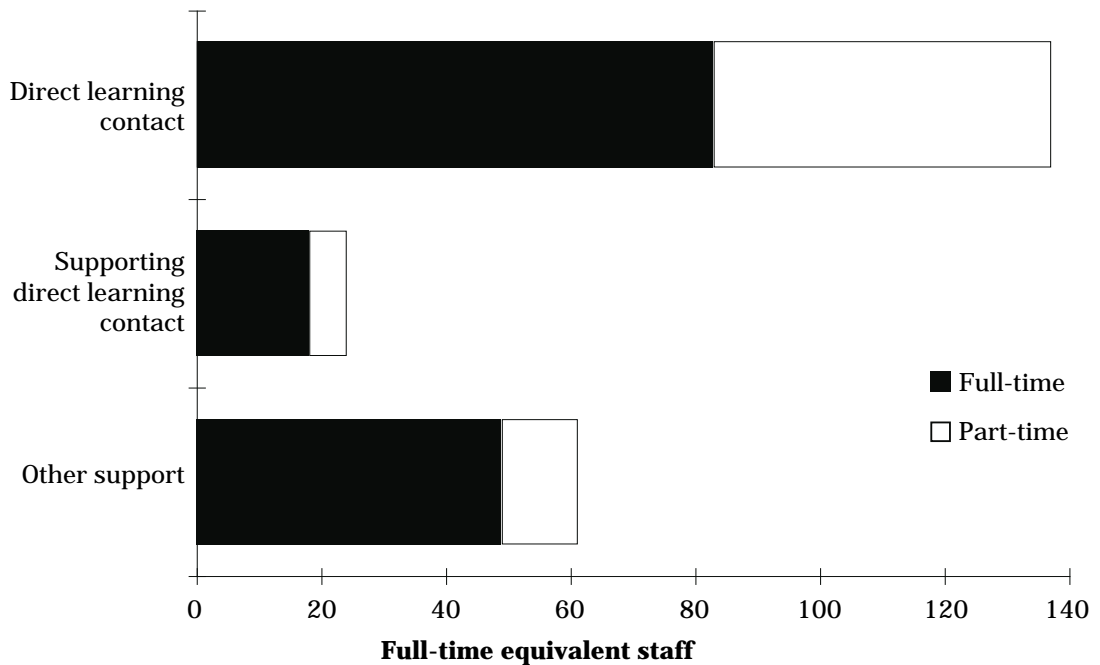
Newbury College: enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1994-95)



Enrolments: 14,787

Figure 4

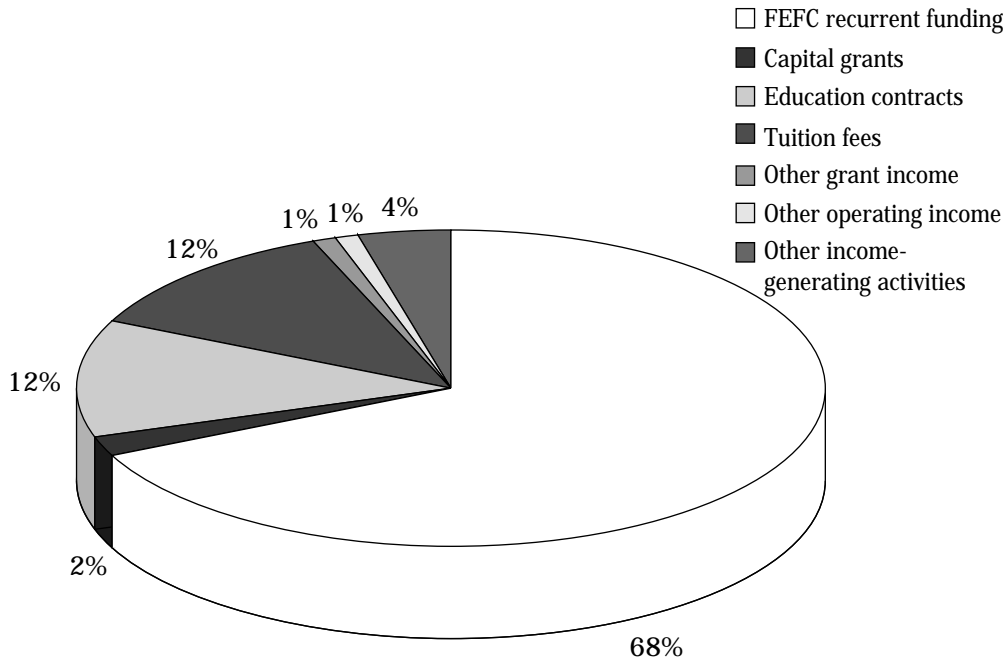
Newbury College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1994-95)



Full-time equivalent staff: 222

Figure 5

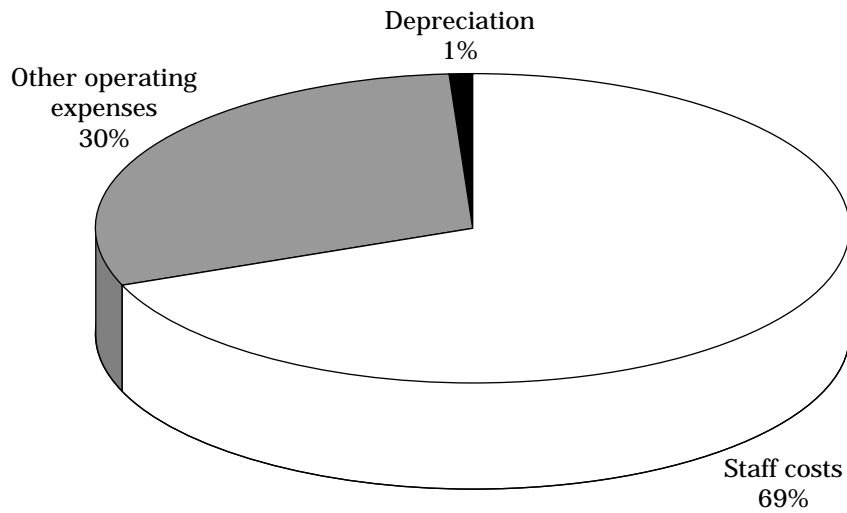
Newbury College: estimated income (for 12 months to July 1996)



Estimated income: £6,894,000

Figure 6

Newbury College: estimated expenditure (for 12 months to July 1996)



Estimated expenditure: £6,663,000

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