

**REPORT  
FROM THE  
INSPECTORATE**

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# **Cannington College**

**June 1995**

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**THE  
FURTHER  
EDUCATION  
FUNDING  
COUNCIL**

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## **THE FURTHER EDUCATION FUNDING COUNCIL**

*The Further Education Funding Council has a legal duty to make sure further education in England is properly assessed. The FEFC's inspectorate inspects and reports on each college of further education every four years. The inspectorate also assesses and reports nationally on the curriculum and gives advice to 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 83/95

**CANNINGTON COLLEGE**

**SOUTH WEST REGION**

**Inspected November 1994 – February 1995**

## **Summary**

Cannington College is the main provider of education and training for the land-based industries in Somerset. It has an appropriate range of courses and, for some of its programmes, attracts students from a wide area. Most teaching is of a high standard and examination results are generally good. Students benefit from efficient procedures for admissions and induction and outstanding arrangements for learning support. Management at programme level is generally effective. There are good levels of specialist equipment and positive links with employers and agricultural organisations. The college should take further action to create a more appropriate style of management that re-establishes confidence in its senior management. It should also monitor and evaluate the turnover of staff. The board must ensure that its proceedings are in full accordance with the articles and instrument of government. There needs to be more effective co-ordination of student support services and a more systematic approach to counselling and careers guidance. Limitations in the quality assurance systems should be addressed and a programme for the planned replacement of equipment should be established.

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

<b>Aspects of cross-college provision</b>	<b>Grade</b>
Responsiveness and range of provision	2
Governance and management	4
Students' recruitment, guidance and support	2
Quality assurance	3
Resources: staffing	3
equipment/learning resources	1
accommodation	2

<b>Curriculum area</b>	<b>Grade</b>
Agriculture, countryside management and food technology	2
Equine and animal care	2
Horticulture, sports turf and golf course management	1

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# CONTENTS

	<b>Paragraph</b>
Summary	
Introduction	1
The college and its aims	2
Responsiveness and range of provision	6
Governance and management	16
Students' recruitment, guidance and support	31
Teaching and the promotion of learning	40
Students' achievements	49
Quality assurance	55
Resources	64
Conclusions and issues	82
Figures	

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## **INTRODUCTION**

1 Cannington College was inspected during the period November 1994 to February 1995. Eight inspectors spent a total of 39 inspector days, 15 of which were spent on specialist subject areas and 24 on aspects of cross-college provision. The team inspected agriculture, countryside management and food technology; horticulture, sports turf and golf course management; and equine and animal care. Inspectors visited 43 classes, examined students' written work and had access to a wide range of documentation. Meetings took place with board members, senior managers, staff, full-time and part-time students, staff from local schools and representatives of local employers and agricultural organisations and the Somerset Training and Enterprise Council (TEC).

## **THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS**

2 Cannington College was opened in 1921 as a college of agriculture in the village of Cannington near Bridgwater in north Somerset. It was originally located in leased medieval buildings which have recently been purchased by the college. A new campus was developed in the 1960s on college land in the village. There have been a number of additions since then, the latest being a new equestrian centre and a nine-hole golf course. The college owns 185 hectares, rents a further 47 hectares and runs its own farm. In addition to the main sites in Cannington, the college operates centres at Yeovil College, in south Somerset and at Cricket St Thomas wildlife park. It also collaborates with Filton College on some provision in Bristol. A number of national plant collections are kept at the college.

3 At the time of the inspection there were 1,710 enrolments, of which 604 were full time. Enrolments by age and level of study are shown in figures 1 and 2. Enrolments funded by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figure 3. One hundred and eighty students were living in the college's residential accommodation and others in lodgings nearby. The college employs 150 full-time equivalent staff, of whom 48 are teachers. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4.

4 The college identifies three main categories of recruitment: nationally for horticulture and golf course management; regionally for food technology and animal care; and largely within the county of Somerset for other full-time and part-time further education courses. The nearest agricultural colleges are Bicton College (55 miles), Kingston Maurward College (54 miles) and Lackham College (73 miles). The college also competes nationally with the other 32 specialist colleges of agriculture and horticulture.

5 The college mission is 'to work together to establish the college as the natural choice for education, training, advice or consultancy in our fields of expertise'. In the last five years the college has concentrated on growth and developments linked to objectives concerned with management efficiency and quality assurance. These are reflected in the strategic plan.

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## **RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION**

6 The college provides an appropriate range of vocational courses in agriculture, countryside studies, amenity horticulture, floristry, food technology and engineering. There are 19 full-time courses including Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) first and national diplomas, BTEC higher national diplomas in horticulture, golf course management and food studies, and courses examined by the National Examination Board for Agriculture, Horticulture and Allied Industries administered by City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G). As from 1 July 1995 the national examination board will become a national advisory committee of C&G and all the qualifications will be validated directly by them. There are also 33 part-time courses, mainly National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) level 1, 2 and 3 and C&G programmes.

7 College staff are well informed about national training targets and issues related to further education. The college has responded positively to changes taking place in the land-based sector by diversifying and extending its range of courses. For instance, a BTEC first diploma in animal care was established last September and new programmes are located at Cricket St Thomas, a wildlife park 30 miles from the college, and Bristol Zoo. This enables ready access to specialist resources and practical work and, in the case of Cricket St Thomas, helps to promote the wildlife park's educational role.

8 Since 1991, the number of full-time students has more than doubled and there has been only a modest increase in the number of part-time students. Higher education students now account for 22 per cent of the full-time enrolments at the college.

9 The college has good links with employers, land owners and related organisations. Many staff are active members of employer organisations or trade groups and there is a regular programme of visiting speakers and visits. Third-year students on the national diploma in agriculture have a programme of 10 visiting speakers during the year and undertake visits to some 17 different farms. Liaison with employers is also maintained through educational advisory committees which meet twice yearly for each of the main vocational areas. However, the college should consider how the contribution of the committees can be used more effectively to support course development. The college has been involved in a number of initiatives involving industry. For example, a pig unit has been developed on the college farm and this has led to a link-up with a major manufacturer of livestock feeds to provide a regional centre for technical information and training for the industry.

10 There are productive relationships with Somerset TEC. The college has a contract with the TEC to deliver youth training and training for work programmes in the land-based industries. These currently involve 250 trainees. A 14 place modern apprenticeship programme leading to NVQ at level 3 is being piloted at the invitation of the TEC.

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11 Courses are promoted through good links with schools, attendance at a large number of trade shows and events, open days and a series of promotional events at the college. Opportunities are provided for pupils in schools to attend the college to experience vocational courses. A number of schools use the college site for curriculum activities. Two schools took part in an equal opportunities programme where boys from one school and girls from another school spent a week at the college following activities traditionally identified with the other sex. The college also collaborates with a secondary school to provide a BTEC first diploma course.

12 The prospectus, directory of full-time courses and course leaflets provide useful details about the college and its resources, the content of courses and career opportunities. The college would benefit from further development of its market research and marketing activities. For example, insufficient information is gathered to inform the college's needs analysis and a more co-ordinated approach is required to develop, monitor and evaluate marketing activities. The appointment last year of a marketing manager and the establishment of a marketing policy have been positive developments.

13 European links are actively promoted. Some full-time students visit a European country as a part of their course. The annual programme of study visits includes trips for agriculture students to Germany, floristry students to Holland and horticulture and horse management students to France. There are work placements for students of golf course management in Spain, Portugal and Germany and for food technology students in France. An initiative with a French agricultural college has resulted in a jointly validated higher education course in European food studies.

14 Adults returning to study have been helped by the introduction of more flexible arrangements for delivering the curriculum. All further education courses can now be taken part time. Arrangements for the recognition of previous learning and experience have been established. However, except for students on some horticultural programmes, few students have taken advantage of this opportunity.

15 Despite some efforts to encourage balanced recruitment of male and female students to two of the full-time courses, some significant imbalances still exist. In September 1994 the equal opportunities policy was revised and a new committee established. An equal opportunities co-ordinator has been appointed and an annual report prepared, but there is still much to be done to ensure that the policies and practices of the college reflect the equal opportunities principles set out in the college policy.

#### **GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT**

16 On the 22 December 1994, the principal was suspended by the board of the corporation. A special committee has been established by the board to consider the case for his dismissal. Formal complaints of management

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malpractice have been received by the board and are being investigated. In January 1995 the board appointed the assistant principal (academic management) to the role of acting principal and the senior management team was enlarged from four to 10. The original senior management team of four comprised the principal, the assistant principal (academic management), the assistant principal (resource management) and the director of finance and information technology. The enlarged senior management team comprises the acting principal, the assistant principal (resource management), the director of finance and information technology, the four heads of school, the personnel manager, the premises director and the head of commercial initiatives.

17 For some time there has been a significant level of mistrust and anxiety in the college about the style of senior management. This was openly acknowledged during the inspection, particularly by middle managers and some senior managers. The former senior management team was divided on a number of issues and the new, enlarged senior management team also fails to operate as a cohesive group. Some of the senior managers carry a perception that the sharing of information is limited. Many managers feel that the climate within the college has improved little.

18 The senior management team is the approving body for new course submissions and also plays an important role in receiving the summary of course team reviews. As the meetings were not minuted until the new team was formed in January 1995, it is not possible to know how these and other matters were handled. Senior managers outside the former senior management team repeatedly commented on their ignorance of what happened to many of the matters they reported to the senior management team.

19 At the time of incorporation, the principal decided to invest in capital projects to support diversification and growth, and to reduce recurrent costs in areas such as staffing. This approach, which is clearly outlined in the college's strategic plan, was supported in principle by staff, but there was little consultation on its preparation. Despite the climate of mistrust there have been some real achievements. For example, enrolment targets are agreed and monitored, and appropriate action is taken to ensure that they are met. At the time of the inspection, the college had exceeded its current enrolment targets.

20 There are five heads of vocational departments reporting to two heads of school. The two groups work well together. Vocational department meetings take place regularly and are appropriately recorded. The current structure is a result of a management reorganisation that took place in spring 1994. Although the need for change was appreciated by those likely to be affected, there is evidence that the process was accompanied by a level of disquiet and dislocation which could have been avoided.



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21 At the time of the inspection there were 15 members of the board including the principal, 11 industrial members, the nominee from Somerset TEC, two staff members and a student. There were no women members. All the 11 industrial governors have an interest and experience in land-based industries including one who is an accountant specialising in agricultural work. The members acknowledge the lack of experience on the board of other aspects of the college's work, for example, law, personnel, estates management and general further education. They also acknowledge the need to recruit women onto the board to reflect the growing number of women in the student body. They are committed to the college and show genuine concern over the college's problems.

22 On a number of important matters the board appears not to have acted in full accordance with the instruments and articles of government. It was not possible, for example, to find any record of the board approving the membership and category of members of the corporation or to locate minutes confirming the appointment of the chair and the clerk to the corporation. In October 1994, the clerk to the governors was absent from college for a period and the principal and chair of governors allocated his duties to the principal without board approval.

23 The board has committees for audit, finance, personnel, remuneration and premises. They meet regularly and are well attended. Supporting documentation varies in quality. For example, the minuting of meetings is generally unsatisfactory; it is difficult to track decisions, supporting papers are not cross-referenced with agenda items, and the responsibility for carrying out agreed action is not identified. The corporation receives the minutes of the academic board and in November last year received a comprehensive report detailing students' achievements. There is little evidence, however, of discussion of these or other academic matters at board meetings.

24 The events which led to the principal's suspension have caused tension between members of the board. There have been a number of approaches to members about the management style of some senior managers and views have differed on how the board should respond. Members also have different views about how they should fulfil their own role and there is no record of any discussion to clarify the respective roles of the board and senior management.

25 The college's average level of funding per funded unit of activity for 1994-95 is £36.03. This compares with £43.86 in 1993-94 but is still higher than the median for agricultural colleges which is £28.37. The college's income and expenditure for the 16 months to July 1994 are shown in figures 5 and 6.

26 There is an increasing awareness of financial issues among staff. Those with responsibility for controlling budgets are receiving information monthly about their profiled and total expenditure. Funding allocations are still based on historical data and work on unit costing has been delayed,

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pending the introduction of modular courses and a new course costing process. Last year, although income targets were set, they were not agreed by all managers and not all targets were achieved.

27 To reduce staffing costs, the average number of teaching hours for each lecturer was increased at the start of the year while the number of taught course hours was reduced. More use is also being made of instructors for practical teaching. However, a significant barrier to improving efficiency is the proportion of classes with relatively low numbers of students. For example, 40 full-time groups have less than 12 students.

28 Management information systems are developing satisfactorily. Regular information is circulated to managers about recruitment and retention rates. Detailed weekly statements are produced showing the progress of applicants to courses and withdrawal rates. By February 1995, 9 per cent of students had withdrawn from their courses. This compares with 8 per cent at the same point in the previous year. Reasons for withdrawal are collected and analysed. Well-presented and comprehensive student performance statistics are readily available on demand to course managers and reported annually to them and to the academic board. However, the management information system does not generate information on attendance patterns and as a result monitoring of attendance is still carried out at course level using a paper-based system. Nevertheless, student attendance in all sessions was good and absences were being monitored satisfactorily. There is still development work required to computerise personnel records and to enable library usage to be monitored.

29 There is a comprehensive health and safety policy which clearly identifies responsibilities. It is monitored by the health and safety committee and external consultants have been employed to audit the arrangements. However, although the current policy has been endorsed by the chair of the board, there is no minute to show that this or the previous policy had been approved by the corporation. The board does not appear to have been involved in monitoring health and safety matters although it has recently requested regular reports from the health and safety committee.

30 The major issues and weaknesses in the management of the college are sufficiently serious to overshadow its strengths and to impede the college's ability to build on them. Action is needed to create a more appropriate management style that re-establishes confidence in the senior management team.

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

31 Following the appointment of the assistant principal (academic management) to the post of acting principal, responsibility for student recruitment, guidance and support has been transferred to two heads of

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school. Many of these services are working satisfactorily and some are particularly effective. However, further consideration of the organisational arrangements, including clarification of roles and responsibilities, is needed. Student services, which is also responsible for some non-teaching aspects of student life such as residential accommodation, has had a high staff turnover which has affected the stability of the service.

32 Student recruitment is well planned. A school liaison team involving 29 staff is in regular contact with 45 schools. Staff attend school events and talk with year 11 pupils. Teachers from local schools were appreciative of the way these links were organised and the general responsiveness of the college. Parents were generally very positive about the information and range of courses provided by the college. Admissions and interviewing are co-ordinated centrally within the college. This is working well.

33 There are outstanding arrangements for learning support. A learning support co-ordinator works with 27 tutors to provide learning support across all college programmes. Ten staff have completed the C&G initial certificate in teaching basic skills and a further 12 are currently taking it. All students, full-time and part-time, are tested at entry for learning support needs. The results of these tests enable staff to determine whether students need additional support or general monitoring by tutors. In the current year, 32 per cent of first-year students have been identified as needing additional support and a further 21 per cent monitoring by tutors.

34 All students have two hours a week timetabled for tutorial activity, and if required, learning support. There is a clear process for assessing further learning support needs, implementation and review. Learning support takes place in the two learning workshops and in areas of the college designated for specific subject support. The emphasis is on providing support related to the student's vocational course. Part-time vocational students receive learning support integrated into their weekly programme. Support is also provided at four community venues around the area. Over the last four years there have been projects to develop packs of learning support materials and there are now several hundred available. Students value the arrangements for support and recognise its vocational relevance. Learning support staff are involved in a number of other initiatives, including piloting a study skills programme to be used during induction.

35 Arrangements for enrolment and induction are clear and effective. All students receive a week's induction and their first three weeks at college are treated as a foundation for their course. Students interviewed had all received course outlines and assignment schedules during their induction period. Although records of achievement are seen at initial interviews, they are replaced by the college's own internal system, the 'welcome to Cannington' file. All students are provided with a file which contains general college information including the tutorial system, student progress and review procedures, and an introduction to common skills. The

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development of common skills, such as literacy and numeracy, across all programmes is a positive feature of the induction process. The file is used for keeping records of students' progress including assessments of assignments.

36 The tutorial system was changed in September 1994. Previously, course tutors acted as personal tutors. Since September, 12 staff have undertaken the role of personal tutor for full-time students and a further two for part-time students. The learning support co-ordinator has the responsibility of co-ordinating the tutorial system and, with the personal tutors, has produced tutorial guidelines. All students are entitled to three individual tutorials in term one, followed by two tutorials in each of terms two and three. Review and action plan sheets are completed at each tutorial with a copy kept by the student and one placed in the central student file. Generally, these arrangements are working satisfactorily and students on most courses are receiving their tutorial entitlement. Difficulties are experienced where the personal tutor does not teach the students whom they are tutoring. The college is currently reviewing this aspect of tutorial support. There is also a wide range in the number of students attached to personal tutors, varying from around eight to 112. While this workload has been agreed with the staff concerned and is reflected in a reduction in teaching commitments, the appropriateness of one person providing tutorial support to a large number of students requires further consideration.

37 There are good working relationships with the Somerset Careers Service and a careers adviser attends the college on one day a week. The main emphasis has been on the development of careers action plans and, by the end of the autumn term, 131 students had completed action plans following contributions to tutorial groups by careers staff. However, while there are broad outlines of the service provided, detailed information was not available at the time of the inspection. Developments have recently been affected by staff illness. Recording procedures for group work, individual careers interviews and written careers guidance need to be improved.

38 Arrangements for counselling are largely informal. The service provided is valued by staff and students and there are examples of appropriate links with outside specialist agencies. However, there is not a clear distinction between counselling and other forms of student support, such as personal tutoring, and there are no procedures for logging the number and nature of counselling sessions. As a result it is not possible to form a judgement about the adequacy of resources for counselling and the level and nature of need.

39 The college charter sets out students' rights and general information about what students can expect from the college. There are student representatives on the corporation board and the academic board. A team of trained wardens, five staff and five former students, operate a rota to

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supervise the campus in the evenings and at weekends. The college welcomes individual contact with parents but there are no parents' evenings.

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

40 Most of the teaching observed had more strengths than weaknesses and there were consistently high standards in horticulture. In the teaching sessions inspected, 72 per cent had strengths which clearly outweighed the weaknesses, 21 per cent had a balance of strengths and weaknesses and 7 per cent had weaknesses which outweighed the strengths. The following table summarises the grades given.

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

<b>Programmes</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>Totals</b>
NVQ		3	0	1	0	0	4
Other*		5	23	8	3	0	39
<b>Total</b>		<b>8</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>43</b>

\* Note: other includes BTEC first diploma, national diploma and national certificate courses.

41 Most sessions were thoroughly prepared and had a clear structure which was understood by students. Learning objectives were defined in a logical sequence. Students' learning was enhanced by the links established between subjects.

42 Resource packs were used effectively to enable students to work on their own, and to link the work carried out in the classroom with that provided during individual sessions for literacy and numeracy. In a practical class on horse management for block-release NVQ students, a study pack was used effectively to relate the teaching to the experiences students had gained on work placement.

43 Much of the practical teaching was of a high standard. A particular feature of the practical work is the settings in which it takes place. For example, on agriculture and horticulture courses the college estate is regularly used and on equine courses, horses and equipment are prepared in advance so that students can start work with a minimum of delay. Practical tasks were demonstrated by tutors and key elements were identified clearly. In most practical sessions useful feedback on individual and group performance was given, and students were often involved in assessing their own work. Students' confidence was developed through a range of well-supervised activities. In the best examples these were clearly linked to theory, although sometimes the opportunity to relate practice to theory was missed.

44 In all subjects, productive classroom teaching was observed. Students were generally well motivated and fully involved in the topics being taught. Good use was made of question and answer techniques to build on the students' own experiences. On horticulture courses, students were

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encouraged to contribute to the session by drawing on their own horticultural experience. Students' understanding was regularly checked and teaching styles took into account ability levels and experience. However, in some sessions a limited range of teaching styles was used. On some agriculture and equine courses there was an over-reliance on note taking and insufficient opportunity for students to work in groups.

45 Assignments were used effectively in all subjects to assess students' progress and promote learning. Many of them drew heavily on the college's commercial and practical units and students appreciated the opportunity to apply their learning to practical situations. The college has standardised documentation for setting assignments and advising students of the criteria against which they will be assessed. Assignment briefs were generally clear and feedback on students' work was usually constructive, although in a few cases comments were too brief. In some of the work, insufficient attention was paid to correcting spelling and to explaining the grade awarded. Students requiring support were identified and resources, including staff, were made available. It would be helpful to students if assignments set at the beginning of courses provided them with more detailed guidance on how they should structure their work, in particular the importance of writing a concise introduction and conclusion.

46 Work experience is used positively to support students' work in college. It is generally well organised and students are well prepared for it. On equine and animal care courses, there is a comprehensive pack for work experience providers and students which includes aims, procedures, responsibilities and assessment requirements. The college has a detailed checklist for vetting prospective placements and a list of those approved.

47 Course guides for students are informative. They cover the structure and content of courses, assessment strategies and arrangements for feedback to students. Schemes of work have a useful framework, but are insufficiently detailed to enable course managers to avoid duplication of work in other programmes.

48 Relationships between teachers and students are good. Teachers are knowledgeable about their subjects and their teaching demonstrates an awareness of issues facing the industry.

### **STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS**

49 Examination results are generally good. In the last two years, all students on equine courses who completed their studies passed their examinations. In 1993-94, a significant proportion achieved merit or distinction grades: 72 per cent on the national diploma in horse management and business studies, 84 per cent on the working with horses first diploma course and 87 per cent on the management of horses national certificate course. Fourteen of the 22 national diploma students achieved additional optional British Horse Society qualifications.

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50 In agriculture, the examination results for 1991-92, 1992-93 and 1993-94 were generally very good with 100 per cent pass rates for many full-time courses. Where courses such as national diploma food technology record a 90 per cent pass rate, this represents only one student failing the course. There is a good level of achievement in full-time horticulture courses with a significant proportion of students achieving merit or distinction grades on some courses. On the national diploma in horticulture 93 per cent gained a merit or distinction in 1992-93 and 86 per cent in 1993-94. On the national certificate in arboriculture the percentages were 12.5 per cent and 67 per cent respectively. Pass rates for C&G part-time course in horticulture were 78 per cent in part 2 horticulture in 1992-93 and 65 per cent in part 3 horticulture and agriculture in 1993-94.

51 Completion rates are generally satisfactory. On agriculture-related courses the average completion rate for 1992-93 and 1993-94 was 88 per cent. There were 100 per cent completion rates on several full-time courses, although these had relatively low numbers. However, there are some examples of lower completion rates: 71 per cent on the 1993-94 national certificate in agriculture and 69 per cent on the national certificate in countryside skills in 1992-93. There have also been low completion rates on some equine courses, particularly part-time courses. In 1993-94, a third of the part-time students failed to complete their courses. Reasons for withdrawal are identified. Many involve personal or financial factors and are not course related.

52 A high proportion of students on equine courses progress to further education or related employment. Over 90 per cent of first diploma students have gone on to other courses at Cannington in the last two years. In the same period, nearly 50 per cent of students from the national diploma and national certificate courses in agriculture, the national diploma in food technology course and the national certificate in countryside skills course have progressed to other further education courses, and nearly 40 per cent have taken up employment. Thirty-four per cent of students achieving the national diploma of horticulture in 1993-94 had not found employment at the time of the inspection; 9 per cent went on to higher education.

53 In agriculture and horticulture most students' written work and presentation is of an appropriate standard. Equine assignments are conscientiously prepared and the standard of work is generally consistent with the level of the course; some is of a high standard. However, some national diploma students have difficulty in drawing appropriate conclusions from the evidence and in applying their knowledge. In class, students display reasonable levels of knowledge and understanding, and their coursework and notes are generally well ordered and detailed. For a few students, weaknesses in numeracy and literacy affect their progress in the technical aspects of their course.

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54 Students of equine studies are careful and conscientious in practical sessions and work to high standards. Riding ability varies, mainly reflecting the range of ability and experience on entry. Horticulture and equine students work well in groups and are mutually supportive, particularly in the preparation of equipment for practical sessions. A number of agriculture students have achieved significant success in national and local competitions. In 1994, a national diploma student was the winner of the Agricultural Mortgage Corporation student award scheme and was also named *Farmers' Weekly* agricultural student of the year.

#### **QUALITY ASSURANCE**

55 Quality assurance is supported by a system introduced three years ago under the International Standards Organization (ISO) 9002 (formerly British Standard 5750). It covers management roles and structure, course review, team management and financial procedures. The course review process includes three meetings a year at which students are asked to comment on specific aspects of the course. Course teams are required to discuss issues arising from the student reviews at their next course meeting and to produce an action plan. Students consulted felt that they were receiving answers to the concerns they raised and that course reviews were generating improvements. Examples of these included changes to timetables, access to computers in the open-learning centre and extending the curriculum on a national diploma course. The course review process is primarily based on comments from students. This is both a strength and a limitation. The process does not provide an opportunity for staff to formally evaluate courses. Staff do discuss the quality of provision at course team meetings but these discussions do not form part of the systematic review process and are therefore not subject to the rigours of the system.

56 A group of staff, as internal auditors, ensure that the system complies with ISO procedures. Senior management also meet three times a year to monitor the ISO system. Staff are generally familiar with the procedures and see them as part of normal professional routine rather than as separate issues. The system is supported by staff training, including staff induction, and updating for the internal auditors.

57 A separate curriculum audit team, in addition to the ISO 9002 team, concentrates on particular issues selected each year by senior management. For example, recent issues have included schemes of work, assignment setting and European awareness. It has also carried out observation and feedback on 25 learning sessions in preparation for the FEFC inspection. One of the results of the curriculum audit has been a requirement for heads of school to check the quality and consistency of all assignments. The curriculum audit provides a useful addition to the ISO audit.



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58 Few quality targets are set. Although the ISO system requires course managers to identify a target pass rate for each examination, they are not being actively monitored. Some service standards are emerging as a consequence of the college charter. For example, standards have been set for responses to enquiries. Last November the corporation board received detailed information on student performance but there is no evidence that this, or other quality indicators, were reported to the board before that date.

59 A high percentage of staff have achieved assessor awards and are able to support internal verification for NVQs and for the General National Vocational Qualifications which it is planned to introduce. However, there is not yet in place a system for co-ordinating the various course verification systems to support moderation and ensure consistency of assessment across the college. This matter is under consideration. External moderators' and verifiers' reports are effectively distributed.

60 The senior management team is an important part of the quality assurance system, receiving and commenting on reports on quality. For example, new course proposals are finally approved by the senior management team rather than by the academic board. Issues which need attention from course reviews are presented to the senior management team. However, since no records have been kept of senior management team meetings until January 1995 it is not possible to assess its effectiveness in quality assurance matters.

61 The current staff-appraisal process is inconsistently applied and there are different systems for support staff and teaching staff. Although the staff-appraisal process gives staff the opportunity to discuss their training and development needs with line managers, links with the staff-development programme are inadequate. A more effective and less cumbersome process has been designed and implementation is being planned.

62 The staff-development plan is an uncosted statement of general priorities. It is not yet linked with institutional objectives and the analysis of staff training needs is unsatisfactory. Staff training and development was not part of the ISO audit process in 1993-94 and the training programme is not evaluated. Despite these weaknesses most staff are satisfied with their training opportunities. However, managers are aware of their lack of management training and have had little support for their requests for training other than specific technical updating. The current training budget is approximately 1 per cent of the staffing budget. A long-term commitment to Investors in People is being delayed by current uncertainties in college senior management.

63 In accordance with the requirements of the inspection process the college produced a self-assessment report. The report follows the headings in the inspection framework set out in Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. It is largely descriptive; there is little critical analysis and it

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fails to provide a full assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the college. Many of the strengths mentioned in the report are supported by the findings of the inspection. However, there are significant issues, identified during the inspection, which are not addressed in the college's report.

## **RESOURCES**

### **Staffing**

64 Teachers are appropriately qualified in their vocational area and demonstrate a good level of technical competence. Forty per cent hold higher education qualifications. Many have relevant commercial experience and most have a good awareness of current practice through links with relevant sectors of industry and their close involvement with the college's practical enterprises.

65 There are effective arrangements to match expertise to teaching needs. An audit of staff skills is used as a basis for allocating staff to teaching duties. There is considerable flexibility for movement of staff between vocational areas. However, this sometimes means that staff are insufficiently familiar with the topics being taught. The college makes good use of part-time staff to respond to changes in demand. Many of them work in the land-based industries and their current experience is used to enrich students' experience. Part-time staff, and teachers teaching on courses outside their own vocational area, are not always aware of the whole curriculum into which their units of work fit.

66 There are sufficient teachers for the current range of courses. Staff have been responsive in taking on new tasks resulting from the considerable growth in student numbers and the increased range of provision. An internal workload review last term showed that teachers often work long hours. Many teachers carry out a significant amount of work which could be more effectively done by administrative staff. At peak times there is insufficient administrative support for academic staff. While line managers are generally monitoring the workload, some teachers have more than one line manager and in these cases insufficient attention is given to competing demands for time. The college is aware of the problem and, following a review, steps are planned to adjust workloads.

67 At peak times there is insufficient technical support in some specialist areas, for example, engineering, science and agriculture. Eight out of the 16 technicians employed in the college are also working as instructors. In some cases the time available for their technician duties is inadequate. They have a different line manager for their technical and instructor duties and this can lead to a lack of clarity in establishing priorities. There is good technical support for information technology. The staff who work on the college's commercial and practical enterprises are used effectively to supervise students carrying out practical tasks.

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68 In some areas there has been a high turnover of staff. In November 1994 it was reported to the corporation personnel committee that 42 of the total establishment of 125 staff had left since March 1993. Even allowing for the 14 who were transferred to the newly-appointed college caterers, this represents a significant turnover of staff. This was acknowledged as an issue by the senior management team. Some of the reasons given reflect a level of concern about the management of the college. Currently 10 of the 16 administrative staff are on temporary contracts. Decisions on staffing structures are the subject of a number of reviews.

#### **Equipment/learning resources**

69 High levels of funding and investment in the past have resulted in a good standard of capital equipment in the college. The college should introduce a planned equipment replacement programme to ensure that this high standard can be maintained.

70 In the programme areas inspected, the provision of specialist equipment is good. There is an adequate supply of hand tools and equipment for agriculture and horticulture. The supply of plants and animals is sufficient for students to develop their practical competence. The preparation and provision of horses and equipment for equine practical work is well organised. There is a good supply of stable tools and tack for horses. The laboratories and workshops are adequately equipped.

71 The new computer suite is spacious and well furnished. It is equipped with modern computers and related equipment. There is a wide range of software including vocationally specific packages. There are sufficient computers to meet the demand from students. The college is closely monitoring the use of equipment to ensure a quick response when shortages occur. Ten additional computers were purchased soon after the suite was opened and the opening times increased. Access to the facilities is good. The suite is open from 08.30 to 21.30 on weekdays and for six hours at the weekend.

72 The main learning-support workshop is well suited to its purpose and has a good display of learning materials. It is well stocked with a comprehensive range of study guides. There are over 300 packages covering vocational subjects and core areas such as information technology, numeracy, communication and science. The library is small by comparison with Library Association recommendations but there are study areas available outside timetabled hours in the learning support room. There is a good range of specialist learning resources in the library. Technical books, videos, periodicals and magazines are available, as well as a compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) database. The supply of books is generally adequate. However, there are deficiencies in the range and quantity of books for some of the newer courses, for example equine

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studies, golf course management and arboriculture. Additional funds are being made available to address some of these shortcomings. There are generally good links between the library staff and teachers. However, the arrangements for students to borrow books to support assignment work are not fully effective. Insufficient data are gathered on library use to inform future planning.

73 Classrooms are equipped with overhead projectors, screens and writing boards. A reasonable supply of additional audio-visual equipment is held centrally but the arrangements for supplying this equipment to teachers do not always operate effectively.

### **Accommodation**

74 The college is located on several sites, mostly in and around the village of Cannington. There are also facilities at Yeovil in mobile classrooms which are in reasonable condition and fit for their purpose. A third base with a classroom, animal room and offices is at Cricket St Thomas, where the college has developed innovative joint arrangements with the wildlife park to gain access to an extensive range of animals and birds.

75 The main site in Cannington village dates from 1960. It includes the central administrative area, laboratories, classrooms, library, learning-resources workshop, main hall, dining room, student common room, nursery and approximately half the residential accommodation (90 beds). The main site is used as a service area for the other sites in the village. However, the dispersed nature of the sites inhibits effective use of the accommodation, particularly its general teaching rooms. The recently-purchased Cannington Court site, on the opposite side of the main road, includes many Grade 1 listed buildings dating back to the twelfth Century. It provides just over 10 per cent of the teaching accommodation and approximately half of the residential accommodation. The site includes most of the college's specialist horticulture facilities. There are four other sites housing specialist facilities and general teaching accommodation. Laboratory accommodation is of a satisfactory standard except for the microbiology laboratory. Workshops are spacious and clean.

76 The quality of the non-specialist accommodation and its fitness for purpose varies widely. Accommodation on the main site is generally of a high standard. Recent investment in the reception area and student communal rooms has provided good-quality facilities. The single-study rooms in residential accommodation are comfortable. Much of the accommodation in Cannington Court is in need of refurbishment. Some of the classrooms are drab and parts of the residential accommodation provide only basic facilities. Most of the classrooms on the other sites are adequate.

77 The college has carried out a complete audit of the accommodation, identifying areas in need of refurbishment. There are many proposals for

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improvement but insufficient attention has been given to analysing competing demands and to library and learning resources requirements. Audits of room use conducted by the college indicate that there is sufficient accommodation for the planned growth in enrolments.

78 Following a report by external consultants there have been a number of improvements in access for students with mobility difficulties. Ramps and a lift have been installed in the main building. Entry to the library is possible but not easy. The design of many buildings makes adaptation difficult. The college has allocated funding for further improvements.

79 Much of the specialist horticulture provision is of a high standard. A few areas, although clean and well organised, are in need of refurbishment. There is a wide range of amenity horticulture areas and these are used extensively for students' practical work. The recently-opened commercial golf course provides a realistic setting for students' work. There is a large protected cropping area with an extensive collection of plants for student identification and investigation. The purpose-built floristry accommodation provides good-quality facilities.

80 The college's land holding has been effectively developed to provide realistic specialist facilities for students from many courses. A number of wildlife habitats and other features have been established on the college's commercial farm and these are used by students on countryside management programmes for practical work and project activity. The development of these facilities provides a good demonstration of farm management which is sensitive to environmental and public interests. A series of signposted public access routes has been established by students. The farm has a range of commercial-scale enterprises typical of those operating in the locality. While the management of these enterprises demonstrates good practice to the students, some of the buildings are in need of redevelopment. A new high-welfare pig unit is being stocked to replace an outdated facility.

81 Specialist accommodation for equine courses is of a high standard. The site is clean, tidy and well organised, and provides a good example for the students. A minor weakness is the lack of a classroom. Effective use is made of an off-site establishment to complement the college's range of horses. Through a joint agreement with a local commercial organisation the college has secured access to a good range of specialist facilities for the animal care courses. These arrangements have enabled the college to establish a new area of provision without the need to invest heavily in its own facilities.

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## **CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES**

82 The college is making progress towards achieving its objectives. Its strengths include:

- an appropriate range of vocational courses related to land-based industries
- many examples of good teaching
- generally good examination results
- good admissions and induction procedures
- generally effective programme management
- good links with employers and related organisations
- outstanding arrangements for learning support
- good levels of specialist equipment.

83 In order to improve further the quality of its provision the college should:

- take action to create a more appropriate style of management that re-establishes confidence in senior management
- monitor and evaluate staff turnover
- ensure that the proceedings of the corporation board are in full accordance with the articles and instrument of government
- improve the co-ordination of student support services
- establish a more systematic approach to counselling and careers guidance
- strengthen the quality assurance system
- establish a programme for planned replacement of equipment.

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## FIGURES

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- 1 Percentage enrolments by age (1994-95)

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

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  - 3 FEFC-funded enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1994-95)

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

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  - 5 Income (for 16 months to July 1994)

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  - 6 Expenditure (for 16 months to July 1994)

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

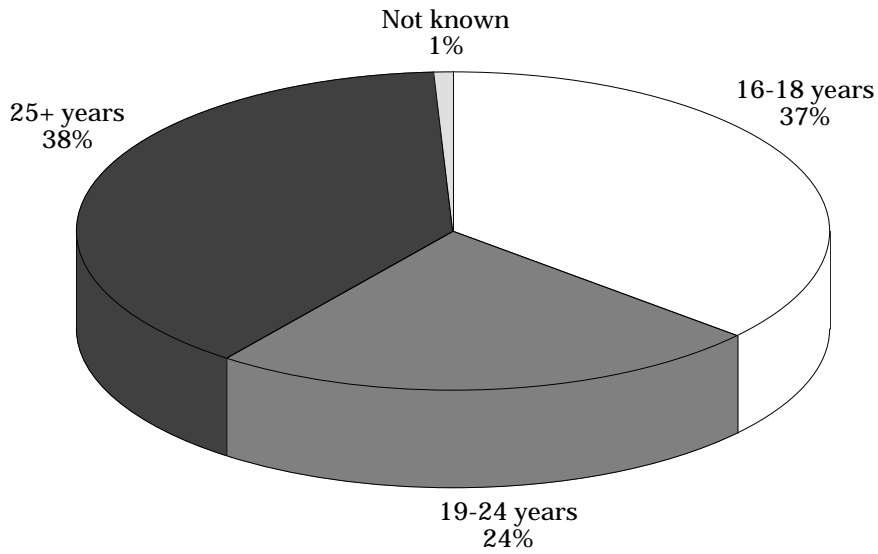
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**Figure 1**

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**Cannington College: percentage enrolments by age (1994-95)**

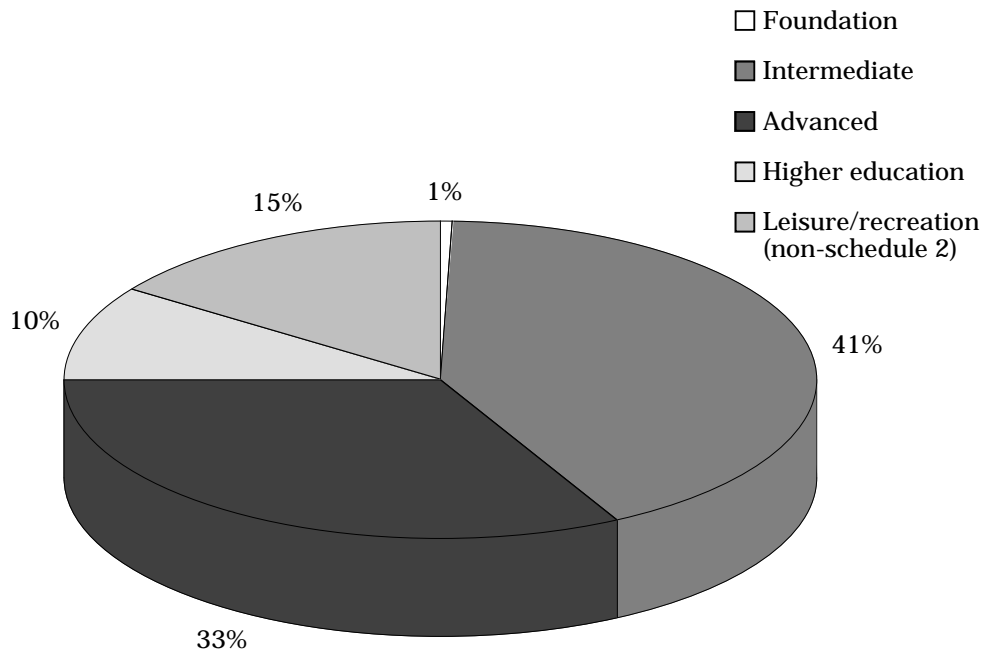


Enrolments: 1,710

**Figure 2**

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



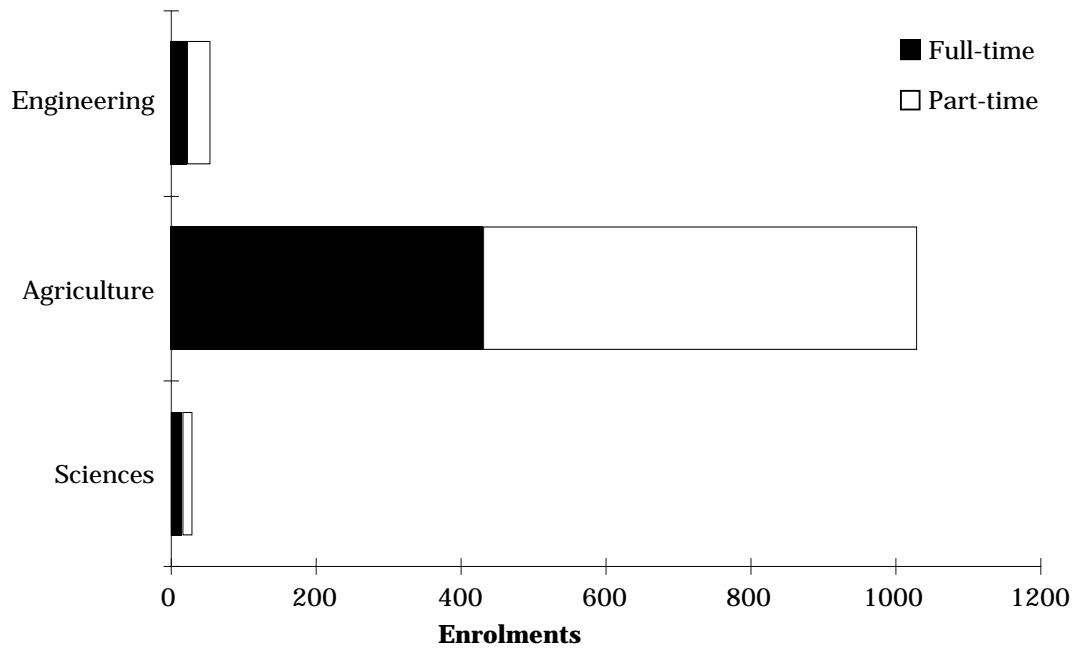
Enrolments: 1,710



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**Figure 3**

**Cannington College: FEFC-funded enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1994-95)**

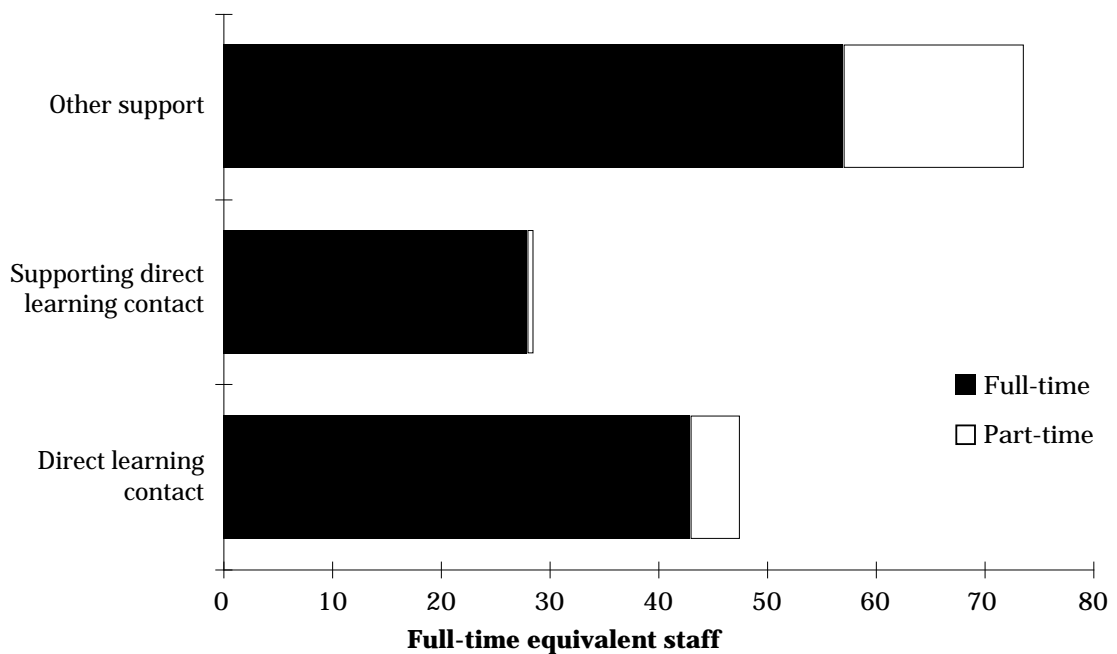


FEFC-funded enrolments: 1,115

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**Figure 4**

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

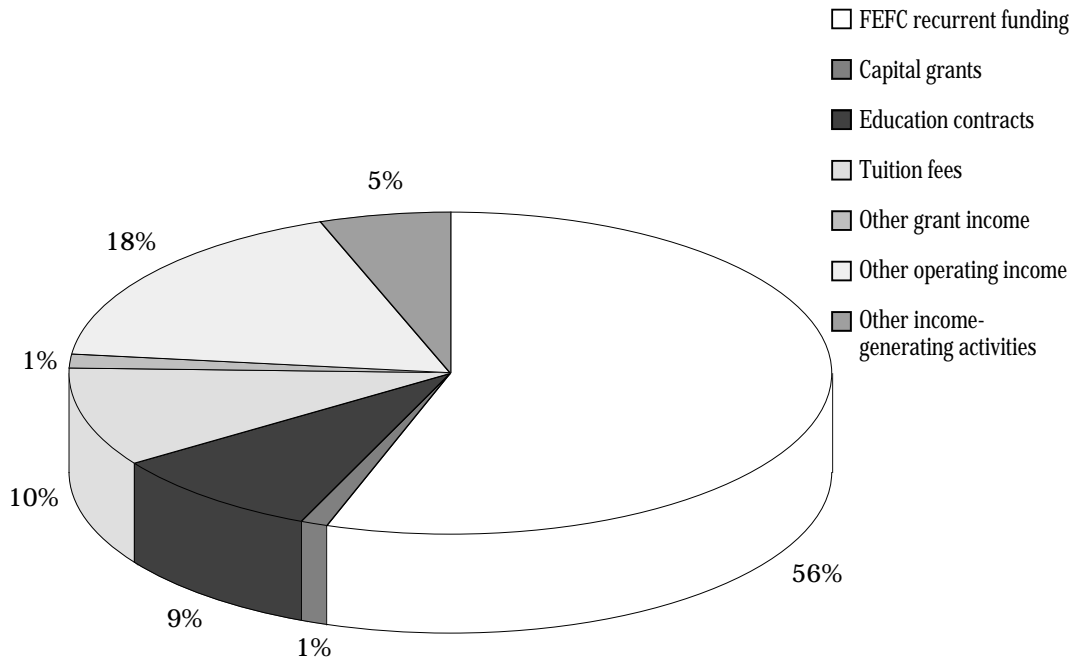


Full-time equivalent staff: 150

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**Figure 5**

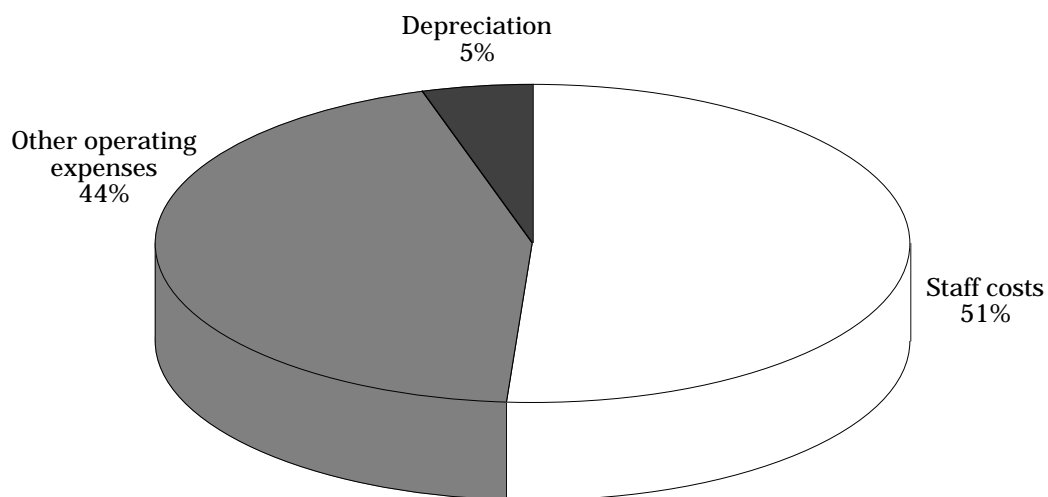
**Cannington College: income (for 16 months to July 1994)**



Income: £5,885,000

**Figure 6**

**Cannington College: expenditure (for 16 months to July 1994)**



Expenditure: £5,300,000

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