

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

Newcastle- under-Lyme College

**September
1995**

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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

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

GRADE DESCRIPTORS

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

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

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FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 107/95

NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME COLLEGE

WEST MIDLANDS REGION

Inspected November 1994-May 1995

Summary

Newcastle-under-Lyme College opened in 1986 and is the only tertiary college in Staffordshire. It provides a balanced range of vocational and general education and is particularly responsive to the needs of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Recently, it has experienced difficulty in reaching its full-time enrolment targets and the numbers in some classes are low. The college has good links with industry. The corporation gives clear strategic direction and provides effective monitoring of performance, aided by comprehensive and reliable management information. The management organisation is clear and managers provide effective leadership. Students benefit from effective recruitment procedures and are provided with good tutorial support, guidance and counselling. Lessons are carefully prepared and the teaching is well structured. Students are well motivated. Their examination achievements are generally satisfactory. Results at GCSE are good, but 16-18 year olds on vocational courses have success rates which are below average for the sector. The college has a staff-appraisal scheme and an effective programme of staff development. It has recently achieved the Investors in People award. Levels of equipment are satisfactory in most areas and buildings are clean and well maintained. The college should: introduce formal procedures for testing all students' basic numeracy and communication skills; improve the development of students' information technology skills; and improve library provision.

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

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Science	2	Art and design	1
Engineering	2	Humanities	2
Business	3	Basic education	2
Leisure and tourism		2	

CONTENTS

	Paragraph
Summary	
Introduction	1
The college and its aims	2
Responsiveness and range of provision	7
Governance and management	21
Students' recruitment, guidance and support	34
Teaching and the promotion of learning	46
Students' achievements	60
Quality assurance	71
Resources	79
Conclusions and issues	91
Figures	

INTRODUCTION

1 Newcastle-under-Lyme College was inspected during the period November 1994 to May 1995. Seventeen inspectors spent a total of 66 days in the college. They visited 147 classes, examined samples of students' work and held discussions with governors, students, college managers, teaching and support staff, local employers, parents and representatives of local schools, the community and the Staffordshire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC).

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 Newcastle-under-Lyme is one of three districts which make up the region of North Staffordshire. The other districts are Stoke-on-Trent and the Staffordshire Moorlands. The population of the three districts is nearly 500,000 inhabitants, three quarters of whom live in Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme. The municipality of Newcastle-under-Lyme has a population 118,000, and includes the market town which was founded some 800 years ago. The University of Keele and a campus of Staffordshire University are based in the North Staffordshire region.

3 North Staffordshire is home to a substantial amount of manufacturing industry. The country's major ceramic companies which include Wedgwood and Royal Doulton are located here, together with Michelin, Lucas-Rists, Creda, Redland Bricks, D2D, ICL, GEC and British Steel. The once thriving coal mining industry has all but disappeared and the region has recently acquired European Community funds for economic restructuring and regeneration. Unemployment in the Stoke and Newcastle area, at 6.8 per cent, is declining.

4 Newcastle-under-Lyme College opened in 1986. It is the only tertiary college in Staffordshire and is an associate college of Staffordshire University. The college is one of three post-16 institutions in the Stoke and Newcastle area. The other two colleges, Stoke-on-Trent College and Stoke-on-Trent VI Form College, are both about three miles away. Leek College of Further Education is some 15 miles away. The college was established to tackle the poor post-16 participation rate which existed in the town in the early 1980s. It was formed from the college of further education and the sixth forms of three local high schools. At that time, there were approximately 2,500 post-16 students in all four institutions. This year there are just over 4,000 students at the college. In the main, the full-time students are drawn from the six 11-16 high schools in Newcastle-under-Lyme. However, a considerable number come to the college from schools in Stoke-on-Trent and elsewhere. Enrolments by age and level of study are shown in figures 1 and 2, respectively. Enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figure 3.

5 The college expects there to be a shortfall of full-time students against the target number for 1994-95 but, at the time of the inspection, it was still aiming to meet its target of funding units through expansion of part-time provision.

6 There are 243 full-time equivalent staff. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4. The curriculum is delivered through seven academic sectors. In addition to a wide range of general education courses and vocational courses up to higher national level, the college has a large adult leisure and learning programme and is a major provider of training credits programmes.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

7 Throughout the college, there is a high level of awareness of national educational initiatives and priorities and of local needs. A balanced range of vocational and general educational courses is provided. Thirty-five subjects are offered at General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level) and 20 subjects at General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE). Vocational provision includes: art and design, business studies, health studies, information technology, engineering, media and performing arts, science, and sport and leisure. A range of higher education courses, including engineering courses franchised from Staffordshire University, is being developed to increase the opportunities for students' progression within the college.

8 The college's policy, clearly described in the strategic plan, is to expand vocational provision and to introduce new vocational qualifications as they become available. Substantial progress has been made with the introduction of General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) programmes in five vocational areas and National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) awards in eight areas.

9 The college timetable is designed to allow full-time students to combine vocational and general education studies. Part-time study routes are available in most areas. The college welcomes adult learners, who can join many of the mainstream programmes. A substantial community programme is offered and the college runs an access to higher education scheme. In some sectors, for example in administrative and secretarial studies, a special study programme is available for adults who are returning to education. In art and design, and engineering, the choice of courses is extensive and growing. The engineering provision ranges from City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) craft courses to higher education courses and includes many short courses. In some sectors, including science, there are opportunities for the development of more full-cost and consultancy work.

10 The college promotes the acquisition of modern foreign language skills. All full-time students are offered the opportunity to study a foreign language and a wide range of language classes is available for evening and part-time students. The part-time and vocational language provision has been particularly successful, involving over 300 students taking courses at different levels. Special language courses are designed for local companies, at full cost. Full-cost training courses for industry are also a successful feature of some other academic sectors. The college has provided intensive

two-week courses in engineering multi-skilling for a national company and other advanced courses which are taught in the workplace have been developed as joint ventures with employers. An important recent development for the college has been the formation of a training consortium, involving four major manufacturers. The consortium has responsibility for delivering the training credits programme, and the college has a key role as its administrator.

11 The college is responsive to the needs of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The learning support provision ensures that every student with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has an individual goal for each learning session. Individually designed programmes are organised to encourage progression to nationally accredited courses. Students on the bridging studies programme are successfully helped to build a skills profile that is recognised by the RSA Examinations Board (RSA). A new initiative, the Pathways course, is intended for students with few formal qualifications and has been piloted in direct response to community needs.

12 A useful range of recreational sport and drama opportunities are offered to students. In April 1995 the college was the principal organiser of the British Association of Sport in Colleges 17th national championships which were hosted in Newcastle-under-Lyme and involved some 1600 students in 12 sports.

13 Good links are maintained with parents. They receive regular progress reports and have the opportunity to meet staff at parents' meetings.

14 The college has strong and, in some cases, innovative links with schools, reflecting the high priority given to this aspect of its operation. Formal arrangements include a well-supported partnership scheme involving six schools. A significant number of schools outside the local catchment area also have close links with the college. A committee of secondary headteachers meets regularly with staff from the college and this provides an important vehicle for communication. There are many informal contacts between the college and schools including arrangements for curriculum support, staff-development projects and opportunities to share facilities and staff expertise. The college has a number of imaginative schemes for working with local primary schools. For example, science enrichment courses are offered every year to about ten primary schools, who each bring 20 to 40 children into the college for a period of three weeks.

15 There are productive links with Keele University and Staffordshire University, both of which are represented on college bodies. The college's associate status with Staffordshire University means that successful students from the college qualify for entry to a number of the university's courses. There is also an arrangement whereby students registered on the university's own Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) diploma in foundation studies in art and design are taught in the college.

16 Trends in the take-up of vocational courses, including patterns of day release, are reviewed regularly. The college is sensitive to the needs of local employers. Links with industry and commerce are extensive and well established. The head of leisure and tourism is the vice-chairperson of the local tourist association and this provides valuable industrial contacts and vocational insights. Local industry is supportive of the college. There are strong links with the local TEC; a college governor is a main board member of the TEC and the TEC is involved in a number of college advisory committees. The college has received funding in the past for high technology equipment which is made available to local companies together with appropriate training. More recently the TEC supported the college in a best practice project, which provided some assistance to the college management in its financial planning.

17 A number of academic sectors in the college have active industry advisory committees. They are a useful means of identifying local employers' needs and of monitoring employers' reactions to the services which the college provides. The committees have clear terms of reference and their membership includes representatives from local industry, higher education, the careers service and the local TEC. The technology sector is a designated Engineering Training Authority learning-resource centre which offers support to industry for NVQ training. The two researchers within the enterprise unit have direct contact with employers and are able to discuss training requirements and devise the programmes which clients want.

18 The college has recently reviewed its marketing strategy. Responsibilities for marketing are separated between matters related to schools, to industry and to the community. The major marketing effort is directed at schools, especially the partner schools. Whilst the links are strong, success in terms of enrolments has been variable. Despite well-produced publicity materials and promotional activities, including visits to the college, and open days for students and teachers, in the context of competition from other colleges and schools the college failed to achieve its target for full-time enrolments in 1993-94.

19 Mailshots, follow-up phone calls and meetings with employers and community organisations have helped the college to increase its recruitment of adult students from 30 per cent last year to 47 per cent of enrolments. Adult students are well supported and advised. Many progress from recreational classes to vocational courses. Employers commented positively on visits by college staff to their premises to recruit employees to adult education.

20 Leaders of community organisations speak well of the reputation of the college and its responsiveness. Although the college has been successful in attracting students from minority ethnic groups, work with these groups is underdeveloped. The college has recognised that equality of opportunity in aspects of curriculum provision and curriculum content requires more stringent monitoring.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

21 The corporation is strongly supportive of the college. It has a clear view of its role in evaluating the college's performance and development. The corporation has a membership of 20. There are 10 independent members, a member nominated by the local TEC, two elected by the staff, one elected by the students, two from the local community, three co-opted members and the principal. Four of the members are women. At the time of the inspection there was a vacancy for one independent member. Members have experience of the health service, law, education, finance and industry. Together they provide a range of expertise which relates well to the educational character of the college and its operation.

22 There are six subcommittees of the corporation: education, finance, employment matters, audit, remuneration, and pay and conditions. There are appropriate agreed terms of reference for each committee. Either a vice-principal or an assistant principal acts as a link between each committee and the college's senior management. Committee members are selected for their appropriate knowledge and experience. Attendance at corporation and subcommittee meetings is generally good, although there has been one example of the audit committee not being quorate.

23 The strategic plan was drafted by the senior management and reviewed and further developed by the corporation. Staff were effectively consulted about the plan through the academic sector meetings. The strategic plan and corporate objectives clearly reflect the college's mission and the operating statement provides an appropriate level of detail on the implementation of the plan.

24 The college has policies for equal opportunities, health and safety, the environment and learning support. Responsibility for implementation of the equal opportunities policy lies with managers. There is particular emphasis on support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and the college ensures equal treatment in its selection and recruitment of staff and students. Responsibility for health and safety is designated to one of the vice-principals. Guidance for staff is contained in a health and safety manual. The college's environment policy is still at an early stage of development.

25 The senior management team consists of the principal, two vice-principals, three assistant principals, a director of curriculum, a director of student guidance and services and seven academic sector heads. One assistant principal and the director of curriculum are responsible for academic matters while the two vice-principals, the other assistant principals and the director of student guidance and services deal with cross-college matters. The direct management of the education provision is the concern of the seven academic sector heads. The structure is complex but staff understand the lines of communication and know to whom they are accountable. From September 1995, the organisational structure is to

be simplified to reduce costs and to reflect the changing priorities of the cross-college functions.

26 The principalship provides clear leadership and managers carry out their responsibilities effectively. The senior management team meets regularly on a weekly basis. There is a structured system of committees for the different areas of college activities. The papers and minutes for the meetings of these committees present a clear picture of policies and activities but it is not always evident who is responsible for taking action, where action is required. Staff receive an informative weekly newsletter.

27 There is an academic board, chaired by the principal and with representation from across the college, to which careers, course approval, equal opportunities and information technology committees report.

28 There is an established system of financial allocation. Some budgets are controlled centrally, others are devolved to the academic sectors. The centrally-controlled budget includes full-time staff salaries, premises costs and central administration. The devolved budgets are for part-time staff costs, consumables, learning resources, field trips and materials for resale. The system encourages accountability and a sense of responsibility for expenditure. At present, allocations are largely historically based and funding has not always reflected the number of students within the academic sector. The college proposes to move to a unit-based system in August 1995.

29 The college's average level of funding for 1994-95 is £16.11 per unit. The median for general further education and tertiary colleges is £18.17. There is careful attention to the deployment of resources. A system of monthly reviews of income and expenditure at academic sector and management level is well established. The financial subcommittee of the corporation takes an active role in monitoring financial planning, income and expenditure. Careful account is taken of variances. Reasons are sought for their occurrence and action is taken where necessary. The college's income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1994 are shown in figures 5 and 6.

30 The college had a surplus in 1993-94 but has since incurred a deficit financial position. Two major issues facing the college are the difficulty in meeting enrolment targets for full-time students and the low average class size arising from the college's mission to provide a wide range of activities and choices for the community. The college has a commitment to raise student numbers and increase class sizes without narrowing its provision.

31 Enrolment targets are set at academic sector and college level. Recruitment figures are regularly updated and are analysed at the weekly management meetings and by the education subcommittee of the corporation. At the time of the inspection, the college was making strong efforts to reach its unit target through recruitment to short courses and part-time provision.

32 Senior and middle managers have access to the management information system through a computer network. The system uses commercial software and a package developed in-house. It provides accurate data on retention rates, attendance, destinations, gender, age and ethnicity of students. The academic sectors and senior managers use the data to assist in planning and monitoring the education they provide.

33 There are established systems for collecting and storing reliable information on student retention rates and destinations. The college obtains information on destinations from almost all its students. On some courses, retention rates are used to inform planning and to influence the targets which are set. However, this is not a practice followed by all courses.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

34 Students are provided with concise information on courses and receive impartial guidance on their choice of courses before they enter the college. There is easy access to further details through named contacts. Subject information sheets outline course content, assessment methods and the possibilities for career progression. These vary in quality, some of them using technical vocabulary which is too difficult for the majority of school leavers at whom they are aimed. The college has effective contacts not only with its local 11-16 partner schools but also with some 11-18 schools, both locally and elsewhere. The range of recruitment activities includes school talks and careers lessons, taster days, open days, parents' workshops and an area careers convention hosted by the college, in partnership with the Staffordshire Careers Service.

35 Many students apply to the college as a result of personal recommendations. Some travel from outside the area because of the reputation of certain courses, such as those in art and design. There is a well-documented procedure for handling applications. Initial interviews are conducted by subject specialists who can refer students to careers staff. Detailed guidelines for tutors ensure a common approach to interviews. Interviewers make use of student records of achievement and career action plans. Through questions included on an interview discussion sheet, the college aims to identify and respond early to students' needs, including additional support to develop core and study skills and to cater for physical disabilities. A surgery held in August, after the publication of examination results, provides a useful opportunity for students to discuss their proposed study programme in the light of their results. In a recent survey, over 95 per cent of students expressed satisfaction with their admission arrangements including the initial interview.

36 Students seeking entry to the Engineering Training Authority programme undergo a series of numeracy, communication and dexterity tests before being accepted. Identification of students who require help

with numeracy, literacy or other core skills is at present unreliable. The recent inclusion of a questionnaire with the letter inviting students to interview, and the monitoring of students whose GCSE mathematics and English grade predictions are low, should assist the college to identify more easily those students who require help. Tutors also need more assistance in detecting quickly the students who require additional support to develop their core skills.

37 Accreditation of students' prior learning procedures are at an early stage of development. At present they are limited mainly to NVQ courses in business administration.

38 The college sees induction as continuing throughout the first weeks of the course. Tutors receive a comprehensive induction pack which includes detailed guidelines for the initial induction tutorial and a list of topics they must cover. Students found the college programme helpful. The timetabled tutorials during the first half term are used to ensure that all students hear the introductory talks on the college library and learning workshop and on careers, counselling and guidance services. Within the academic sectors the quality of induction is variable. Several courses provide good introductory booklets which include notes on study skills.

39 There are accurate records of course transfers. Counselling prior to change of course is linked to the student's record of achievement. Students are helped in making course changes and in returning to study after time out from their college course.

40 There is a well-developed tutorial system and a study entitlement for students which guarantees coverage of a range of topics. A high priority is given to ensuring that students progress successfully. Action plans which involve students in setting their own learning objectives and in evaluating their achievements, together with the maintenance of records of achievement, are seen as key elements of the tutorial provision. All full-time students maintain records of achievement and their use and maintenance is well established in the tutorial and guidance process. Records are validated by the Staffordshire group of the West Midlands Group for the Accreditation of Records of Achievement. The college has benefited from involvement with this group since its inception. Staff have developed an awareness of the need for, and use of, records of achievement in schools, higher education and industry. Some students spoken to during the inspection did not appreciate the significance of the record of achievement or the process used to maintain it. Nevertheless, students and their parents had positive views about the value of tutorials, and particularly the high level of care and support for students with specific learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

41 Student support, counselling and guidance are provided through the careers, counselling, admissions and progression team. Confidential counselling is available from qualified counsellors who refer students, where appropriate, to external agencies. The service is valued and is well

used. Students are able to buy weekly bus tickets from the careers, counselling, admissions and progression team at concessionary prices. There is a hardship fund to support students aged 16-19 who are in real need. The range of college and trust funds available is unusually wide and considerable effort is made to obtain financial help from other charitable sources to assist students in travelling to college and on field courses, in the purchase of essential equipment and with childcare costs. The college provides a creche.

42 Attractive and comfortable accommodation is available for careers counselling and the reading of careers literature. There is a wide range of up-to-date material, including a large video library and a variety of careers computer software. Relationships with local schools and with Staffordshire Careers Service are strong, ensuring co-operation at many different levels. Careers staff are well informed about individual career requirements. The well-managed programme for applications to higher education institutions begins over a year before proposed entry, and assistance with Universities and Colleges Admissions Service application forms for entry to higher education is thorough. Support for students continues into the summer vacation when GCE A level examination results are published. Students who fail to achieve the grades required for a chosen higher education course are helped to find alternative pathways.

43 The students' union is an additional source of help and advice for students. A notice board, which gives information on part-time employment vacancies, is also a useful recent initiative. There are several projects which link students with the local community. These include fund raising events for charities such as Young Homeless, working with a local group to help Romanian orphans and organised activities ranging from 'bring and buy' sales to sponsored walks.

44 The college has effective procedures for monitoring students' attendance. Employers of students on day release from employment are contacted promptly if students are late or absent.

45 Students are given clear and comprehensive information about their rights and responsibilities both in the college charter and the students' handbook. The latter includes the college's mission statement and has space for an individual student timetable. A guide for part-time users provides useful information for both staff and students.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

46 Of the 147 sessions observed, 68 per cent had strengths which outweighed weaknesses. Only 2 per cent had weaknesses which outweighed the strengths. The grades awarded as a result of the inspection are shown in the following table.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE AS/A level		7	20	12	0	0	39
GCSE		1	7	7	0	0	15
GNVQ		5	11	6	1	0	23
NVQ		0	2	3	0	0	5
Other vocational		7	28	13	2	0	50
Access to higher education		3	2	2	0	0	7
Other		2	5	1	0	0	8
Total		25	75	44	3	0	147

47 Carefully-planned lessons and good teaching were observed in all subject areas. The aims and objectives of lessons were shared with students. Students produced personal statements and action plans and were encouraged to take some responsibility for their own learning. The good relations between staff and students helped to promote effective learning. Assignments for students had clearly defined aims; they were set regularly and assessed appropriately. Students were expected to prepare at least one major assignment using computers, although this was not achieved in all sectors. Teachers kept good records of the work set and the grades awarded.

48 There were good schemes of work for most courses and the course documents issued to students were clear and well organised. Lecturers used an effective range of teaching strategies which included opportunities for students to work together in small groups or to work by themselves. Lesson topics were clearly presented and teachers made effective use of teaching aids. Weaknesses were seen in a minority of sessions: opportunities to reinforce core skills were neglected or too much time was spent on taking dictation or copying notes.

49 The community and learning support sector provided assistance to other sectors with the integration of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Lecturing staff were able to seek the help of the sector where it was required. Language support was available to meet the wide-ranging needs of students, most of whom were offered individual programmes of study. The use of a speech synthesizer in business administration courses enabled a visually impaired student to take a course in wordprocessing. A policy for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who join practical science classes had been developed by the science sector. Support was available for students with hearing or visual impairment from the local authority support service.

50 The quality of teaching in science was good. Science teachers made effective use of visual aids, including overhead transparencies and

magnetic board models to help develop students' understanding. In a few sessions the work was uninspired. Staff would benefit from sharing the good practice which exists in the sector. Students on vocational courses in science were encouraged to meet deadlines by a system of penalty points for late work, which lowered their assessment grades.

51 In mathematics, the work was well organised and students worked purposefully. The usefulness of some practical lessons in electrical engineering was limited by the lack of technical support staff and inadequate preparation on the part of teachers. Students had some opportunity to tackle problems through group discussion and there was particularly effective groupwork on one of the BTEC courses. In whole class situations, both lecturers and students appeared reluctant to ask questions, as a means of clarifying issues and developing understanding.

52 In engineering, learning targets for full-time students, are discussed during tutorial periods or at times determined for the completion of records of achievement. Regular course team meetings are held to consider the overall performance of each student. Written reports are provided for students, parents and, where appropriate, for employers. The needs of all students are discussed at these meetings and progress targets are set for each full-time student. The development of common skills is particularly well managed. Each student has a common skills mentor. In class, teachers set work in a practical context and frequently directed questions at individual students to check what they had learned and to stimulate and maintain their interest. There was insufficient reference to engineering applications in the work in mathematics and teachers provided inadequate feedback to students on some of their assessed work. There is also a need to develop learning materials for the NVQ programme and for the computer-aided design courses to allow for more flexible patterns of learning.

53 Some business studies lessons were of high quality. Activities were well directed and purposeful. Teachers used an appropriate range of methods of working. They were aware of students' abilities and levels of understanding and organised work accordingly. In some of the practical sessions students were given individual learning targets and, with staff help, they were expected to monitor their progress in achieving these. There was good use of the college's business centre to support the achievement of NVQ competences. Other business studies lessons had a number of weaknesses. In some cases, teaching methods were inappropriate. Students were expected to spend too much of their time listening to the teacher, taking dictation, copying notes from the whiteboard, or re-organising papers and files. In other cases, learning goals and levels of achievement were unclear.

54 The work in leisure and tourism was well organised. Teachers took good account of students' differing levels of ability and the requirements of the GNVQ units. Learning generally resulted in sound standards of

achievement. Lecturers were careful to remind students about deadlines for submitting work and to ensure that these were met. Subjects were often related to the students' interests and to the locality. An established programme of internal assessment of students' work was in place. Checks were made to determine that students had understood the topic being taught. There were also regular checks on the students' use of English in assignment work. Teachers' written comments on assignments occasionally lacked sufficient detail.

55 Classes in modern languages were undertaken in a relaxed but purposeful atmosphere which promoted learning. There was good use of the language being learned. Helpful course booklets were produced for GNVQ students, stating what was expected of them in terms of commitment, attendance, and assignments. Teachers' written policy on marking was clear and simple and the document was available to students. Full-time students were well informed about their programme of studies and their progress. The classes for part-time students, which were taught mainly by part-time staff, did not have the same degree of focus and lacked a common approach. In the best classes, activities were appropriately demanding and enabled students to respond individually. Adult students were appreciative of the individual help they received from teachers.

56 Topics which were common to several courses helped students to integrate the various elements of art and design. There was an appropriate emphasis on drawing; all students had classes in life drawing. Study programmes were well planned and teachers ensured that students progressively developed both practical skills and knowledge. Students displayed good understanding of their subject. Course assignments were designed effectively for students' different levels of ability. The learning contract was used, when required, to remind students of their responsibilities. Students had little opportunity to experience measured or formal design problems particularly in three-dimensional practical work. Foundation students' portfolios were well organised and reflected the highly structured nature of the course.

57 In law, the teaching was mainly through lectures. Staff taught the subject with enthusiasm. Question and answers were used effectively to develop students' understanding. Teachers drew on students' own experiences to make work more relevant. The tasks set were appropriately demanding. Coursework in English and communication studies was well managed and fairly assessed. Individual programmes of study were devised for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and teachers provided good individual support for part-time students. There was inadequate attention to the development of core skills. Some schemes of work lacked detail and course guides for students consisted mainly of extracts from the requirements of the examination syllabus.

58 Lessons in psychology and sociology were set firmly in the context of students' previous learning. There was comprehensive course

documentation. Where students were taking options across academic sectors there was good documentation to support the links which needed to be made. There was good attention to the development of communication and numeracy skills, but students were offered no experience of information technology.

59 Lecturers in adult basic education courses used relevant and stimulating materials and were successful in maintaining students' interest and motivation. In some cases there was excessive reliance on photocopied material and occasionally the language used was too complex. Learning activities were organised to cater for individuals' needs as part of the development of effective personal study programmes. Students were encouraged to work independently and to support each other. Their work was of a high standard. It was well presented in folios, and met the requirements of RSA skills profiling and/or records of achievement.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

60 Students are generally well motivated and see the relevance of the work for future studies and career aspirations. In art and design, the motivation is reflected in the hard work of students, both within and outside timetabled hours.

61 In a majority of the academic sectors of the college, students display appropriate understanding of their subject. It is evident in the sophisticated contributions to discussion from students of GCE A level law and economics, in the perceptive written and oral work of students following GCE A level courses in psychology and sociology, and in the confidence with which some adult learners use modern foreign language skills. In art and design, students' drawing skills are based upon a thorough understanding of the principles involved which enables them to explore a wide range of visual ideas.

62 While staff generally have appropriate expectations of students, individual needs are not always well differentiated. For example, the most able students on GCE A level science and GNVQ business courses are not always fully stretched. The generally high level of achievement by students on art and design courses and on GCE A level law and economics courses should be further raised by more attention to problem solving and analytical skills. In business and secretarial studies, students would benefit from more assignments which offer insights into vocational practice. The successful application of knowledge to vocational tasks can be seen in some of the work undertaken by students on C&G engineering and GNVQ intermediate science courses, particularly in the use and application of information technology.

63 Group and team working skills are being successfully developed in a number of vocational areas, including engineering, leisure and tourism, and information technology. Engineering students are able to sustain constructive group discussion. Students following an office skills/business

module on the BTEC information technology applications course work as company teams, undertaking a variety of business tasks, arranging team meetings and producing minutes. Occasionally, behavioural problems among a very small minority of full-time students on the leisure and tourism courses hindered the development of interpersonal skills, but these were generally well handled by teachers.

64 Core skills and study skills are generally being developed appropriately. The standard of written English is high in GCE A level law coursework. Some engineering students, students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and students on basic adult education courses are making good progress in developing their communication skills. These skills are less well developed in mathematics and on vocational science courses. Students' coursework is often well presented. In art and design, mathematics and provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, students are developing the ability to work on their own. In the case of art and design, there is also evidence students are developing the attitudes required for successful progress to higher education or to careers in vocational areas. There is a college-wide need to strengthen students' general information technology skills.

65 Students undertake practical work competently and with due regard to safety procedures and dress codes. In electrical engineering, students are acquiring important vocational skills, helped by the availability of up-to-date industry standard test equipment. There is a need to improve the laboratory techniques of environmental science students.

66 Performance tables produced by the Department for Education for 1994 show that 72 per cent of the 153 students aged 16-18 were successful in the final year of their vocational courses. This places the college in the bottom third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure, although pass rates have improved steadily between 1992 and 1994. There are significant variations between and within vocational areas. For example, while 97 per cent of registered students on the BTEC national diploma in business and finance gained the full award, the equivalent figure for the national diploma in information technology was 60 per cent. The proportion of students registered for BTEC first diplomas and certificates who gained the full award (34 per cent) was low.

67 About half of the full-time students in the college are enrolled on GCE A level and advanced supplementary courses. The 331 students aged between 16-18 who were entered for the examination in 1993-94 scored on average 3.6 points per entry. This places the college in the middle third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure, based on data in the 1994 performance tables published by the Department for Education. Pass rates well above the national average are being achieved in some subjects, including law, economics and psychology. In art and design the pass rate has been close to 100 per cent over the past three years. The pass rate in law and mathematics is declining. The

grades being achieved in science subjects, while near the national average, do not fully reflect the high GCSE scores of students on entry.

68 The percentage of full-time students entered for GCSE examinations and achieving grades A-C in 1993-94 (62 per cent) is well above the provisional average for further education sector colleges. The percentage of A-C grades being achieved within the individual academic sectors varies between 85 and 46 per cent.

69 The college is at an early stage of measuring the value-added students' achievements by comparing examination results with qualifications on entry. Awareness of value-added measures is being raised in some academic sectors and at the level of the corporation but further work on students' performance within subject areas is required.

70 From the figures published in the college annual report for 1993-94, the overall retention rate is high (85 per cent). Areas with lower than average retention rates include some part-time evening courses. Of the full-time students who completed their studies in 1993-94, 60 per cent were successful in gaining places on higher education courses, 5 per cent continued their studies in further education and 22 per cent found employment. Students in art and design, English and communication studies have been particularly successful. That all the students on the BTEC art and design courses progressed to higher education is an excellent achievement.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

71 The college has a commitment to quality assurance and the improvement of quality. The academic sectors and support staff quality circles have the responsibility to ensure that quality assurance is continuous and meets college requirements. All staff are seen as being responsible for maintaining and enhancing the quality of the college's provision. The quality assurance framework has been developed from existing procedures using a total quality management model and the Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. The new framework was introduced in September 1994. As yet the effectiveness of its operation has not been fully evaluated. A quality unit assists various areas with data collection and analysis and the production of reports.

72 Staff are aware of, and responsive to, the Charter for Further Education and college charter. Students do not receive individual copies of the college charter. Copies are available at enrolment in reception and in the library. There are references to the charter in the students' handbook. A simple, but effective complaints procedure is in place and students can obtain copies of the procedure from the reception desk. In recent times, the college has received few formal complaints and these have been dealt with informally by a senior manager.

73 One of the vice-principals has overall responsibility for quality assurance. Course teams from each of the sector areas are responsible for

setting standards and targets, monitoring progress towards their achievement and planning appropriate action. To assist in the delivery of the strategy, a course review manual has been devised. It contains comprehensive information and guidance on course aims, students, targets and monitoring and review. Teams are expected to collect information from a variety of sources that include, amongst others, student questionnaires, moderators' reports and advisory committee observations. In one instance, inspectors were able to trace a sequence of events starting with the planning and implementation of a student survey, continuing with discussion of the responses by the course team and concluding with the modification of a course in response to students' views. One team in leisure and tourism quickly changed course documentation at the request of the external verifier to meet the requirements of the GNVQ programme. Teachers commented that course review manuals were useful quality control and information documents. However, the process of completing and updating these manuals was carried out with varying degrees of effectiveness.

74 The college has formed a curriculum unit to disseminate good practice. At present, the unit is effectively involved in assessing the teaching skills of probationary teachers. For next year it is planned that the curriculum unit will be involved in classroom observations as part of the staff-appraisal process. Quality assurance policies and good practice is spread through college newsletters and at meetings of the course teams. The management information system provides the various areas with comprehensive and reliable data which are used by the teams to plan and monitor their work. Course teams work with a range of performance indicators. The college recognises the need to improve and develop such indicators and for the academic board to have a more active role in monitoring quality. The support staff quality circles encompass nine areas. They have only recently been formed and their impact to date has therefore been minimal.

75 Two-yearly staff appraisal is part of the quality assurance process and involves all full-time staff. The scheme has been established for three years. Its aims are clear and procedures are well documented. The self-appraisal form provides the appraisee with an opportunity to carry out a structured and critical analysis of his or her performance. Staff development is arranged to meet needs identified in the appraisal. Schedules of appraisals for the coming year are drawn up to inform the staff concerned. Staff spoken to during the inspection found the process of appraisal a positive and rewarding experience. The college intends to extend the scheme to part-time teachers.

76 There are eight staff-development priorities in the strategic plan. Their aim is to provide staff with the experience required to play their role in achieving the college's aims. A budget of £46,000, just under 1 per cent of total college expenditure, is allocated to staff development. The priority

for training has been the delivery of GNVQ and NVQ programmes. There has also been limited training to update teachers' knowledge of their subject and their industrial experience. There has been little secondment of staff. The college undertakes a thorough evaluation of training and of the outcomes. Staff complete evaluation forms on the quality of the training and these are carefully reviewed by the curriculum director and form the basis of a report for the academic board and for managers. The college is confident from its evaluation of the process that it is successfully meeting most training needs. Qualified staff from the college are able to provide courses leading to Training and Development Lead Body assessor awards for other educational providers and for industry. The college has recently been awarded Investor in People status.

77 In the majority of cases, new full-time staff found their six-week induction programme a worthwhile and enjoyable experience. Induction includes a comprehensive pack giving essential information about the college. The requirement to meet key personnel was found time consuming and difficult to operate because of problems over their availability. A useful guide to the college and its organisation is supplied to part-time staff.

78 The college produced an internal quality assessment report for the team inspection. Strengths, areas of development and the evidence for conclusions were documented using the headings from Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. Overall the report is a fair assessment of the college's current position although weaknesses were not treated as rigorously as in the inspection findings. The college sectors each carried out interim self-assessment reports for the specialist inspections. Weaknesses were discussed with inspectors and in most areas these were being addressed. In some instances, improvements had occurred before the end of the inspection. For example the course review manual has been made more specific and the training programme for Training and Development Lead Body awards has been accelerated.

RESOURCES

Staffing

79 Lecturers are well qualified and have relevant industrial experience for the programmes offered by the college. First or higher degrees are held by 97 of the teaching staff and 29 have appropriate professional qualifications. Ninety-two members of the full-time staff hold a teaching qualification.

80 Sound personnel policies are in place and there are a number of guides and codes of conduct to maintain and improve good practice. All staff have an up-to-date job description and the deployment of staff is monitored to try and improve efficiency. The college aims to increase the average class size from its present level of 12 to 15.

81 There are 149 full-time equivalent teachers of whom 30 per cent are part time. This level of part-time teaching gives the flexibility required to mount the range of courses offered. In community and learning support the greater reliance on part-time staff reflects the fluctuation in demand for teaching.

82 Generally, there is a low turnover of teaching staff. Most teachers have been employed at the college for more than five years. Many have little experience of working in other educational institutions. Over the last seven years, the college has made 46 teaching appointments. Twenty-three were men; and 23 were women. The college is committed to ensure that its current appointment procedures give equal opportunities for men and women. At present, there are only two women managers out of an overall management team of 15. All the senior managers are men.

83 Support staff in all categories have appropriate qualifications and relevant experience for the posts in which they are employed. Staffing levels are adequate in most areas. There is a shortage of technician support in art and design, business studies and information technology.

Equipment/learning resources

84 Specialist equipment is adequate for most of the programmes offered. The major information technology provision is in the technology sector which has bookable rooms of networked and stand-alone computers. These are used mainly by students taking specialist computer courses but also provide a limited drop-in facility for all students. Other computer provision is available in the computer video workshop and in the business and administration areas. The art and design area has its own system of computers. To bring much needed improvements to its information technology provision, £56,000 has been spent on new computer workstations. New machines account for just over half the 169 computers accessible to students. There is a satisfactory range of software but it needs to be brought up to date. A policy to achieve standardisation in software has been introduced.

85 The library has a full security system. It also houses a video collection and playback facilities. A computerised management system was installed in the summer of 1994 but the complete transfer of records is not expected to be achieved until the autumn of 1995. The library has insufficient books and periodicals and many of the books are out of date. The college has a programme to improve the library stock. It should also work to enhance the status of the library as an important learning resources for students. The study materials area is an extension of the library containing other learning resources, many of which have been prepared by lecturers. A wide range of new learning material to support students working independently is also available through the further education national consortium. The area has three computers, compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) databases and an extensive range of software including

a multi-media package. Students are able to use desktop publishing software and can have their work printed in colour.

86 The computer video workshop has the facilities to make off-air television broadcasts and has recently acquired a multi-media system. The learning support workshop offers appropriate study materials and assistance from staff. The older type of computers available here are not suitable for students with special needs.

87 The modern languages accommodation suffers from a shortage of whiteboards. In art and design the workshops and studios are adequately equipped, with the exception of the three-dimensional workshop. There is a well-equipped physics area which also contains a good range of useful textbooks. Provision for chemistry and biology is less good and it is poor for environmental science. Funding through a TEC scheme enabled the college to purchase a good computer-based electronics training laboratory and industrial standard computerised numerical control machinery. Most of the conventional machine tools are more than twenty years old and there are increasing maintenance problems. The engineering provision is not adequate to support the work at higher national certificate and degree level.

Accommodation

88 The college is situated on three sites in Newcastle-under-Lyme. Buildings are a mixture of traditional, modern and prefabricated design. They are clean and well maintained. Most of the outside of the buildings is in good condition. Parts of the Liverpool Road site are being renovated. Other facilities have also been upgraded recently. A 10-year maintenance plan has been developed.

89 Teaching rooms are generally large enough for the groups who use them. Most sectors are sensibly located in their own areas and have the responsibility of ensuring that rooms are kept clean and used fully and safely. The majority of staffrooms and storage facilities are adequate in size and number. The business studies centre at the Mayer Avenue site, the learning materials and computer centres, the science laboratories and the engineering area provide good learning environments. A recent room suitability survey, part of the college's accommodation strategy, indicated that most were in a satisfactory or good condition. The strategy is being further developed through an analysis of predicted numbers of students and their requirements. Annual accommodation audits, which include information on the use of space, are reported to senior management. Some internal areas especially in the Trinity annexe are drab and require renovation. Leisure and tourism rooms are in poor condition; they also lack toilet facilities. The inappropriate design of rooms is hindering teaching in the language laboratories by preventing students from having a clear view of the teacher and other visual aids. Environmental science is located in unsuitable prefabricated accommodation. However, the

accommodation is next to the nature reserve, which forms a useful learning resource.

90 Wheelchair users have access to all the buildings on the main site and at the Mayer Avenue site access is also good. There are no lifts to the upper floor of Trinity campus. Posters and examples of students' work were displayed on walls in the teaching accommodation for science, business, languages and art. Other areas lacked any indication of their subject identity. The students' refectory is comfortable but can become congested and untidy at peak periods. The sports hall and games facilities provide a wide range of leisure and sport pursuits. The foyer and information area is well located but requires upgrading to provide a more welcoming environment. Lighting and signposting throughout the college is satisfactory. Car parking facilities are adequate. The main site is surrounded by pleasant landscaped areas which are well maintained.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

91 The strengths of the college are:

- the balanced range of vocational and general education provision
- responsiveness to the needs of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- the effective monitoring and direction provided by the subcommittees of the corporation
- clear and effective management organisation
- good recruitment procedures
- well-developed tutorial support, guidance and counselling
- carefully-planned lessons and well-structured teaching
- a management information system which provides comprehensive and reliable information
- the attainment of the Investors in People national award
- high standards of cleanliness and maintenance throughout the college.

92 To improve the quality of the provision the college should address the following:

- the failure to meet recruitment targets for full-time students
- low class sizes
- the lack of formal procedures for assessing students' numeracy and communication skills
- students' poorly-developed information technology skills
- low success rates for 16-18 year olds on vocational courses
- the poor library provision.

FIGURES

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- 1 Percentage enrolments by age (1994-95)

 - 2 Percentage enrolments by level of study (1994-95)

 - 3 Enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1994-95)

 - 4 Staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1994-95)

 - 5 Income (for 12 months to July 1994)

 - 6 Expenditure (for 12 months to July 1994)

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

Figure 1

Newcastle-under-Lyme College: percentage enrolments by age (1994-95)

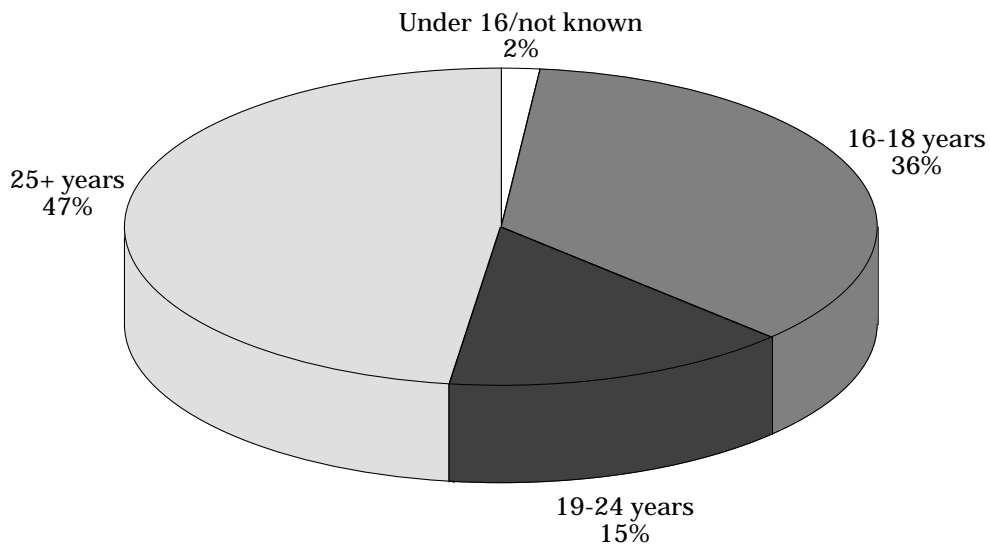


Figure 2

Newcastle-under-Lyme College: percentage enrolments by level of study (1994-95)

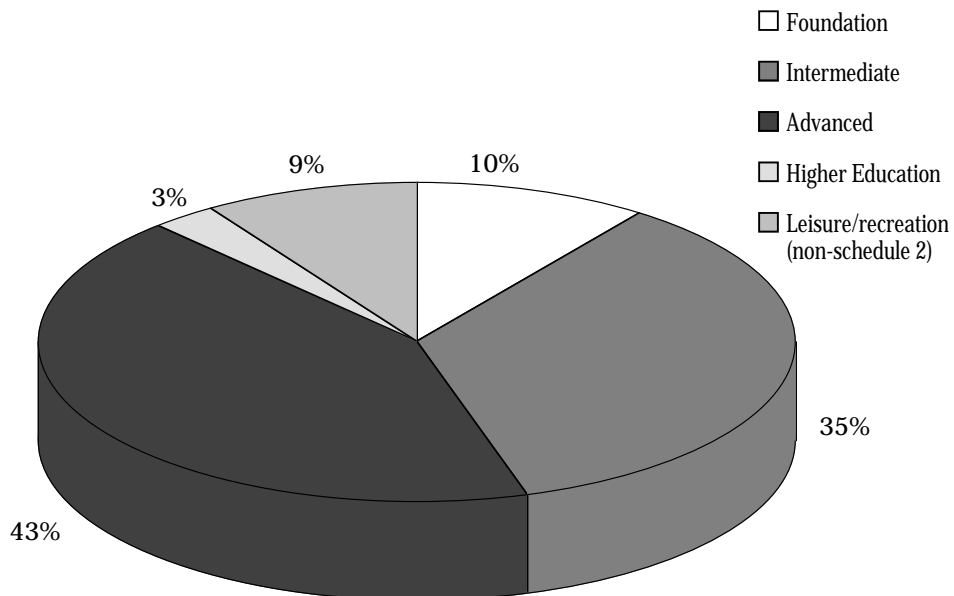
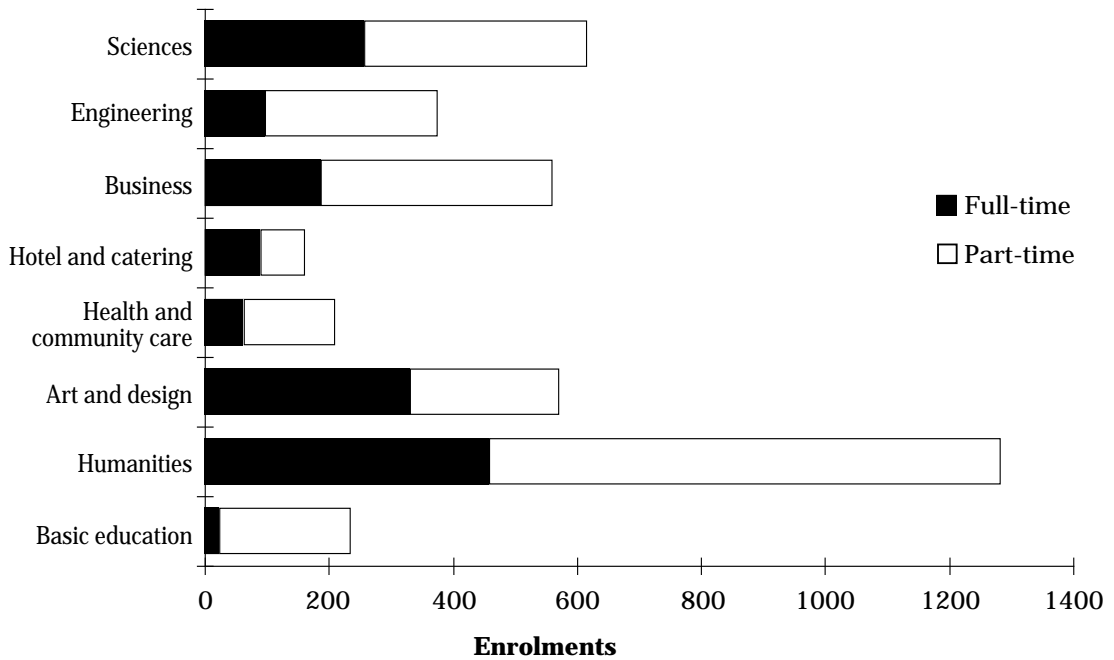


Figure 3

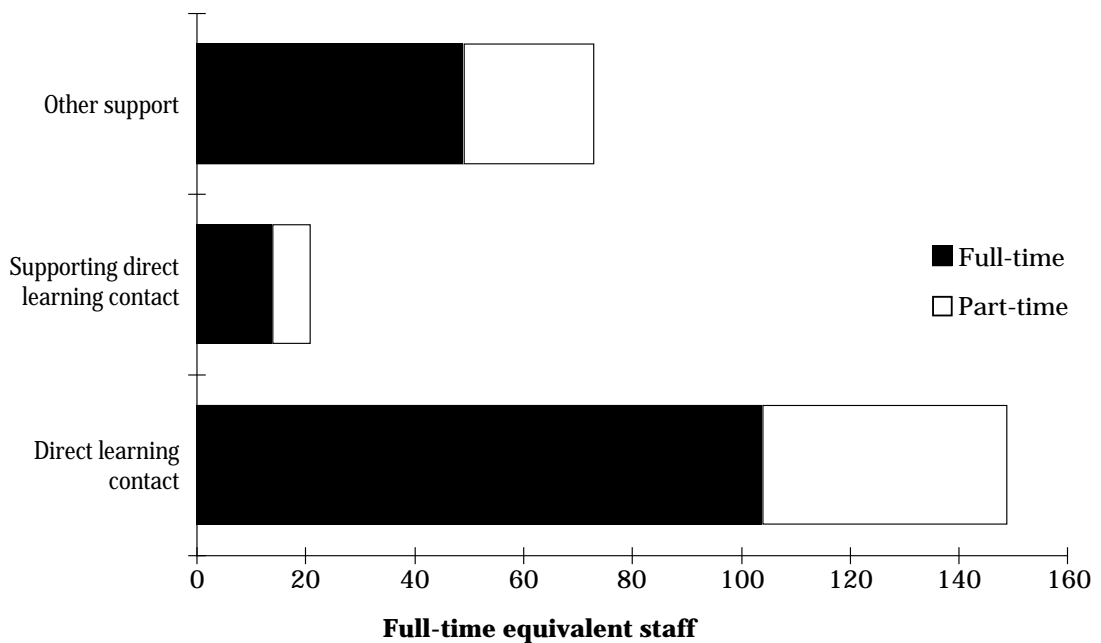
Newcastle-under-Lyme College: enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1994-95)



Enrolments: 4,018

Figure 4

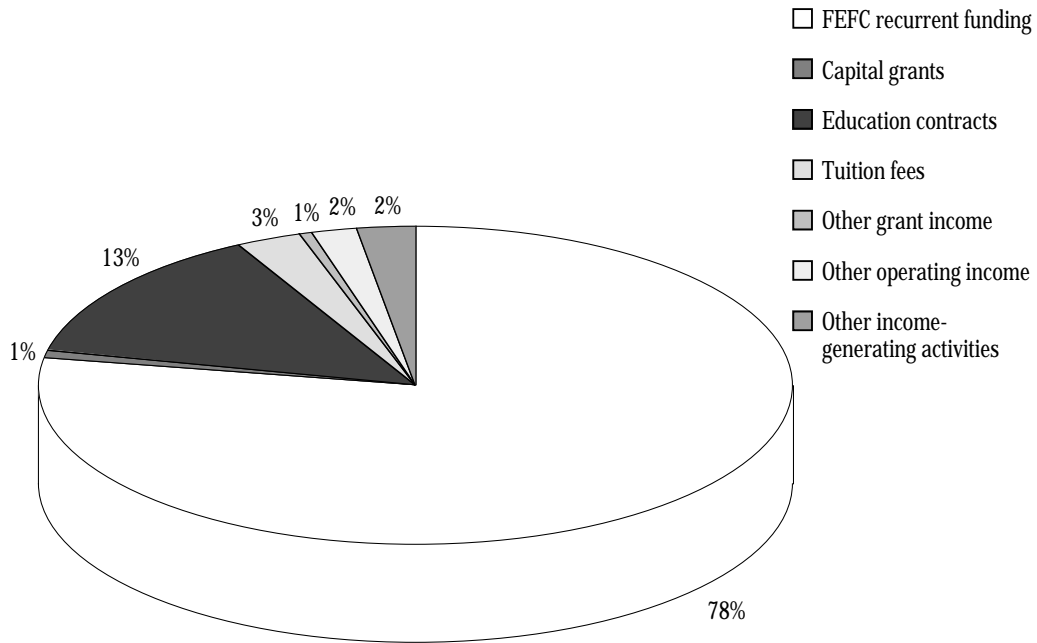
Newcastle-under-Lyme College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1994-95)



Full-time equivalent staff: 243

Figure 5

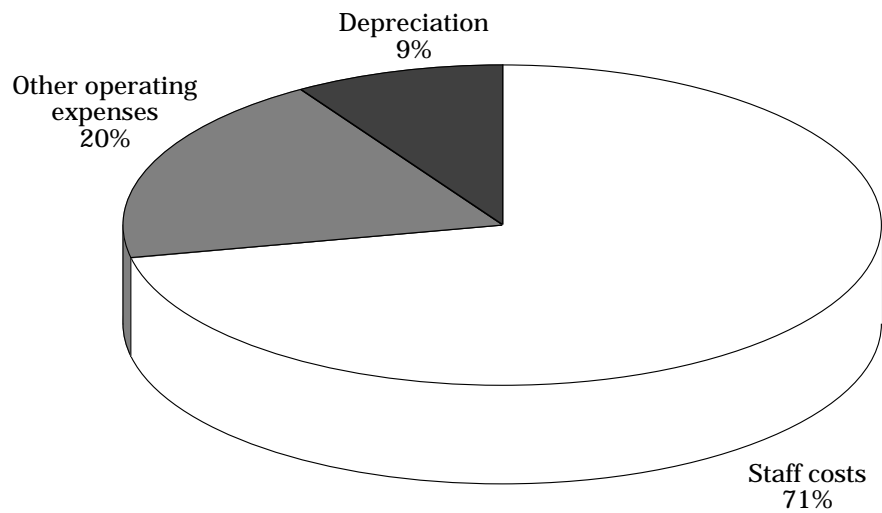
Newcastle-under-Lyme College: income (for 12 months to July 1994)



Income: £5,788,954

Figure 6

Newcastle-under-Lyme College: expenditure (for 12 months to July 1994)



Expenditure: £6,184,736



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