

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

Carmel College

September 1996

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL**

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

	Paragraph
Summary	
Introduction	1
The college and its aims	3
Responsiveness and range of provision	9
Governance and management	19
Students' recruitment, guidance and support	29
Teaching and the promotion of learning	38
Students' achievements	47
Quality assurance	55
Resources	62
Conclusions and issues	70
Figures	

GRADE DESCRIPTORS

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

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

College grade profiles 1993-95

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

FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 104/96

CARMEL COLLEGE
NORTH WEST REGION
Inspected April 1995-May 1996

Summary

Carmel College is a Roman Catholic sixth form college in St Helens, Lancashire. It aims to be a Christian college, ecumenical in outlook, which values all people. The governing body is experienced and hardworking and it supports the college in its mission. The college responds well to, and has excellent links with, the community it serves. The college is very well managed. It places the highest priority on meeting the needs of its students. At all times, students receive outstandingly good support and guidance from their personal tutors and students' services. Students speak with affection of the college. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are encouraged to learn and are well supported. Staff are well qualified and hardworking. Much of the teaching is of a high standard. Students' achievements and examination results are generally impressive. All students are enabled to extend their knowledge and skills and enrich their individual perspectives. Accommodation is clean and well maintained. It is enhanced by displays of students' work. The library has been improved and it is well used. The quality assurance system has many good aspects but there is greater scope for co-ordination of its activities. The college should: increase participation on intermediate level courses; improve its 'open forum' programme; address poor retention rates in some evening classes; review programmes of study for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities; and continue to upgrade its accommodation and equipment.

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

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Mathematics, information technology and computing	2	English	1
Science	2	Modern languages	1
Business	2	Geography, psychology and sociology	1
		SLDD provision	2

INTRODUCTION

1 Carmel College was inspected between April 1995 and May 1996. Humanities provision was inspected in April 1995 and other specialist areas in April 1996. The college's enrolment and induction procedures were inspected at the start of the autumn term in 1995, and aspects of cross-college provision in the week beginning 13 May 1996.

2 Thirteen inspectors spent 57 days in college. They visited 112 classes, observed practical work and examined students' written work. Inspectors looked at a range of documentation, including the college's strategic plan and self-assessment report. They held meetings with the college's governors, managers, teachers, staff responsible for support services, students, parents, headteachers, employers, parish priests, and representatives from St Helens Chamber Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), the St Helens education business partnership, and higher education. They attended an open day for prospective students and observed a meeting of the governing body.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

3 Carmel College was established in 1987 as a result of a reorganisation of Roman Catholic secondary education in St Helens. Following further reorganisation in 1989, it became the designated Roman Catholic sixth form college for Warrington. It is a designated college of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) under the trusteeship of the Archdiocese of Liverpool.

4 The accommodation comprises five main buildings situated on one site. A new block of teaching rooms with a theatre studies suite was opened at the time of the main specialist inspection. The college is located on the outskirts of St Helens in an urban environment with attractive views across open countryside. It has approximately three hectares of well-maintained playing fields and one hectare of amenity land. There are on-site car parking facilities. All land and buildings are owned by the Archdiocese of Liverpool.

5 Unemployment in St Helens is above the national average and it has high long-term and youth unemployment. Merseyside, including St Helens, receives the highest priority for European social funding. The college is committed to playing its part in economic regeneration. Warrington has new town status. Unlike the neighbouring Merseyside region, there is some growth of service industries in Warrington.

6 The college competes for students with other post-16 providers. Within a radius of about 15 miles, there are four other sixth form colleges, five large general further education colleges and nine 11-18 schools with sixth forms. The college strives to develop productive relationships and partnerships with other post-16 providers and particularly with St Helens College. Students from its partner Catholic schools are guaranteed a place at the college. The college is very popular and has introduced a waiting

list system for applicants from non-Catholic schools. In its admissions policy and in practice, the college gives high priority to meeting the needs of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, regardless of which schools they have attended.

7 In November 1995, the college had 1,516 students on roll, comprising 1,039 full-time students, mainly 16 to 19 year olds, and 477 part-time evening students, mainly adults. Student numbers by age, by level of study and by mode of attendance and curriculum area are given in figures 1, 2 and 3, respectively. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is given in figure 4.

8 The college's mission is 'to strive to be a centre of educational excellence, opportunity and support within a caring Christian environment'. It aims to be a Christian college with an ecumenical outlook. Carmel College welcomes students of other faiths and sees itself as part of the community, creating mutually enriching educational, business, community and parish partnerships.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

9 The college responds well to the needs of the community it serves. Its range of courses has grown considerably since the founding of the college and now includes:

- General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level) in 35 subjects, with 18 of these also being available as GCE advanced supplementary (AS) subjects
- General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) in 15 subjects
- General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) courses: four advanced, two intermediate and two at foundation level
- National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) level 3 in administration
- an office training and technology course
- RSA Examinations Board (RSA) core skills and skills for life programmes.

The range of GCE A level subjects is reviewed annually. Modular GCE A level courses have been introduced in science, mathematics, computing, history and geography. In 1994-95, the college introduced evening courses. These have been very successful in attracting students especially in information technology and languages. There are now almost 500 students following evening courses.

10 There are some gaps in provision at levels 1 and 2. There are 53 full-time students on GCSE programmes and many of them are repeating subjects in which they obtained poor results. The college offers some provision to students for whom a study programme made up entirely of GCSE subjects may be inappropriate; there is scope for increasing this alternative provision and publicising it more widely. The proportion of students on advanced level courses has increased. Although the college

offers GNVQ intermediate courses as an alternative to a GCSE programme, only 14 students were following these courses at the time of inspection. From September 1996, the college is raising its entry requirements for all its courses. The changes to the entry requirements for GCE A level have been made in response to requests from partner schools which wish to raise the aspirations of their pupils. Students on GNVQ intermediate courses are now required to obtain a merit before they can progress to a more advanced course.

11 The college maintains good links with higher education. It has developed a foundation course for a science degree offered by the University of Liverpool which is now in its third year of operation, and an art foundation diploma course accredited by Manchester Metropolitan University and University College Salford. There are 36 students on these courses. A further preparatory course for a degree in computing offered by the University of Liverpool, is planned for 1996-97. Links with Salford University were established three years ago; advanced GNVQ business students who achieve a merit, are guaranteed a place on the university's higher national diploma course.

12 Excellent links are maintained with schools and other colleges. These links cover school pupils' progression to the college, curricular matters and general working arrangements with partner institutions. All links are co-ordinated by an industrious liaison team which works to agreed guidelines. Its members visit schools regularly and they take part in careers education activities. Events and meetings are carefully logged. Many students said that they feel as if they know, and are known by, college staff before they enrol. There is some scope for improving curriculum links with schools. As a result of one of the college's collaborative arrangements, students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are provided with good progression routes at St Helens College. The college also works in partnership with St Helens College on a higher national diploma course in environmental science which receives financial support from the competitiveness fund of the St Helens Chamber TEC. The college places importance on its good links with parents. They are invited to open days and to the interviews which their children receive when they apply to the college, or when they have their work reviewed. Parents said that they feel welcomed in the college.

13 The college has productive working relationships with St Helens Chamber TEC and the St Helens education business partnership. It receives TEC funding for initiatives to facilitate students' progression, GNVQ developments and staff training. In September 1996, the college will be implementing the modern apprenticeship scheme in partnership with the local rugby league club. GCE A level students are involved in the replanting of riverbanks through a project run in conjunction with the education business partnership, local infant and junior schools, and North West Water. The college is a member of a collaborative group consisting of Carmel College, St Helens College, the local education authority and

St Helens Chamber TEC, which in 1995 won a contract to provide the local careers service.

14 Links with employers are good. There are links with local industry through the Merseyside Industry Commerce Awards, which involve visits from staff and students to companies and the mentoring of students by employers. The college provides a GNVQ advanced health and social care course for employees on day release from the St Helens Health Trust. It also provides short courses in information technology and languages for local industry. Science and mathematics students have limited links with the world outside the classroom. However, work experience and involvement in young enterprise activities are available to all students. Language students have many opportunities to visit other countries, including opportunities for work experience in Spain and Germany. Students have served as translators for the twin town exchanges between St Helens and Chalons-sur-Saone.

15 The college meets the requirements of sections 44 and 45 of *The Further and Higher Education Act 1992*. Christian beliefs are encouraged and informed by a variety of activities. The chaplaincy makes an important contribution in helping the college fulfil its commitment to create a caring community of people who support one another. Chaplaincy planning meetings attended by the principal, the equal opportunities co-ordinator, two students, the chaplain and the Dean of St Helens are held every half-term. In order to maintain good working links between the college and the trustees there is also a termly meeting between the Auxiliary Bishop of Liverpool, who is a college governor and trustee of the archdiocese of Liverpool, and senior managers of the college. Mass is celebrated every week, and on Holy Days.

16 Students are offered a wide range of activities to enrich their curriculum and broaden their experiences. They are enthusiastic about these. Activities include the University of Liverpool enrichment programme, which is designed to enhance communication, personal and problem-solving skills. The college's recreation programme is extensive and popular. Students are able to participate in a wide range of team games as well as individual keep fit activities. The college won the 1996 British Colleges Champions Cup for rugby league. As part of the programme, there are compulsory weekly sessions called 'open forum' when students examine beliefs, moral codes, spirituality, environmental issues and world religions and philosophies. Inspectors observed a few open forum sessions. They were ably directed by staff and were of a good standard. Some students express dissatisfaction with open forum, however. They claim it sometimes repeats areas covered in school or in tutorial sessions, involves them in too much time on administrative tasks such as the recording of skills and knowledge they have gained, and is planned without consulting them fully.

17 Marketing is well managed. The marketing team consists of a senior member of staff, a marketing co-ordinator and a marketing officer. Promotional materials for full-time courses are good; the prospectus, course directory and course leaflets are attractive, informative and appropriate. The quality of such material for evening provision is not of such a high order. The college's market research, in relation to older students, is underdeveloped.

18 Awareness of the importance of equal opportunities is well promoted throughout the college. The equal opportunities policy is regularly reviewed. Staff in curriculum areas write their own strategies for implementing the equal opportunities policy, but these are not co-ordinated across the college. Staff training is undertaken in relation to equal opportunities. Students' awareness of equal opportunities is raised through tutorial activities. Recently, the college carried out a survey of the suitability of resources, in the context of equal opportunities. This resulted in the culling and replacement of some resources. Efforts are being made to redress gender imbalances on language, computing and science courses.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

19 Carmel College is well managed. Its management structure is not overtly hierarchical. It is based upon a co-operative network within which many staff are entrusted with several roles and responsibilities and report to other colleagues. Staff expressed their admiration of the college's management structure. They felt it enhanced their job satisfaction because they were enabled to play a full part in the administration of the college. Through careful use of management information, clear objectives for management, and good communications systems, the college is able to meet its aim to 'develop effective and harmonious management to ensure the best use of human, financial and physical resources'.

20 Governors take a close interest in the college's activities. They support the college's ethos. Membership of the governing body consists of 11 foundation governors, a nominee from St Helens Chamber TEC, a parent governor, two staff governors, three co-opted governors and the principal. Governors have a wide range of experience in education, industry, commerce and the community. Three are qualified accountants and one has expertise in personnel matters. They are provided with a useful handbook to support them in their role. The governors have adopted a code of conduct, and have undertaken an exercise to define their role. They have received training and have reviewed their own performance. There is a clear job description for the post of clerk to the governors. The present clerk, who is a member of the college's support staff, has received training for the role, and serves the governing body effectively.

21 The full governing body meets five times a year; meetings are business like and agendas reflect the importance governors give to the college's mission. The governors receive clear reports on the performance of the

college across a range of aspects including financial matters and students' achievements. Staff regularly make presentations to the governing body or to one of its subcommittees. There are six subcommittees; finance, estates and marketing, personnel, remuneration, audit, and appeals, and a committee which deals with disciplinary and grievance procedures. Each committee has clear terms of reference, a description of membership and a planned cycle of meetings.

22 The college's aims are reflected in the planning process and are underpinned by clear objectives, targets and criteria for success. There are effective procedures for developing and reviewing the strategic plan. Sufficient emphasis is given to local market information, the national targets for education and training and risk analysis. The staff are aware of how they can contribute to meeting the targets set in the college's strategic plan. Curriculum areas have development plans which reflect the aims and objectives of the college's strategic plan. These plans include realistic aims, objectives, and performance indicators. They are reviewed annually and amended when necessary. Some curriculum plans give insufficient consideration to the management of learning process, evening provision, and foundation level courses.

23 The college has policy statements covering the environment, equal opportunities, health and safety, staff development and pay. These are well supported by staff and all managers have responsibilities for their implementation and review. Particular prominence is given to the equal opportunities policy. Health and safety issues are dealt with efficiently. There is a developing awareness among staff and students of environmental issues. Governors receive regular reports on the implementation of the policies on the environment, equal opportunities and health and safety.

24 The senior management team comprises the principal, the vice-principal, five senior tutors and the finance and business manager. Their leadership of the college is highly effective. The senior tutors have responsibility for the organisation of the curriculum and quality assurance, student services, careers and admissions. They each manage a fifth of the students and staff. The senior management structure is designed to emphasise that all staff in the college have a pastoral role. It is a major strength of the college that all staff, including senior staff, have close contact with students. Staff fully understand the management structure, and know to whom they report and for what they are responsible. All posts have job descriptions in a common format and these relate to the mission of the college. All staff teams meet regularly in accordance with college guidelines. Meetings are efficiently recorded.

25 The curriculum is well managed. There are curriculum and course teams and the managers of these report to both the senior tutor for curriculum organisation and quality assurance, and to the senior tutor for personnel and curriculum development. Many teams work well together,

particularly in science, English and modern languages. There are limited opportunities for different teams to combine in order to develop resources, or share ideas. However, there are well-planned procedures for the dissemination of good practice across the college. These have been particularly effective in improving schemes of work. The management of part-time staff who only teach in the evenings is less effective and they receive insufficient support from curriculum leaders.

26 The system of financial allocation is well understood by staff. The delegation of consumable budgets is closely monitored. A bidding system for capital expenditure is prioritised in line with curriculum development plans. The college is starting to cost its existing courses and proposed developments. The college has been successful in bidding for funding from sources such as the St Helens Chamber TEC. Staff and other resources are well deployed.

27 The college's estimated income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1996 are shown in figures 5 and 6 respectively. The college receives 86 per cent of its income from FEFC recurrent funding. Its average level of funding has decreased from £18.14 per unit in 1993-94 to £17.50 per unit in 1995-96. The average level of funding in 1995-96 for all sixth form colleges is £19.37 per unit.

28 There is an efficient system of collecting, collating and disseminating management information. It has been developed to meet the needs of both college managers and external bodies. Managers receive regular and useful reports on a wide variety of issues including enrolments, attendance, retention, budgets and equal opportunities. A small amount of information is still held in manual systems. Only senior managers have direct access to the computerised system.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

29 The provision of effective guidance and support for students is one of the college's top priorities. All staff have a strong commitment to ensuring that their students receive the necessary care and guidance to help them succeed. Staff approach their responsibilities for pastoral care with conviction. Teams of staff manage all aspects of support and guidance and have devised clear guidelines on their implementation. Students and their parents speak extremely highly of the quality of pastoral care and support which the college provides.

30 Admissions arrangements are effective and comprehensive. The criteria for admissions procedures are well understood by all college staff. All prospective students are offered several opportunities to visit the college; for example there are three open evenings, and numerous taster days for school pupils. A conference for prospective students is held in June at which participants are provided with simulated experience of a typical college day. There are, however, no taster experiences for prospective students who wish to take intermediate level courses.

Prospective students on foundation level courses are provided with an excellent programme of visits from college staff. They also spend five days in college before the start of their course.

31 Individual students receive excellent guidance as part of the admissions process. All students are interviewed and receive impartial advice. The admissions procedure culminates with an admissions day at the end of August. Most staff are involved in this, together with representatives from St Helens College and the local careers service. Students already at the college play a part in the day's activities and give prospective students a friendly introduction to the life of the college. The great majority of prospective students expressed their satisfaction with the admissions day.

32 The college provides new students with three days of induction. The induction programme is well structured and provides a good balance between information about the college life and the curriculum. There are daily tutorials, talks and introductory lessons which give students a clear impression of what the study of a particular subject will involve. There are useful handbooks for all courses. In a few instances, staff gave students inappropriate materials on courses. During induction, staff stress the importance of the programme of enrichment activities. This provides students with the opportunity to broaden their experience at college by taking part in cultural, recreational and sporting activities.

33 Students are highly appreciative of the helpfulness, accessibility and supportiveness of staff. All full-time students belong to a tutorial group which meets daily. Tutorial groups are made up of students from different courses and include those who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. On at least two days each week, the tutorial time is devoted to individual interviews and discussions. At other times, there is a well organised programme of tutorial activities which covers careers education, core skills and life skills. Whilst students value many aspects of the tutorial programme, they express some dissatisfaction with the high number of administrative activities which take place in tutorials. Students who progress within the college from one course to another complain that they often have to repeat parts of the tutorial programme unnecessarily.

34 Students' progress is thoroughly monitored through termly reviews. The constructive dialogue between subject teachers and students is a key element of this monitoring process. Reviews are arranged so that parents may attend them as well. The quality of documentation emerging from reviews is variable. In some instances, targets for the students' future achievement are not identified and the main points covered at follow-up interviews are not recorded. Students' attendance is rigorously monitored. The college belongs to the St Helens compact which gives students awards for good attendance and punctuality.

35 There are separate courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The college provides students on intermediate and advanced programmes with well co-ordinated additional support for learning. Close liaison with schools ensures that specific arrangements for such support are made, where appropriate, for students early on in their course. There are extra consultation and tutorial periods in many subjects for students who need additional help. There are no learning centres or special workshops where students may receive help with literacy or numeracy at times which suit them. Teachers, however, give generously of their time to assist students.

36 The college counsellor is making an increasingly important contribution to student welfare. Students are well aware of the range of support available to them. This includes one-to-one counselling, tutorials on study skills, a welfare rights service and discussion groups. The college's counselling service has built up a strong, external network of contacts for providing students with advice. The students' council is an effective channel for representing students' views and concerns. It organises the college's significant contribution to a variety of charities as well as many imaginative social events.

37 High-quality and comprehensive careers education and impartial advice are offered to students. The college maintains close links with St Helens Careers Service Ltd. Two members of the service work with the college's own team of 13 careers tutors. They offer individual students advice and provide careers education within tutorials and lessons. Careers education meets the needs of students on different courses. Students clearly value the events organised by the careers team, such as the careers and higher education awareness days and the higher education forum, to which parents are invited. Group tutors provide excellent guidance and support to students preparing applications for higher education and employment. The quality of the advice and support the college provides for students after they have received their examination results is outstanding.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

38 Inspectors observed 112 lessons. Most teaching was judged to be of a high standard. Seventy-six per cent of sessions had strengths which outweighed the weaknesses. This percentage is significantly higher than the average for all subjects recorded in the *Chief Inspector's Annual Report 1994-95*. The weaknesses outweighed the strengths in less than 5 per cent of sessions. Attendance rates in the classes inspected averaged 89 per cent and ranged from 87 per cent in psychology, sociology and geography, to 92 per cent in business. The following table summarises the grades awarded to the sessions inspected.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE AS/A level		22	35	14	2	0	73
GCSE		6	3	2	1	0	12
GNVQ		5	2	2	0	0	9
NVQ		0	2	1	0	0	3
Basic education		3	4	3	1	0	11
Other		2	1	0	0	1	4
Total		38	47	22	4	1	112

39 Teachers are enthusiastic and knowledgeable about their work. Most lessons are carefully planned and conducted in a relaxed but purposeful atmosphere. In most curriculum areas, students experience a variety of interesting and well-balanced learning activities. In some lessons, teachers did not take enough account of the different abilities and needs of individuals. They used unsuitable learning materials or devoted too much time to a few students at the expense of others.

40 Much science teaching is good. In some lessons, the teaching was particularly imaginative. Good use was made of learning aids, such as jigsaws, games, model-building kits and videos, to engage the students' interest and illustrate basic principles. In revision classes, question and answer techniques were well used. Theoretical and practical activities are effectively integrated and rigorously assessed. Marking schemes are well designed and implemented consistently. Written work which counts towards final examination grades is marked carefully and teachers provide students with helpful, written comments on their performance. The marking of other pieces of work, however, is not as thorough and some teachers do not use assessment as a means of showing students where they need to improve. There are well-structured schemes of work for all science courses. In a few instances, teachers did not manage time well in the classroom. Some teachers set the students trivial and undemanding tasks.

41 Teachers of mathematics and computing courses plan their lessons carefully and ensure that they reflect the requirements of examination syllabuses. In mathematics, students' work is assessed regularly. Records of students' progress are detailed and up to date. Teachers emphasise the value of developing and presenting clear, logical solutions to mathematical problems. There is a narrow range of approaches to teaching and learning. In most mathematics lessons, teachers worked through problems on the board, or with the use of the overhead projector and students copied down the solutions the teachers provided. This way of working inhibited discussion and did not give students opportunities to offer and clarify their own ideas about how to tackle mathematical problems. In GCE A level mathematics courses, there is not enough emphasis on the use of

information technology as a mathematical tool. In some computing lessons, teachers did not remind students of what they had done earlier or they did not outline the purpose of the lesson. Some computing students did not receive enough feedback from their teachers on the quality of their written work.

42 Schemes of work and documentation for business courses are good. Teachers use a well-judged mix of activities to introduce new topics and to strengthen earlier learning. Students are given plenty of opportunities to apply theoretical knowledge to practical situations. For example, in one lesson, on a GNVQ advanced course, students worked in small groups to analyse advertising campaigns used by the post office. Each group identified key points and shared its findings with the rest of the class. Tasks which NVQ students carry out in the college training office complement those which they perform during work experience on employers' premises. A few lessons were poorly managed by the teacher. For example, some students failed to complete tasks because the teacher did not keep to the timetable for the lesson. In another class, some students working in small groups did not understand what they should be doing and failed to use their time productively. There are not enough opportunities for GCE A level students to develop information technology skills.

43 English teaching is of a consistently high quality. Students are provided with information to help them understand how different parts of syllabuses and assessments relate to each other. Work is marked meticulously. There are effective procedures to check that marking is accurate and consistent, in terms of standards. Staff have high expectations of their students and value their contributions to lessons. They use an imaginative range of appropriate activities and manage classes well. For example, to begin a detailed study of one of Arthur Miller's plays, the teacher read aloud the stage directions for the opening of the first act and asked the students to sketch the set, indicating three important issues they should consider. The students worked in groups of three and drew their sketches on large sheets of paper for others to see. The teacher chaired the subsequent discussions well and highlighted important points as they emerged. The activity helped to convince students that the play was a dramatic piece rather than just a written script. There were a few occasions when teachers did too much of the work in lessons or failed to summarise key points.

44 There is a wide range of imaginative and appropriate teaching activities in most modern languages classes. Teachers prepare their lessons well. Overhead projectors, cassette recorders, and authentic learning materials are used effectively to illustrate key points and develop students' listening and speaking skills. For example, a teacher played a recording of a programme about the French presidential election results. Students were asked to elicit specific pieces of information and to identify priorities for the incoming president. Working in pairs, they prepared

their responses before presenting their findings and answering questions from the rest of the class. Teachers correct oral mistakes sensitively so as not to discourage students from using the foreign language. Staff are fluent in the foreign languages they teach and use them whenever possible, even to explain examination techniques. Although each lesson is well planned, there is scope for reviewing and extending many schemes of work. In some instances, the teachers' assessment of written work did not include comments and advice on how the students might improve their performance. In other instances, students' work remained unmarked.

45 Staff teaching psychology, sociology and geography courses have developed thorough schemes of work and useful course handbooks for their students. There is an excellent study guide for GCE A level geography students and a well-designed self-evaluation sheet which GCE A level sociology students use to assess their essays. Teachers mark students' work regularly and provide feedback on its quality promptly. They have a good rapport with their students, and offer them a range of activities outside the classroom to enrich their studies, such as field trips and residential events. Most lessons were lively and involved students in a variety of appropriate activities. In a revision class for GCE A level psychology students, the teacher used a suitable extract from a television programme to illustrate key points of theory which had been covered earlier in the course. Students then tackled a set of graduated questions and exercises which tested further their understanding of the topic.

46 Separate courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are divided into units of work which are externally accredited. Schemes of work for these units are appropriate and cover the development of core skills such as literacy and numeracy. However, when units are combined to meet the needs of individual students, they do not always provide a coherent programme of study. In most lessons, students were able to work at their own pace. Activities were relevant and well managed to involve everyone, but they failed to challenge some students. A few lessons lacked clear objectives and teachers did not assess students' achievements adequately. In some instances, staff did not know how to offer effective support to dyslexic students.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

47 Students have a mature and responsible attitude to their studies. They work hard, participate enthusiastically in lessons and are well motivated. They are encouraged to succeed. The majority attain their learning targets. The college closely monitors achievement. The overall attainment profile of students shows that their achievements in recent years have steadily improved. There are high rates of completion and success on full-time courses. In 1995, the average retention rate across full-time programmes was 94.4 per cent. Further improvements in retention have occurred in 1996. Retention rates have been significantly weaker in some evening classes.

48 Students acquire appropriate levels of knowledge and skill. In GCE A level English, students write accurately and at length, show flair and originality and successfully apply theoretical knowledge to original data. Modern languages students develop confidence and fluency in the language being learnt; students usually have a good understanding of the extended, even sophisticated, language used by the teacher. On GCE A level computing courses, students demonstrate appropriate skills and knowledge of programming. Some assignments, however, are not well presented; some lack task descriptions, indexes or source references. GCE A level mathematics students are able to handle graphical calculators confidently and effectively. They are sometimes reticent in class. GNVQ students show that they can apply the theory they have learned to solve problems. Their coursework and assignments are of a good standard. Students' information technology skills are not being developed consistently across all courses.

49 Foundation level students work hard and generally achieve well. Of a total of 19 students on foundation courses for RSA core skills, skills for life and GNVQ, 13 successfully progressed to the vocational access course at St Helens College. One particular success story relates to a student from a special school who progressed from a skills for life course at the college to a GNVQ intermediate and then a GNVQ advanced course taken in combination with a GCE A level subject. Thereafter, the student went on to a computing degree course at Liverpool John Moores University.

50 In 1994-95, the 365 students aged 16 to 18 taking GCE AS/A level examinations scored, on average, 4.5 points per entry (where grade A=10 points, E=2) according to the 1995 tables published by the Department for Education and Employment. This places the college amongst the top third of all colleges in the sector. The average points score for students taking two or more GCE A levels has steadily risen over the last four years from 12 in 1992 to 13.6 in 1995. There have been outstanding results in GCE A level mathematics and further mathematics over the last three years both in terms of pass rates and proportions of higher grades. Features of the examination results for 1995 include the following:

- an average pass rate at GCE A level excluding general studies of 87 per cent. The overall pass rate including general studies is 83 per cent which is equal to the national average for sixth form colleges
- pass rates of between 95 per cent and 100 per cent in 10 out of 26 subjects offered at GCE A level
- all students passing French, German, further mathematics and music
- high proportions of A and B grades in mathematics, further mathematics, English, French and Spanish

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- pass rates in GCE A level history, business studies, economics, psychology, sociology, biology and religious studies which were approximately 5 per cent below the national average. In some subjects, such as sociology and psychology, results had been above average in the previous year.

51 There were 467 entries for GCSE examinations in 1995. Forty-nine per cent of the college's GCSE results were at grades A to C, an improvement on the previous year's performance of 4 per cent. In nine of the subjects, results were above the national average. The largest number of candidates was in mathematics and English. Of a total of 163 candidates in mathematics, 40 per cent achieved grades A to C, which equates to the national average for sixth form colleges. However, about 40 per cent of students did not improve on their existing grade. In English, of a total of 91 candidates, 44 per cent achieved grades A to C, below the national average. Biology results were poor, with only 14 per cent achieving grades A to C.

52 The Department for Education and Employment's 1995 performance tables show that 94 per cent of the students, aged 16 to 18, in their final year of study on vocational courses at the college were successful. By this measure, the college is placed in the top 10 per cent of colleges in the sector. The main features of students' achievements on vocational courses are:

- 100 per cent pass rates on the one-year post GCE A level foundation art course and on RSA core skills courses
- excellent results on GNVQ advanced in business studies with 94 per cent of students gaining their qualification, all with a merit or distinction
- the well above average pass rate on GNVQ intermediate health and social care and the above average results on GNVQ intermediate business studies
- of the 358 entries achieving full awards in a range of RSA office skills and technology courses the average pass rate was 87 per cent. Sixty-one per cent of the candidates achieved distinctions
- only 43 per cent of the small group of students taking the business administration course achieving the full award.

53 At present, the number of full-time students aged 19 or over is relatively small. They are mainly students on a third year of a GCE A level course who are aiming to improve their grades. Most older students study on part-time courses in the evening. Many of these are taking RSA computer literacy and information technology courses. Of a total of 97 students, 40 per cent gained their full computer literacy and information technology award, 27 per cent achieved partial success and over 20 per cent left the course early. Large numbers of students take courses in elementary French and Spanish. Those who complete these courses

usually obtain good examination results. Thirty per cent of students left the French course early. Other provision in the evening includes GCSE English, mathematics, sociology and GCE A level textiles. There were high percentages of higher grade passes in textiles, sociology and English. Non-completion rates in both mathematics and English were high.

54 College data on students destinations are impressively comprehensive. For 1994-95, the destination of only seven students are unknown. Destinations are publicised in an attractive booklet. This gives details of the destinations of individual students, summarises destinations by level of course and gives pen portraits of students who have been particularly successful. In 1995, this publication shows that:

- 73 per cent of students on the post GCE A level art foundation course went on to specialist art courses in higher education and 27 per cent gained employment
- 84 per cent of GCE A level students progressed to higher education, 3 per cent continued in further education, and 5 per cent gained employment. The remainder were either seeking employment or training, or had deferred entry to higher education
- 82 per cent of students on the GNVQ advanced course in business studies gained places in higher education
- of 64 students on a variety of courses at intermediate level, 73 per cent continued in further education, 8 per cent undertook appropriate training programmes, 8 per cent found employment, and 8 per cent were seeking employment. The destinations of 3 per cent were unknown.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

55 The college's quality assurance system has many good features. The college carries out an annual cycle of reviews, reports, internal inspection and planning for the improvement of quality. There is scope for strengthening the co-ordination of these processes across the college. There is no comprehensive policy on quality assurance and there are no guidelines on the implementation of quality assurance procedures. Performance is measured against a set of quality standards and criteria which are regularly reviewed. Responsibility for the measurement and monitoring of these standards is clearly devolved to individual staff. The standards are set out in the charter. Students are familiar with and understand the college's charter. The complaints procedure is clear. The college has gained externally accredited quality awards for its work in the areas of records of achievement, careers guidance, work experience, business links, and is helping students to be self-reliant in their learning and to work on their own.

56 The college carries out a thorough review of its curriculum. Reports are produced by curriculum teams using a common format. They include

an analysis of students' achievements, retention rates, destinations and attitudes and make comparisons with the previous year's performance. Where possible, course teams make analytical comparison of the examination results obtained by students at the end of their course, with the qualifications and examination grades they held when they joined the college. Through this analysis, the extent of a student's achievement whilst he or she is at the college, can be calculated. The college compares the analysis of its students' achievements with that carried out by other sixth form colleges. Some course teams carry out this analysis more rigorously, and in more detail, than others. Meetings between staff and senior managers on the review of the curriculum are minuted. Future action for improvement is identified. There is insufficient analysis of the performance of curriculum areas in relation to the college's quality standards, as specified in its charter.

57 The college makes extensive use of attitude surveys and questionnaires. It has well-established practices of obtaining the views of students on the quality of provision. The views of parents are also regularly sought. Information on students' attitudes supplied by the Advanced Level Information System is available to course leaders. The findings of two surveys of students' attitudes have been fed back to student representatives. The framing of some questionnaires allows students insufficient opportunity to express their opinions fully. The information gathered through these questionnaires is not always well used or acted upon. Some students complain that there are too many questionnaires. There is scope for the college to make more use of alternative methods of obtaining the views of students.

58 Internal inspection is undertaken systematically. A code of practice sets out the role and processes of inspection. Reports are written to the headings of the Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*, and are based on discussions with staff, a review of a portfolio of evidence and the direct observation of teaching and learning. The reports are well written and analytical. They contain recommendations which form part of an action plan. The implementation of the plan is subsequently monitored by the quality team. Recommendations do not always relate to all the issues which have been identified in inspection reports.

59 The college has operated a system of annual staff appraisal for two years. After some initial apprehension, staff have welcomed staff appraisal because it gives them an opportunity to review their professional development. They regard the process as positive and supportive. Appraisal may focus on one aspect of an individual's role or, by agreement, it may be wider in its scope. The appraisal process does not include a review of an individual's overall performance against his or her job description or particular targets. Most staff choose to be appraised by a manager to whom they report for some or all of their work.

60 The college's staff-development policy includes a statement of the right of all staff to have access to development and training opportunities. The programme of staff development reflects the outcomes of the appraisal and the curriculum planning processes. Records are kept of staff-development activities. Staff are invited to evaluate their experience of training activities. A wide range of staff-development activities has been undertaken by staff, including the observation of each others' teaching. Induction arrangements for new staff are well documented. They provide a sound introduction to the college and give new staff an opportunity to identify any training needs. All new teachers have their teaching observed at least twice in the first year. The induction arrangements have been evaluated by staff and subsequent improvements are planned for the coming year. In 1995, the college achieved the Investor in People award.

61 The college has produced a self-evaluation report. The report follows the framework outlined in Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. It was written by the vice-principal but drew upon an analysis of strengths and weaknesses compiled by teams throughout the college. The weaknesses identified by teams rarely related to teaching and learning. A few key weaknesses, identified by inspectors, were absent from the report and some strengths were overstated. The report was clearly set out and well written. It represents a measured appraisal which often coincided with the conclusions of the inspectors.

RESOURCES

Staffing

62 Staff are well motivated and work hard. They demonstrate a high level of commitment to the college's mission, work co-operatively together, and are proud of the college's achievements. Communication between staff is good. They feel that managers are accessible and ready to listen to their views. The deployment of staff is closely related to the college's developing course provision through the college's staffing and curriculum review. This sets out costed options for, and recommendations on, staffing for the governing body.

63 Teaching staff are well qualified. Ninety per cent have degrees or the equivalent, 17 per cent have higher qualifications and over 90 per cent are teacher trained. A good proportion of teachers have had relevant industrial or commercial experience including 11 who have undertaken industrial placements. In science and computing, staff lack recent industrial experience. Several teachers are external examiners or moderators. Seventeen staff have achieved the appropriate training and development lead body awards. In office skills, staff have not acquired the required training and development lead body award to enable them to carry out internal verification. Technician and support staff are well qualified and experienced. Over 80 per cent have a qualification or experience relevant to their job in the college. They are effectively deployed. The college

library, personnel and finance sections are professionally staffed. There is a shortage of technician support for information technology.

64 Ninety-three per cent of the 69 teaching staff are full time and the majority are female. There is an even balance between men and women holding promoted posts. Sixty-three per cent of senior managers are male.

Equipment/learning resources

65 Classrooms are well furnished. They generally contain easily movable tables and chairs. Adjustable tables and workbenches for students with disabilities are provided where required. In some rooms, it is difficult for projectors and television sets to be used effectively as teaching aids because the quality of the window blinds is poor. The ratio of computer workstations to students across the college is 1:11.5. There are five suites of networked personal computers. There are freestanding computers in classrooms; students may work on their own at these machines when classes are in progress.

66 There is sufficient specialist equipment for most courses. Learning materials produced by teachers are of a good standard. There is a bank of audio-visual resources and staff may borrow equipment from this through an efficient loan procedure. The training office is well equipped. Modern languages students have access to satellite television. The range of equipment in the training and fitness room has recently been extended by the addition of rowing and step machines. Technical aids and a bank of resources are available to students with disabilities; these include the provision of laptop computers and tape recorders for dyslexic students. There is good equipment for most science courses but there are insufficient microscopes for biology. There is a lack of listening facilities for individual students, particularly for those studying languages.

67 The library is well used by students. It contains 10,500 books, 21 compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) titles, over 200 audio and video cassettes, a good selection of careers information and a range of periodicals. There is a photocopier for the use of students. Stock is electronically catalogued and there is effective monitoring of its use. The library also has an electronic link with the library of the University of Liverpool. Twenty computers are available to students in an extension to the library. Some of the weaknesses in the library stock in humanities subjects, identified in the early part of the inspection, had been rectified. By the time of the team inspection some books were out of date especially some of those for business and information technology. There are few books for those on foundation level courses and stock is limited for those non-mathematicians who wish to improve or revise their numeracy skills.

Accommodation

68 The quality of accommodation is generally good. Accommodation is well maintained and decorated and efforts have been made to ensure it is

attractive and welcoming. There have been carefully planned extensions to buildings. Lifts and ramps give easy access to all parts of the college for wheelchair users. There are displays of students' work and other materials to stimulate the students' interest. Staff accommodation is mostly good. Some support staff work in cramped conditions.

69 Some classrooms, and particularly those used for biology, are too small for the classes taught in them. The layout of the information technology rooms gives students little desk space. The information technology area in the library is poorly ventilated. There is one mobile classroom which is used for art lessons. It is of poor quality. Communal areas for students are inadequate. There is considerable overcrowding in the refectory. The college has been successful in bidding for funding to improve its accommodation.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

70 Carmel College's strengths are:

- a strongly Christian ethos which permeates all aspects of college life and places value on all members of the college
- an outstanding commitment to the care and development of individual students
- responsiveness to the community it serves and the maintenance of good links with a variety of groups within it
- an excellent range of elective activities to enrich students' experience and extend their skills
- effective and efficient management supported by a management information system which meets the needs of the college and external bodies
- supportive and hard working governors
- the high levels of support and guidance available to students
- excellent support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities including ease of access to all parts of the college by wheelchair users
- a high standard of teaching and learning
- good levels of achievement, and good examination results for full-time students
- good elements of quality assurance including an annual cycle of reviews, reports, internal inspection and planning
- an appraisal process which identifies staff-development needs
- hard-working, well-motivated and well-qualified staff who take a pride in the college's achievements
- students who participate fully in college life and enjoy their learning.

71 In order to continue the good progress the college is making towards achieving its objectives, it should:

- ensure that quality assurance activities are better co-ordinated
- review the 'open forum' programme and take into consideration students' views on its value and effectiveness
- extend participation on intermediate courses
- address the high non-completion rates on some evening provision
- review programmes of study for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

FIGURES

-
- 1 Percentage student numbers by age (as at November 1995)

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

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

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

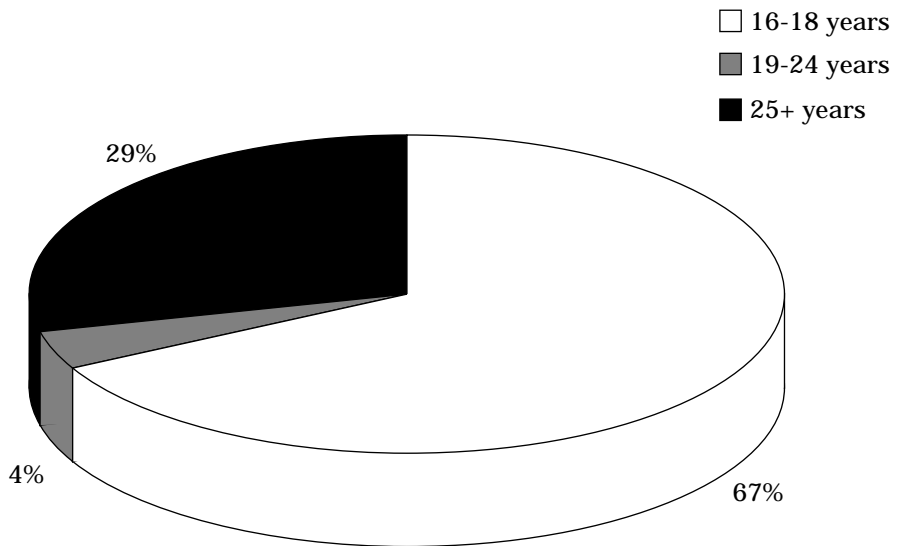
 - 5 Estimated income (for 12 months to July 1996)

 - 6 Estimated 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

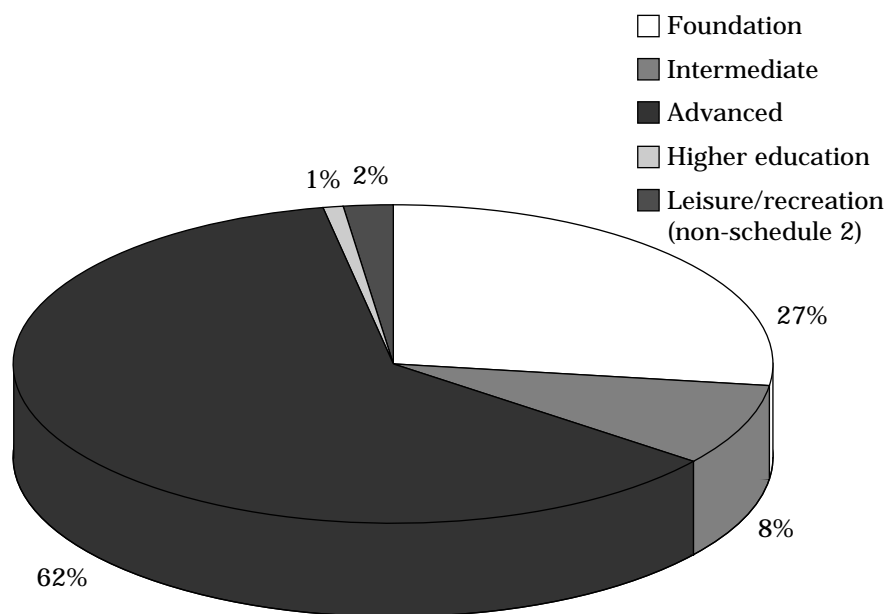
Carmel College: percentage student numbers by age (as at November 1995)



Student numbers: 1,516

Figure 2

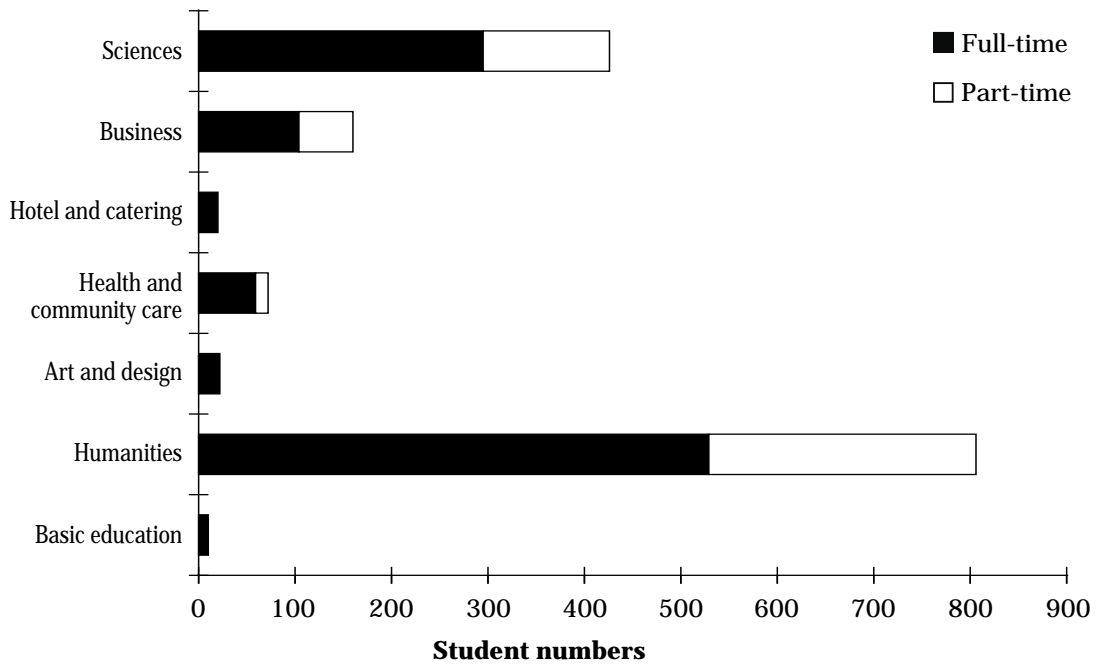
Carmel College: percentage student numbers by level of study (as at November 1995)



Student numbers: 1,516

Figure 3

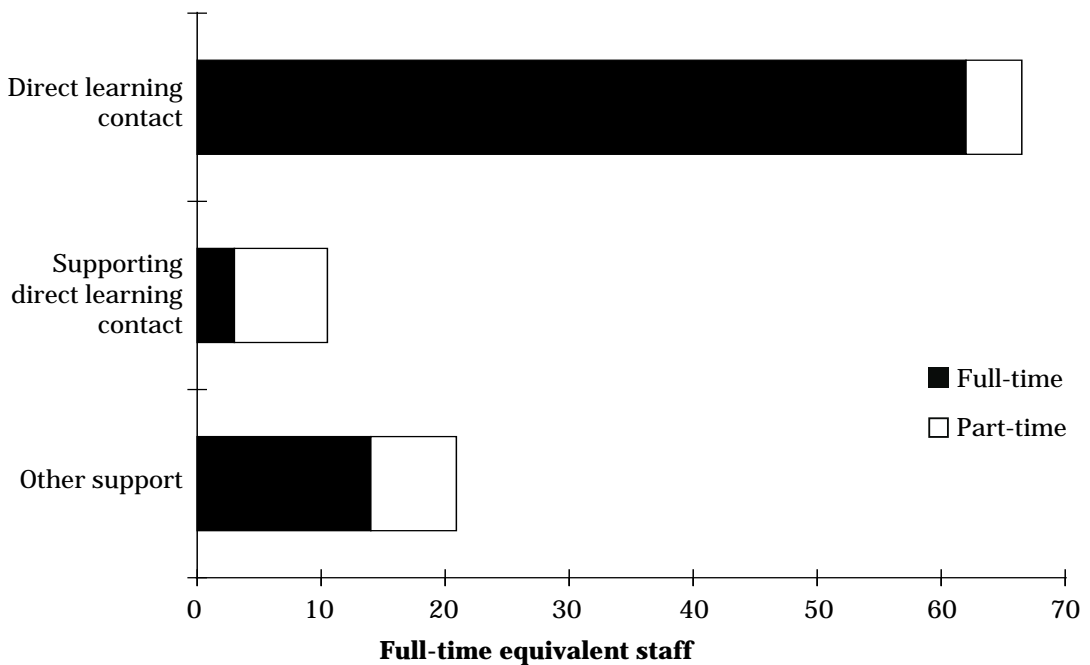
Carmel College: student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at November 1995)



Student numbers: 1,516

Figure 4

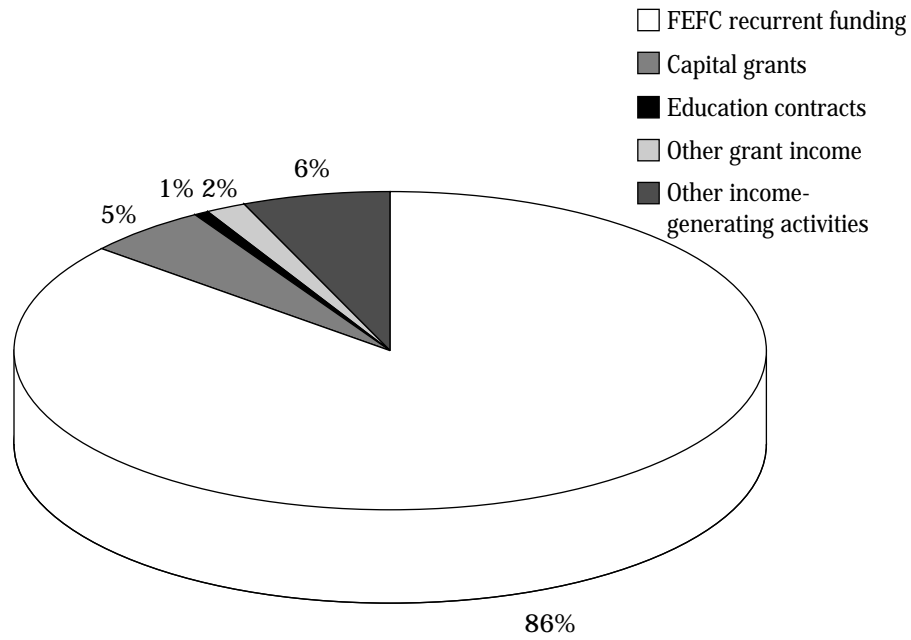
Carmel College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1995-96)



Full-time equivalent staff: 98

Figure 5

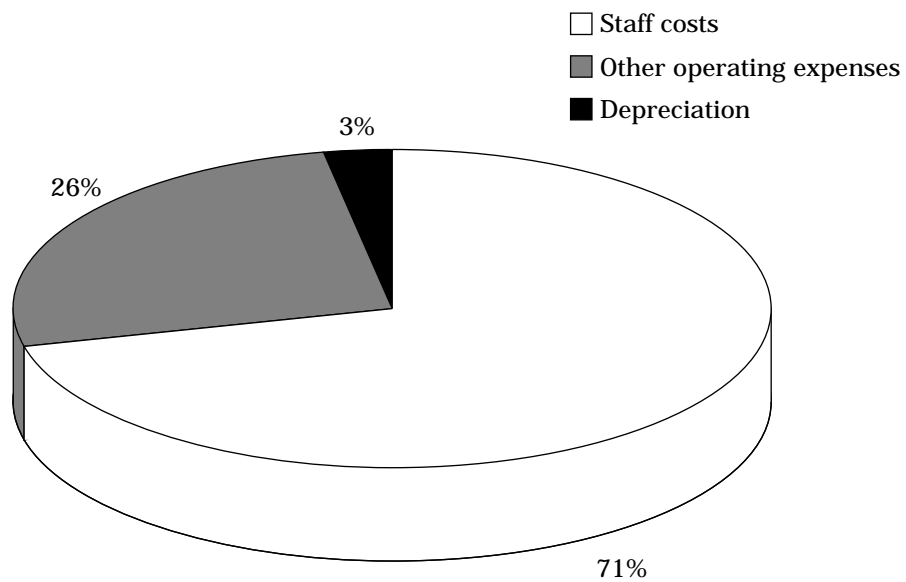
Carmel College: estimated income (for 12 months to July 1996)



Estimated income: £3,212,000

Figure 6

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



Estimated expenditure: £3,168,000

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