

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

**Capel Manor
Horticultural and
Environmental
Centre**

September 1997

**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 the FEFC's quality assessment committee.

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

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GRADE DESCRIPTORS

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

By June 1996, some 329 college inspections had been completed. The grade profiles for aspects of cross-college provision and programme areas for the 329 colleges are shown in the following table.

College grade profiles 1993-96

Activity	Inspection grades				
	1	2	3	4	5
Programme area	9%	59%	29%	3%	<1%
Cross-college provision	14%	50%	31%	5%	<1%
Overall	12%	54%	30%	4%	<1%

FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 101/97

CAPEL MANOR HORTICULTURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL CENTRE GREATER LONDON REGION

Inspected June 1996-May 1997

Summary

Capel Manor Horticultural and Environmental Centre is a small college specialising in courses in land-based subjects and animal care. The governors are appropriately experienced, support college managers, and conduct their business effectively. Financial management is sound. The college's estate is managed efficiently as a learning resource and as a public attraction. Productive links have been established with the North London TEC, the London Borough of Enfield, local schools and a wide range of employers. The college has diversified its range of courses to respond to the needs of students in the London area and beyond. There is an open approach to strategic planning which involves all staff. The learning experience of many students is enhanced by the high standard of the estate at the main site. The college has some good specialist accommodation and equipment. Students receive much informative literature before enrolling, and teachers give them substantial informal support during their course. The quality of teaching is variable. Success rates for students who complete courses are generally satisfactory, but many students fail to achieve certification in the target time. Practical work of a high standard was seen in most curriculum areas. Many teachers have recent industrial experience. A comprehensive appraisal system is in place and the college has recently achieved the Investor in People award. The college should: complete the implementation of the revised curriculum management structure; clarify progression routes for students within the college; ensure that students are recruited to appropriate courses; improve the teaching and information technology skills of some teachers; improve the technical support for information technology; address the inconsistencies and weaknesses in tutorials; remedy the poor retention rates and achievements on some courses; ensure consistent application of quality assurance systems; develop and monitor the use of performance indicators; and remedy the inadequacies in aspects of small animal care.

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	3
Students' recruitment, guidance and support	4
Quality assurance	3
Resources: staffing	3
equipment/learning resources	2
accommodation	2

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Floristry	2	Horticulture	2
Equine studies and small animal care	3	Arboriculture and countryside	3

INTRODUCTION

1 Capel Manor Horticultural and Environmental Centre, in Enfield, was inspected between June 1996 and May 1997. The college's induction and enrolment procedures were inspected in September 1996. Eight inspectors spent 44 days in the college. They visited 56 classes, and scrutinised students' work and college documentation. Meetings were held with governors, college managers, teachers, students, employers, and representatives of the careers service, and the North London Training and Enterprise Council (TEC).

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 Capel Manor Horticultural and Environmental Centre is a specialist college established in 1968 by the London Borough of Enfield as a horticultural training centre in five acres of the then derelict grounds of Capel House, Enfield. In 1982, the college began rapidly to expand its facilities, its scale of operation and range of courses. The capital needed for these developments was raised almost entirely through commercial sponsorship, and by the college itself.

3 On incorporation in 1993, the college took over responsibility for the whole Capel Manor site, including the grade II listed Georgian house. The gardens and the buildings on the site have been completely restored, and several new educational facilities have been established including the Francis Perry library, the Greater London Arboricultural and Countryside Centre and the National Gardening Centre. The college has also opened two small, additional centres at Gunnersbury Park in West London, and Upminster Court in Essex. Plans to take over the farm at Forty Hall, adjacent to the main site, are at an advanced stage. An equine centre and museum of the working horse is being developed with Heritage Memorial Fund support at Forty Hall. This will eventually replace the services of a local riding school used to support the college's horse studies courses.

4 Capel Manor is the only specialist horticultural centre in Greater London. Prior to incorporation, most of its students came from the London Boroughs of Enfield and Barnet. It now attracts students from the whole of Greater London and further afield. The nearest comparable colleges are a higher education agricultural college 26 miles away, and a general further education college 18 miles away. The latter has a large agricultural section offering some courses which are similar to those of Capel Manor. The range of courses offered by the college reflects the need in London and the home counties for staff who are qualified and vocationally experienced in the land-based industries. Some of the courses, including arboricultural, professional gardening, equine and animal care courses are unique in the London area. Capel Manor is the only college in England offering horse driving and heavy horse training as an integral part of its full-time course provision. Employment opportunities for students completing courses are extensive and growing. At the time of the

inspection, there were 196 full-time and 1,486 part-time students enrolled at the college. Student numbers by age, by level of study and by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figures 1, 2, and 3. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4.

5 The college's mission is 'to promote the understanding and enjoyment of plants and animals for career, business and leisure purposes'.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

6 Since incorporation, the range of subjects offered has been extended beyond amenity horticulture and environmental studies to include floristry, equine studies, arboriculture, countryside and animal care. Opportunities to offer courses for small specialist markets have been exploited in balloon artistry, carriage driving and heavy horse handling. With the exception of floristry and small animal care, all subjects can be studied full time to national diploma level, although most students study part time. Degrees in garden design and in environment and business management are run jointly with Middlesex University. There are currently no access courses for entry to higher education or compact arrangements with universities. The college has joined the Hertfordshire Access consortium with the intention of making such provision available in September 1998. The opportunities which exist for students to progress to higher level courses within the college are not made as clear to students as they might be.

7 The needs of amateur gardeners are served by the provision of short courses in garden design, floristry, flower arranging and botanical illustration. As there are few local authority funded adult education classes for those with a leisure interest in land-based subjects, many students enrol on Royal Horticultural Society courses, though they do not take the final examinations. A few refresher courses in floristry and arboriculture and amenity forestry are offered, and a five-week garden design course prepares students to run their own businesses. The current provision for professional updating does not make full use of the college's resources, and all the courses are not yet modularised to enable students to take single modules if they wish. The college has created an enterprise unit to identify ways of promoting a wider and more flexible range of leisure and professional updating courses from September 1997.

8 The college has, through the patronage of the Duchess of Devonshire, governors, trustees and staff, established a reputation as a prominent venue for the promotional activities of companies associated with the land-based industries. In the last 10 years, the college has attracted sponsorship exceeding £2 million, particularly for the design and construction of gardens for the National Gardening Centre and demonstration gardens sponsored by 'Gardeners' Which?'. Together, these attract more than 100,000 visitors a year and generate a significant income. The London Borough of Enfield has adopted the gardens as part of the leisure provision within the borough and makes a financial

contribution to ensure free access for residents of the borough on two days each year. Sponsorship has also supported the expansion of courses, provided resources, enabled the college to refurbish many of its buildings and created scholarships for students. The national diploma equine studies modules on heavy horse handling and carriage horse driving have been sponsored, respectively, by a department store and a veterinary drugs company. Musical soirees sponsored by a high street bank are held annually in conjunction with the orchestra of a local school.

9 There are good links with industry which provide varied opportunities for students to learn off-site. However, the college is not fully exploiting opportunities for assessing national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in the workplace, and has been slow to extend the provision of full-cost courses, consultancy services and modern apprenticeships. There are few examples of combining an NVQ programme with another course. At incorporation, the governors decided to concentrate on extending the range of Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) funded provision, but are now seeking to offer more courses funded from other sources.

10 Capel Manor maintains its public prominence through a range of activities. All 34 London mayors are invited to the Mayors' Day, one of two open days when large numbers of people visit the grounds. The access the general public has to the college's gardens plays an important role in raising the profile of land-based training and education. The visitors' centre houses a floristry training shop where students gain retail experience, sell finished pieces, and exhibit their work. The college's grounds are used as a venue for horticultural society exhibitions and open air theatre groups. Equine studies students benefit from opportunities to handle heavy horses and carriage teams in public through exhibition work across the country, and through stable yard demonstrations at weekends. Arboriculture students take part in 'logging days' with volunteer conservation groups in woodlands where access is restricted and felled trees have to be removed by horses.

11 There are close links with local schools. In particular, the college grounds are used as a valuable resource for work relating to the national curriculum requirements for children at key stages 1 and 2. In 1996, 17,000 children visited the college to study subjects such as the adaption of plants and animals, the use of maps and compasses, and conservation. The college's resources are also used by local further education colleges and special schools to provide specialist courses for students with special learning difficulties and/or disabilities. For example, a consortium of heads of local special schools, secondary heads and college managers has devised a 'link' course in horticultural skills leading to NVQ levels 1 and 2, as well as the National Proficiency Test Council 'land-based industries' certificate. In conjunction with Enfield Social Services, the college has supported a horticultural therapy group whose members work in their own purpose built garden on the Capel Manor estate.

12 Staff from the college have been seconded to a number of off-site projects. A European Social Fund project, 'building for jobs', managed on behalf of Enfield Borough Council trains people in the Lee Valley area in landscape skills. Similar projects in the past have assisted groups such as women returning to work after a career break, although these courses have not been continued beyond the life of the project. The college also manages the Royal Parks apprenticeship scheme, based at Regents Park, which is a day-release scheme running over three years. It has also jointly with Middlesex University set up a centre for environmental business management based at the University.

13 There are close and productive links with North London TEC which have resulted in successful competitiveness fund bids. These have included the funding of a multi-media project which has provided the information technology facilities required for access to the Internet, and an independent telephone careers advisory service for land-based courses. In collaboration with Enfield Borough Council, the college is involved in an advisory group for the Local Agenda 21 government initiative which sets targets for local communities to influence actively their environment. Agencies working in partnership with the college report a positive response from the college to suggestions for new courses.

14 The college's activities and courses receive good press coverage. Promotional material is informative and of a good standard. The strategic plan is informed by market research which is gathered from a variety of sources. In 1996-97, although recruitment targets were met overall, there was a significant shortfall in recruitment to many courses, sometimes by as much as 30 per cent. The courses office maintains detailed records of applications and interviews. It identifies the current position with regard to this on a regular basis, although the information is not always directed towards addressing the recruitment shortfall. The college does not have a formal marketing strategy, although two staff now contribute part of their time to promotional activities.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

15 The corporation has 19 members. They provide expertise in business, education, estates management, finance and personnel management. Some have extensive expertise in equitation, garden design, horticulture and landscaping. The board recognises that it currently lacks expertise in floristry and is addressing this. Four board members are women. There are no members from minority ethnic backgrounds. The governing body comprises the principal, 10 business members, a member from the TEC, three co-opted members, two members representing the local community, one elected member of staff and a student member. At the time of the inspection, there was one vacancy. Governors understand their roles and responsibilities and they are involved in developing the strategic direction of the college. They have adopted a code of conduct and keep a register of

interests. Governors visit the college regularly, and are involved in many of its activities. There is a productive working relationship between the governors and senior managers. The powers delegated to the principal are clear and appropriate. Corporation meetings are held three times a year. Attendance at the full board and subcommittee meetings is low, at around 60 per cent. All governors receive an induction to their work and have attended training sessions in the college. Recent training has included updating on funding, self-assessment, and the process of inspection.

16 The corporation manages its business well. There is a timetable of meetings and an agreed schedule for the distribution of agendas, papers and minutes. The clerk to the corporation is a member of the college's executive board. Governors receive written and oral reports from the principal and senior managers, and speak highly of the quality and accuracy of the information they receive. They monitor financial matters closely. Much of the detailed business is carried out by five subcommittees: audit; finance and general purposes; health and safety; remuneration; and search. The subcommittees have clear terms of reference. The chairs of subcommittees present minutes and make recommendations to full corporation meetings. In 1995, governors established a quality assurance panel to monitor quality assurance systems in the college. Despite requests for information, governors have not received regular reports on the curriculum or on academic standards. With the exception of recent monitoring of their attendance, there is a lack of clarity over governors' plans to introduce performance indicators to evaluate their own performance.

17 The college's executive board comprises the principal, the curriculum manager, the corporation secretary and the director of estates and buildings. The executive board meets every two weeks. Curriculum team leaders, who are responsible for groups of courses, meet with members of the executive board to form a managers' meeting. These meetings provide an opportunity for managers who are not members of the executive board to raise issues and contribute to the college's strategic planning. Minutes are generally well produced and responsibility for action is identified, but timescales for action are not always specified. A curriculum manager has been appointed to direct the management and delivery of the curriculum. Inspectors found that there had been a lack of direction and support for curriculum team leaders, evident in the failure to monitor the implementation of policies for tutorial support, information technology and some aspects of staff deployment. The management of the college's estates, including specialist facilities and the wide range of sponsorships and promotional activities, is effective.

18 The process of strategic planning includes appropriate consultation with staff. There are 'away days' for managers, and regular consultation meetings for all of the college's staff. The planning process is understood and supported by staff. Governors are involved in the development of the

college's strategic plan. Priorities are agreed by senior managers and governors and the board gives final approval. There are no development plans for individual sections, specifying aims and objectives to match those in the college's strategic plan.

19 Course management meetings address issues relating to the curriculum, teaching and learning methods, course review and evaluation, and students' attendance. However, there is no common framework for the organisation and content of these meetings and their frequency varies, ranging from every two weeks in one section to once a term in another. Some sections are well organised; others rely too much on informal arrangements. At the time of the inspection, the college's management structure was being reorganised. The senior management of the college should act urgently to complete the implementation of the management reorganisation, and to address the lack of formality and consistency in monitoring the delivery of the curriculum.

20 Communications within the college are generally good. There are meetings of all college staff at least once a term, and newsletters cover a range of general and specialist topics. The college's academic board meets once a term. The membership of the board has recently been reviewed, and its recent work is more clearly focused on issues affecting the curriculum. The board is responsible for overseeing course approvals and validations. It has not yet fully addressed the poor levels of achievement on some courses.

21 There is an effective method of formulating and allocating staffing budgets to heads of section. The college's finance manager conducts a monthly review of all budgets, and provides budget holders with a monthly financial report. The college has clear financial regulations and controls which have been approved by the corporation board.

22 Since incorporation the governors and managers of the college have placed a high priority on working towards convergence in funding. Significant efficiency gains have been achieved without incurring a deficit. The college's average level of funding for 1995-96 was £29.78 per unit. The median for London general further education colleges was £20.47 per unit, and for agricultural colleges, £23.57 per unit. This figure does not reflect the efficiency gains made by the college, since over 50 per cent of its work is currently funded through the FEFC's much lower demand led rate. This means that the actual average level of funding is substantially lower than the figure quoted. The college's income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1996 are shown in figures 5 and 6.

23 The college's management information system provides accurate and timely financial reports for governors. Members of the executive board have access to information including student profiles, trends on enrolment and reports on quality. This information is generally accurate and senior managers express confidence in the system. Section heads and

curriculum team leaders have access to information but do not have the knowledge and experience to make full use of the system. Management information, particularly that relating to students' achievements made available for the inspection, was sometimes incomplete and inaccurate. Some managers and teachers do not yet fully understand the importance of setting targets and currently there is only limited use of performance indicators in areas such as retention and students' achievements.

24 Through the health and safety committee, the college has distributed a well-thought-out health and safety policy and code of practice that has been approved by the corporation. All managers have carried out a risk analysis and have to confirm in writing that they have received and read the health and safety policy. There is an equal opportunities policy but mechanisms for monitoring the implementation of the policy are not fully established. The college has begun to monitor enrolment and employment data in order to identify possible breaches of the policy and take remedial action, if required. A comprehensive disability statement has been prepared which covers topics such as admissions arrangements, educational facilities and support, recruitment and retention of staff, complaints procedures, examination and assessment, support procedures, students' welfare and physical access, as well as the funding of students with disabilities.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

25 Initial enquiries about courses are handled by the courses office. There is a clear admissions procedure for full-time and part-time courses. Prospective students are sent a detailed information pack, including information about the college and courses, application forms, details of course fees, an information sheet on the land-based industries and an invitation to advice sessions and open days. Some applicants are invited to spend a 'taster' day in college prior to commencing courses. Interviews are conducted by course managers but the outcomes of these are not always recorded carefully. A new interview form has been developed with the intention of ensuring greater consistency in recording results of interviews. Two references are obtained for all full-time students prior to acceptance. This can lead to a long delay in informing some students of the outcome of their application. Applications for part-time courses are acknowledged and details of enrolment are sent, but places are not confirmed until enrolment in September. Some students are recruited onto courses that are inappropriate for their needs. In a few cases, students are placed on a course at the wrong level.

26 All full-time students follow a one-week induction programme at the beginning of each year of their course. The programme is planned to meet students' needs. Staff ensure that all aspects of induction are covered, and students sign a checklist to confirm this. There are comprehensive induction handbooks for most courses which set out college and course

information clearly. Students sign a learning agreement at the end of the induction period. An informative student diary, which contains details of the charter, college procedures, and students' rights and responsibilities, is given to all students and is used regularly by many of them. There are structured arrangements for the accreditation of students' prior learning. The tutors' handbook outlines the accreditation procedures.

27 Staff are aware of the role of the learning support unit established in September 1996, and liaison between teachers and the learning support unit is developing. All students take basic skills tests during the initial induction week, the results are circulated to tutors, and students who need it are offered support. Students who receive support enter into a documented learning agreement. However, there is little planning of tasks to be completed and students do not receive any documented review of their progress. Only 59 of the 137 students identified as needing learning support this year have received such support. Some students who have signed learning support agreements fail to attend. Students at the Gunnersbury Park and Upminster Court do not currently have access to formalised learning support.

28 All students have a personal tutor. There is a handbook for students which gives a useful overview of tutorial arrangements but it lacks detail about the frequency of tutorials. Students receive considerable informal support and guidance from tutors who are friendly and helpful, but there are inconsistencies and weaknesses in the organisation and delivery of tutorials. Tutorial times are not always identified on timetables. Few students receive regular formal tutorials; for example, students following the national certificate in animal care course in 1996-97 had received only one tutorial by April 1997. On some courses with low achievement rates, students have no formal tutorials. In a few tutorials, tutors follow a programme of relevant topics and students make useful plans for action to meet their needs. In some others there is little or no review of the progress students are making and, consequently, no action plans for learning.

29 There is a lack of consistency in the way in which the college reports to students, parents and employers on students' progress. All students are entitled to receive regular progress reports, but the frequency, quality and format of reports varies greatly across curriculum areas. Most employed students receive termly reports, but some of these are issued too late to enable the students to improve quickly enough. In one case, reports on work during the autumn term were not issued until the following March. Students are encouraged to maintain personal records of achievement. Some students have records of achievements from school but these are not regularly updated and are used mainly as a file for certificates. Some course teams have devised their own records of achievements and these are generally well maintained.

30 Attendance is recorded twice daily at the start of the morning and afternoon sessions. The college is slow to respond to prolonged absence by students; absences are not followed up until the student has been absent for two weeks. Students often arrived late for classes during the inspection.

31 There is no professional counselling service at the college. Students have access to external counselling services on request. The college has recently arranged for a local clergyman to be available for personal support but few students are aware of this service. There is currently no guidance by the local careers service at the college. Students are able to make an appointment to visit the careers office in Enfield. Teachers often give informal careers guidance, and students value this.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

32 The strengths outweighed the weaknesses in 55 per cent of the lessons inspected. This is lower than the average of 63 per cent for all lessons observed during the 1995-96 inspection programme, according to the *Chief Inspector's Annual Report 1995-96*. In 5 per cent of sessions, weaknesses outweighed strengths, compared with a figure nationally of 8 per cent, recorded in the same report. The average attendance in the classes inspected was 78 per cent, compared with an average of 76 per cent for all classes inspected in 1995-96. The following table summarises the grades awarded to the lessons inspected.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade 1	2	3	4	5	Totals
NVQ	4	8	2	1	0	15
Other vocational	4	9	15	2	0	30
Other	3	3	5	0	0	11
Total	11	20	22	3	0	56

33 The preparation and planning of courses and lessons is generally satisfactory. Most courses have schemes of work which in many cases are shared with students. Useful course handbooks containing information about assessment and course content are given to students during induction. Some schemes of work are underdeveloped, and do not include details of the range of activities to be undertaken, the expected learning outcomes or the assessment procedures.

34 Relationships between students and teachers are generally good. Most teachers are enthusiastic and are committed to helping their students to achieve success. Students are generally responsive and keen to learn. Some teachers employ an appropriate range of teaching methods to stimulate learning, which take into account the differing abilities and experience of students. Good use is made in some lessons of questions aimed at checking that learning has taken place, developing understanding

and consolidating the students' knowledge. In a minority of lessons, students were given little opportunity to participate in the work by asking questions or making comments. A few, ostensibly practical, sessions were taught as lectures; there was no use of models or specimens, and little participation on students' part other than listening to the teacher. The quality of visual aids used by teachers in lessons varies widely. Good use is made of demonstration material and plants in some lessons to illustrate the work. In floristry, there are effective 'flash cards' to extend the range of plant identifications. In some lessons, teachers used overhead transparencies. These were sometimes of poor quality and difficult to read. Extensive use is made of handouts to reduce the students' note taking, but in some lessons these are of poor quality.

35 The teaching of key skills varies in quality. Many courses provide opportunities for students to develop the skills of communication, problem solving, and of working on their own or in a team. The use of information technology in lessons and in the presentation of assignments, however, is generally poor. Information technology is not integrated with other specialist courses. In equine studies, students receive little instruction in the use of information technology.

36 The teaching of floristry is sound overall, sometimes exciting, challenging and innovative. However, good ideas are not always fully developed, and some teachers use too narrow a range of teaching methods which do not always take into account the differing needs of the students in the group. In one session which involved small group discussion, teachers failed to provide an appropriate structure and students were not clear about the aims of the discussion. In some classes, teachers make effective use of overhead projectors and other practical equipment. In many lessons, the practical demonstrations by teachers are of high quality and enable students to respond by producing good-quality work. In some lessons, students arrived late and left early. In one case, this meant that the assessment of a pair of students working together could not be completed because one had left.

37 In horticulture, teachers have a thorough knowledge of plants which they impart to students with enthusiasm. The practical and theoretical aspects of courses are well integrated. Timetables are organised so that one member of staff often teaches the group for a whole morning or afternoon session. During this time, classes move between the classroom-based theory sessions and practical activities, which include demonstrations and horticultural tasks in the gardens or glasshouse areas. Most teachers successfully maintain the interest of their students through the pace and content of the work. In a few practical sessions, time was wasted because not enough tools were provided for the students to start work immediately. Some comments made by teachers on students' written work do not give enough guidance on how the work could be improved.

38 Most lessons in arboriculture and countryside studies had a balance of strengths and weaknesses. Teaching and learning in practical sessions was generally of high quality. The best lessons were well prepared. Lesson objectives were made clear to the students and were closely linked to theoretical studies. The procedure for carrying out tasks was explained clearly and students were closely supervised. For example, in a tree-pruning session for NVQ arboriculture students which took place in the college grounds, the equipment and tools were readily available, enabling the students to start work promptly. Students were given clear instructions in the use of the equipment, and clear guidance on health and safety. The tutor closely supervised the activities, and pointed to ways in which students could improve their performance. In a few practical sessions, weaknesses in organisation and management reduced the effectiveness of the work, and students' time was not always used productively. In theory classes, frequent and effective reference was made to practical applications. In some theory classes, however, insufficient attention was given to identifying and meeting the different needs of all of the students.

39 On equine studies courses, teachers have established a good rapport with students. In the practical equine sessions, teachers actively involved all students in the work and set a challenging pace which enabled students to improve their skills. In theory lessons, teachers failed to vary their methods sufficiently to maintain students' interest. They did not involve the students actively enough by encouraging them to ask questions and giving them opportunities to express their own ideas. Work experience is used effectively to enable students to develop their skills, but the scope of the routine stable duties is limited. Students on courses in small animal care do not have access in the college itself to a sufficient variety or quantity of animals, and this restricts the opportunities students have to practise their skills. Arrangements have been made for students to work with dogs and cats at a commercial kennels about 15 miles from the college. The college owns no exotic animals itself, but uses a local expert and his animals to support learning in that aspect of the curriculum.

40 Most students on vocational courses undertake work experience as a part of their studies. In most cases, this is well managed and monitored. Students of equine studies, for example, complete an assessed project as part of their work experience and their skills are assessed against a standard list of competences. Practical tasks in floristry are closely linked to work experience, and students' work is sold commercially in the floristry training shop. The use of practising professionals to teach specialist aspects of some vocational courses adds an important practical dimension to students' learning. Most students of countryside and arboriculture are able to participate in real work projects in a wide range of suitable locations outside the college, to supplement the limited opportunities which can be offered on the college site.

41 In most subjects homework and assignments are set regularly, and marked and returned quickly. Many teachers are careful to correct grammar and spelling errors in written work and, in some cases, the work is annotated with critical but helpful written comments. There are examples of comprehensive assessment schemes within which students receive a continuous update on how they are progressing. Assessment criteria and records of grades are not always clear. Sometimes the grading sheets are not suited to recording the achievement of the task being undertaken. On horticulture courses, assignment briefs are usually challenging and students receive an assignment schedule which enables them to plan their time effectively. In a successful floristry session, while some students were having their bouquets individually assessed by the teacher, the remaining students had been set a different floristry piece for practice so that they made best use of their time. Many assignments in equine studies are theoretical and library-based. They do not offer students sufficient challenge to produce original or investigative work or to use the practical facilities of the college as a resource.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

42 Students who attend regularly work well in lessons and enjoy their studies. In the best sessions observed, the students were responsive, supportive of one another and able to work well in groups. Retention rates across the college are poor; in 1995-96, on average, 19.8 per cent of all those enrolled failed to complete their courses. In the Royal Horticultural Society general certificate grade 1 course, 57 of the 100 students initially enrolled in 1994 completed the course in 1996. Of 10 students who enrolled on the national diploma in arboriculture course in September 1996, only three are still attending the college. Most students on courses leading to NVQs in floristry at levels 1, 2 and 3 complete their course, though many do not achieve the full award. There has been insufficient analysis of the reasons for poor retention rates, and little action to address possible causes.

43 Many students achieve the knowledge and skills they require for employment. Assessed coursework meets the standards of awarding bodies. A few arboriculture and countryside assignments produced by students are of a high standard, well researched and well presented. The quality of many floristry and horticulture assignments is good and students demonstrate good presentational skills. Students on equine studies courses develop their riding skills to a high standard. They generally achieve standards appropriate to the level of their course in their written work. Attendance and punctuality are poor on the national certificate in animal care and only 55 per cent of the students on the course achieved the qualification, a figure below the national average.

44 Students' ability to use information technology varies across the college but, in general, their skills in information technology are not well developed. In most subjects students do not have the opportunity to

experience vocationally relevant applications of information technology. There were few examples of the use of information technology in the completion of written assignments.

45 Eighty-three per cent of students, aged 16 to 18, in their final year of study on the intermediate vocational courses included in the Department for Education and Employment's (DfEE's) 1996 performance tables were successful. This places the college in the top third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure. These results, however, do not reflect the diversity of courses at the college or the large number of mature students. Of the 789 students enrolled on one-year courses in 1996, 644 completed their studies and 508 (64 per cent) passed. Significant numbers of students, however, fail to achieve certification within the target time.

46 There were low overall pass rates in 1996 for most courses in countryside and arboriculture. Nevertheless, a high proportion of successful students entered employment or continued their studies. Some students achieved additional qualifications. Most students showed appropriate motivation in lessons, but some were easily distracted. Most students' notes are well ordered. In practical lessons, students pay due regard to health and safety. The level of practical ability demonstrated by students varied widely.

47 Students of floristry are generally well motivated and are able to produce floristry pieces of a high standard. They are often able to describe the importance of the various processes involved in the construction of a floristry piece. There were examples of work which displayed considerable artistic flair. Most students have produced extensive plant identity portfolios with photographs, drawings and pressed leaves, which provide them with a useful resource for assignment work. In some classes, students were not involved in the choice of flowers for displays, which limited the scope for individuality and original design in the work produced. Success rates for students who complete courses are generally satisfactory, but retention is poor on many courses.

48 Many students on courses in horticulture and arboriculture who complete their courses successfully progress to relevant employment. However, only 16 per cent of students taking the NVQ level 2 in floristry progressed to work in floristry in 1996.

49 Students and staff are frequently involved in shows and demonstrations of practical work outside the college. Students from many courses have received awards from external bodies. For example, in 1996, students were involved with the design and production of two gardens which were awarded gold medals at the Chelsea Flower Show. Horses exhibited by students of the college gained high places in county shows in 1996, including the Hertfordshire County Show, the Royal Show and the Essex Heavy Horse Show. Two students were awarded prizes by the Society of Floristry, and another floristry student was the European Balloon Artistry prize winner in 1996.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

50 The college has a quality assurance policy, which is 'based on defined and measurable standards and monitored and evaluated against agreed, realistic targets'. Quality standards have been developed for teaching, tutorials and many cross-college services. Each standard has suggested measures and targets and, in some cases, staff are allocated responsibility for action within a specific timescale. Some of the targets are unclear, and the measures for monitoring their achievement lack rigour. In 1995-96, a report was produced for governors based on a monitoring of these standards but the report recorded only the achievement or non-achievement of targets without any evidence or comment. The college is reviewing and continuing the development of defining standards, setting targets and monitoring processes.

51 The quality assurance system includes a process of curriculum evaluation and development which has existed for many years and has been reviewed regularly. Students' views are sought through questionnaires three times each year. The first questionnaire covers marketing, initial guidance, enrolment and induction. The second looks at the implementation and delivery of the course, and the third seeks to evaluate the overall effectiveness of the course. After each questionnaire, course managers are required to collate results. The course team is required to produce an action plan which addresses the issues raised by students. The plan allocates responsibility and deadlines for the completion of each action. Although the process is followed for all courses, there is considerable variation in the thoroughness with which plans are completed.

52 Separate questionnaires are also used to seek the views of students who leave the course early, the views of employers, and the views students have of their work placements. A questionnaire is also used to obtain the views of teachers on the quality of course delivery. The results of all these surveys and profiles are included by course managers in an annual report. The report provides a summary of the survey outcomes and gives details of subsequent actions. It also includes the action planned as a result of comments by external verifiers. Although the college has been slow to address some of the issues identified in annual reports, there is clear evidence of action taken to improve the quality of courses. There is no formal process for informing students or teachers of the outcomes of this review process.

53 The course managers' annual reports are considered by the college 'quality' group, which includes representatives from the college executive group, academic board, curriculum sectors and a student. The group is charged with the development and monitoring of the quality assurance system. Originally the group met monthly, but since 1996 meetings have been less frequent. Attendance at meetings has been inconsistent.

Following the appointment of a curriculum manager in 1997, the membership of the group has been reviewed and a regular time provided for its meetings which has enabled members to attend regularly. This group reports to the academic board. In many cases, the academic board receives oral and not written reports from the quality group. Heads of curriculum sections provide reports for the governors' quality panel, which was formed in 1995 with a membership of five governors. The panel meets at least three times a year to consider and review matters relating to quality across the college. Throughout the quality assurance system, the use of performance indicators and targets is underdeveloped, and many of the reviews lack quantitative analysis. Some staff say that they do not understand the system fully or see the relevance of all the forms used. A draft quality manual to improve awareness of the system is being produced by the curriculum manager. It is almost complete.

54 Internal verification takes place on all courses, but the formal process is not well developed. There are no written reports from internal verifiers, and monitoring of the process is informal. In recognition of this, the curriculum manager and heads of sections have prepared a draft proposal, for presentation to the executive and academic board, to establish a college verification policy steering group. The proposed membership and terms of reference of the steering group directly address the weaknesses in the internal verification process.

55 There is a well-established system of staff appraisal which includes lesson observations by line managers. The appraisal documentation is comprehensive and is usually completed thoroughly. The system aims to support staff who generally regard it as a valuable aid to their professional and personal development, and a way of improving communication between staff and managers. It identifies training and staff-development needs and, in some cases, these have been successfully met.

56 The college has a staff-development policy, but the aims of the process are not being fully met at present. Staff-development budgets are devolved to sections using historical interest as a basis for allocation. There is also provision for sections to bid for additional resources. Staff are able to apply for staff development by making a direct request to their line manager. There is no systematic link between the provision of staff development and the strategic plan and there has been insufficient training in the use of information technology to enable staff to support students. There is an induction programme for new staff, which the college has identified as being in need of improvement. Plans for a new staff-development funding strategy are now being made in readiness for implementation in September 1997.

57 The quality assurance processes, staff-development strategy and related policies and procedures have been rigorously reviewed over the past year, and the newly-appointed curriculum manager is implementing a series of changes to address deficiencies. The extent to which the college

has moved to improve quality assurance processes since the appointment of the curriculum manager was clear to inspectors. The college has recently attained the Investor in People award.

58 The college has clearly-worded charters for students, staff, employers, visitors and schools, all of which are subject to continuous review. Each charter lists the college's commitments to the appropriate recipient, and clearly identifies its expectations of them. Copies of the charters are readily available, and are issued to all staff and students. The students' charter, which states the college's commitment to equal opportunities and outlines the complaints process, is included in the students' diary.

59 The college produced a self-assessment report prior to inspection. The report was developed by senior managers in consultation with staff, and did not derive directly from the quality assurance systems in place in the college. Some teachers believe that they did not contribute to its development. All staff received a copy. The report addresses each of the headings in Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*, but does not clearly identify strengths and weaknesses. The report failed to identify some of the weaknesses subsequently identified by inspectors.

RESOURCES

Staffing

60 Most staff have been appointed recently; about two-thirds have been at the college for fewer than six years. Staff have appropriate professional qualifications. Most have relevant industrial experience and their close links with industry help to maintain an awareness of current developments. Animal care teachers lack breadth of experience of the industry. Most teachers have assessor qualifications. Only 25 per cent of teachers have a teaching qualification, which is significant in view of the weaknesses in teaching that were identified by inspectors. Some teachers' computing skills are insufficiently developed. The college currently employs 79 staff of whom 42 are full time.

61 There is a clear procedure for allocating academic staffing costs to the four sections, based on student numbers and FEFC-funded units. This has effectively raised managers' awareness of course costs. However, the arrangements to use teachers based in other sections are not always effective and, as a result, opportunities for the better deployment of staff are missed. Many teachers have a high administrative load in addition to their teaching duties. The college executive has acknowledged there are aspects of section and course managers' work that could be done by administrative staff, and the distribution of tasks is being reviewed. There is little monitoring or review of workloads of staff. Some staff do not manage their workloads efficiently. Tutorial work is not evenly distributed amongst staff. Although part-time teachers bring valuable current experience of industry to the teaching, in some areas they are not fully involved in all aspects of the work of the course teams. The college has

sought to increase the proportion of teaching done by part-time staff and this has enabled it to develop its provision.

62 Technical support is sufficient except in information technology where it is barely adequate. The lack of technician support prevents the full integration of information technology with other aspects of the curriculum. There is adequate technical support to maintain the college's computers but help for students working on their own is often not available.

Equipment/learning resources

63 The college has an extensive collection of plants, both protected and outdoor, from a wide range of habitats. There is a good supply of machines and equipment for practical horticulture work and sufficient materials for practical work in floristry. The floristry workrooms are well equipped. For countryside and arboriculture students there is a good supply of chainsaws, and a satisfactory range and quantity of other handtools, and safety equipment, such as ballistic trousers. Some equipment is becoming out of date. The college does not have a planned approach to the replacement of equipment. Equine studies students have access to sufficient horses to support most of their learning. The quantity and range of animals for animal care students, however, is inadequate for some aspects of the curriculum.

64 There is a good range of learning materials in most subjects, including books, periodicals, slides, videos and a small, but developing, range of compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) databases, one of which has been produced by the college in collaboration with a nearby general further education college. The stock of books is generally adequate and, in some specialisms, good. The rapid rise in numbers of students, coupled with the provision of new courses, has resulted in a few shortcomings. For example, there are shortages in the range and quantity of books for animal care students. Access for students from Gunnersbury Park to the Capel Manor library is being improved. This will partially compensate for the inadequacies in the books available to students who are not at the main site.

65 Although the ratio of full-time equivalent students to computers is poor at 19:1, there are generally enough computers to meet the current low demand, though some students reported difficulty in finding spare machines at peak times. The number of computers will not be sufficient to support the required development of information technology in the curriculum. There is little use of specialist software, or of vocational applications of standard software. Liaison between teachers and the staff responsible for the library and information technology should be strengthened. There are insufficient manuals in the open access computer room to help students when they are working on their own. Most teaching rooms are equipped with an overhead projector and screen.

Accommodation

66 Much of the college's accommodation is of a high standard. Most classrooms on the main site are of a good quality, well furnished and of sufficient size. The rooms are generally well decorated, clean and tidy. Access to rooms above ground-floor level is difficult for students with restricted mobility, and there is no wheelchair access to the library and the computer rooms. The college grounds have good access for visitors and students with restricted mobility. Some gardens have been developed to meet specific needs. For example, there are scented gardens for people with visual impairment, and raised beds for people who use wheelchairs. The extensive grounds contain numerous flowers, shrubs and trees which are maintained to a high standard, and provide an attractive setting for the buildings. The opening of centres at Gunnersbury Park and Upminster has made some of the college's provision more accessible to students who live at some distance from Capel Manor itself.

67 The Capel Manor site is subject to planning control which has restricted new developments. Developments which have been possible have been based on glasshouse or barn constructions to match existing buildings and, as a result, some of the accommodation is not always fully suited to its purpose. The new accommodation is multipurpose; rooms of different sizes can be created with the use of partitions. Sometimes rooms designed for practical work are used for theory lessons, which is not always appropriate. There is good provision of covered areas for practical work when weather conditions make outside work impractical. The floristry accommodation is a compact unit conveniently grouped around a grassed area and offering easy movement between the various rooms. There is a purpose-built classroom for countryside and arboriculture students which is used for general teaching and specialist practical work. The college is rationalising and redeveloping its accommodation in response to the development of new courses.

68 Although the Capel Manor grounds provide sites for many aspects of practical work, they do not have the range and diversity of habitats and quantity of plant material required for countryside and arboriculture students. However, the college makes good use of numerous off-site locations to provide realistic working environments for students. There is insufficient housing for the number and range of stock required for animal care students. Although there is limited stabling and a lack of some other specialist equine facilities on the Capel Manor site, these shortcomings are largely compensated for by the use of a riding stable about seven miles from the college.

69 The refectory is too small to provide for the needs of students and visitors at peak times. Communal areas for students are inadequate. The continuing growth in student numbers and an increasing emphasis on students working on their own have significantly added to the load on the library. There is insufficient space for students to study privately.

When whole classes are using the library they are a distraction to students wishing to work on their own. There are outline plans to expand into an area below the library. There are proposals to address shortcomings in some specialist accommodation, setting out various stages of development. Although managers have a clear view of developments, they acknowledge that there is a need to draw these proposals together. The accommodation strategy is due for revision in 1997. Monitoring of room use is at an early stage of development and the college has identified it as a priority for this year.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

70 The strengths of the college are:

- appropriately-experienced and supportive governors who carry out their business effectively
- effective management of the estate, including the organisation and implementation of sponsorships
- sound financial management
- close and productive links with the TEC, Enfield Borough Council and schools
- the diversification of courses to respond to the wider needs of students in London
- an open approach to strategic planning which involves all staff
- the informative literature available on the college and its courses
- the unique learning environment offered by the Capel Manor grounds
- the many teachers who have recent or relevant industrial experience
- the amount of informal support and guidance received by students
- practical work which is generally of a high standard
- some good specialist accommodation and equipment
- the comprehensive staff appraisal system
- the achievement of the Investor in People award.

71 If it is to improve its provision further, the college should address:

- the need to complete the implementation of the revised curriculum management structure
- the lack of clear progression routes within the college
- the need to ensure that students are recruited to courses of an appropriate level
- the need to improve the teaching and information technology skills of some teachers

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- the need to improve the provision of and support for information technology
 - inconsistencies and weaknesses in the delivery and recording of tutorials
 - poor retention rates and achievements in some subjects
 - the variable quality of course reviews and the monitoring of subsequent action
 - the limited use and understanding of performance indicators
 - inadequacies in the provision for small animal care courses.

FIGURES

-
- 1 Percentage student numbers by age (as at July 1996)

 - 2 Percentage student numbers by level of study (as at July 1996)

 - 3 Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at July 1996)

 - 4 Staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (as at April 1997)

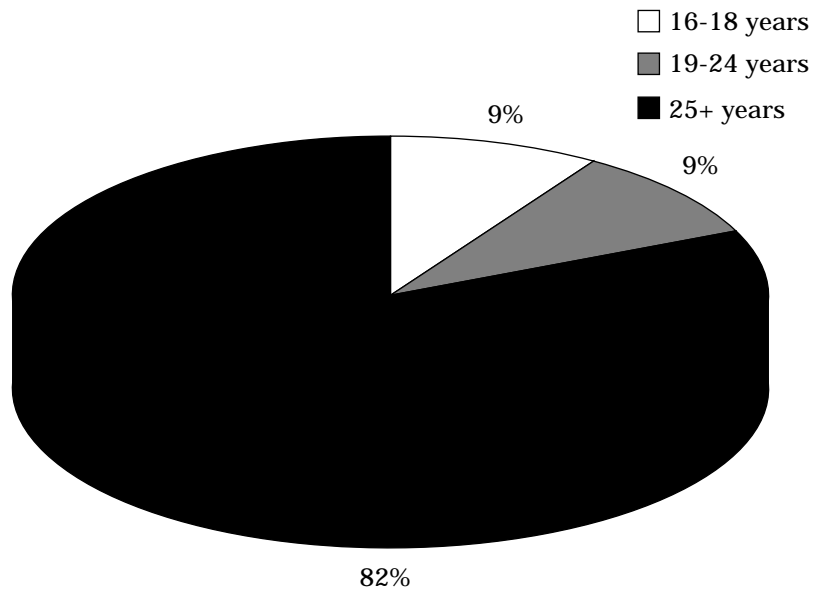
 - 5 Income (for 12 months to July 1996)

 - 6 Expenditure (for 12 months to July 1996)

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

Figure 1

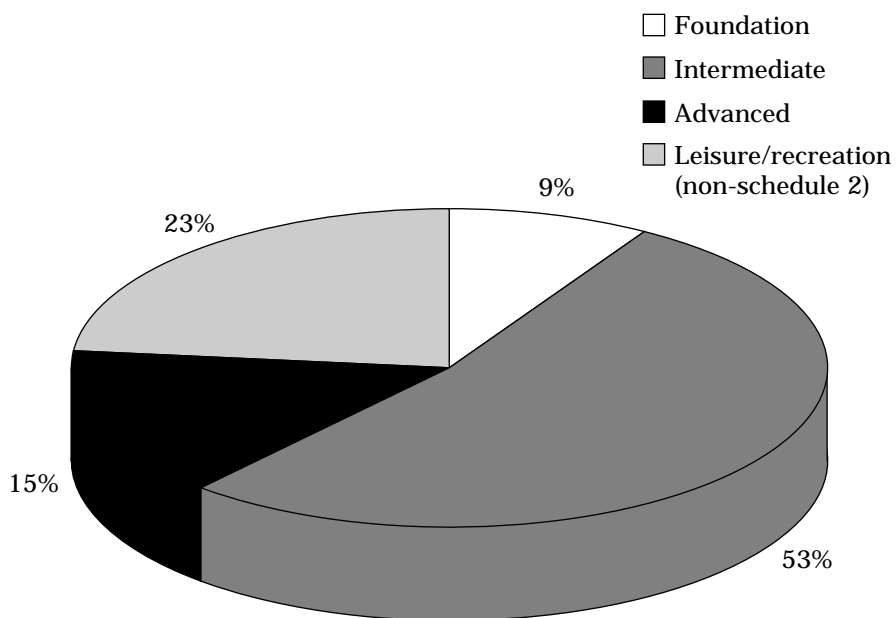
Capel Manor Horticultural and Environmental Centre: percentage student numbers by age (as at July 1996)



Student numbers: 1,682

Figure 2

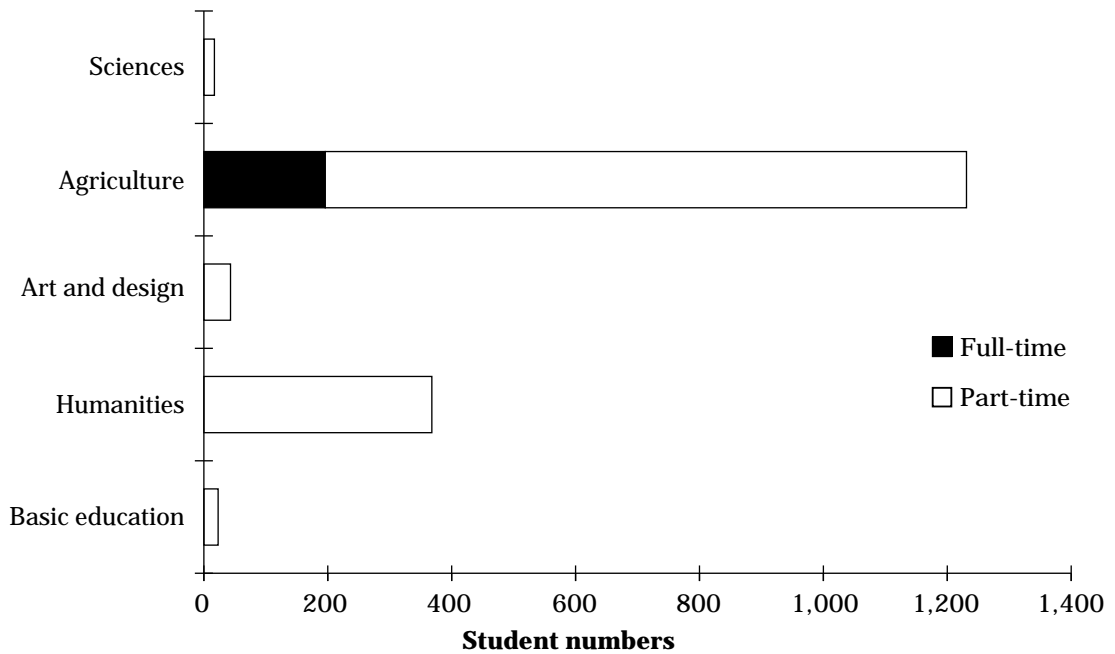
Capel Manor Horticultural and Environmental Centre: percentage student numbers by level of study (as at July 1996)



Student numbers: 1,682

Figure 3

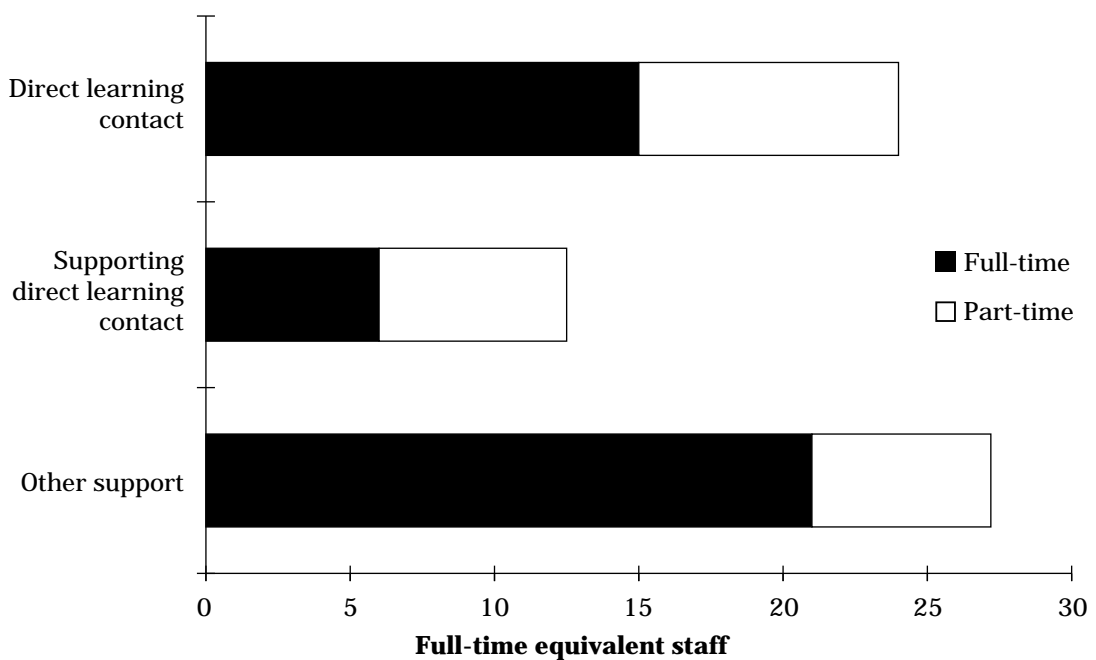
Capel Manor Horticultural and Environmental Centre: student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at July 1996)



Student numbers: 1,682

Figure 4

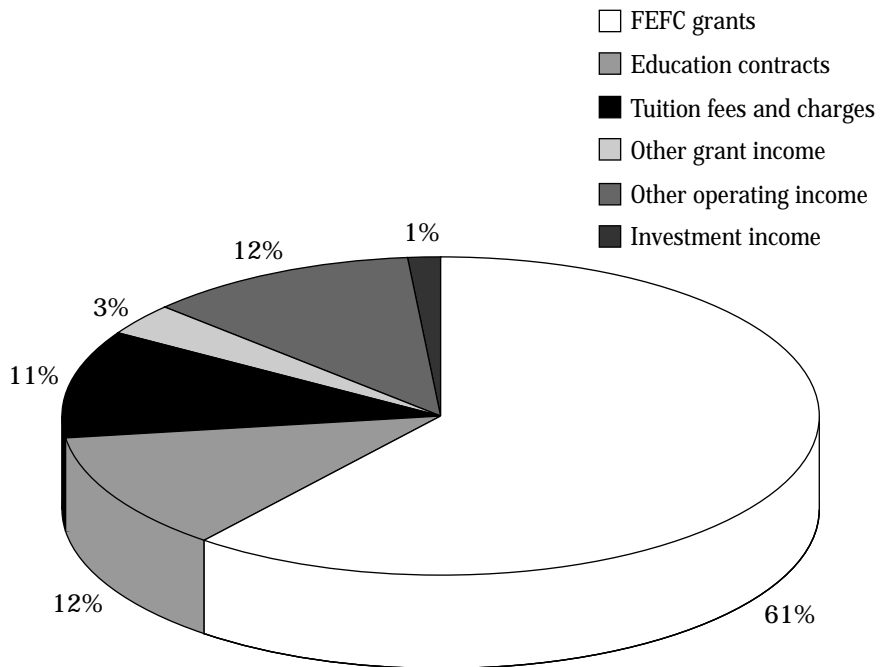
Capel Manor Horticultural and Environmental Centre: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (as at April 1997)



Full-time equivalent staff: 64

Figure 5

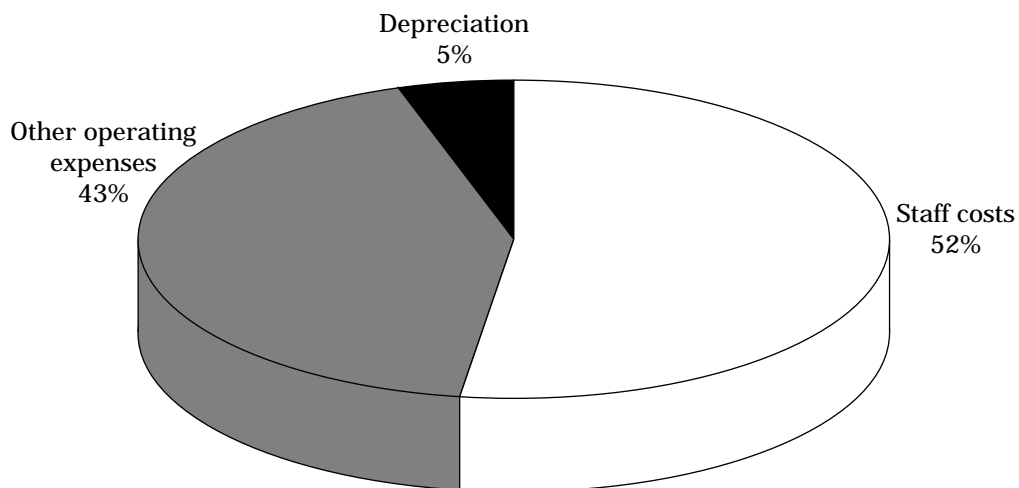
**Capel Manor Horticultural and Environmental Centre: income
(for 12 months to July 1996)**



Income: £2,710,754

Figure 6

**Capel Manor Horticultural and Environmental Centre: expenditure
(for 12 months to July 1996)**



Expenditure: £2,601,753

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