

Carmel College

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1998-99**

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL**

The Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) 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 according to a four-year cycle. It also inspects other further education provision funded by the FEFC. In fulfilling its work programme, the inspectorate assesses and reports nationally on the curriculum, disseminates good practice and advises the FEFC's quality assessment committee.

College inspections are carried out in accordance with the framework and guidelines described in Council Circulars 97/12, 97/13 and 97/22. Inspections seek to validate the data and judgements provided by colleges in self-assessment reports. They involve full-time inspectors and registered part-time inspectors who have knowledge of, and experience in, the work they inspect. A member of the Council's audit service works with inspectors in assessing aspects of governance and management. All colleges are invited to nominate a senior member of their staff to participate in the inspection as a team member.

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Grade Descriptors

Inspectors assess the strengths and weaknesses of each aspect of provision they inspect. Their assessments are set out in the report. They use a five-point scale to summarise the balance between strengths and weaknesses.

The descriptors for the grades are:

- grade 1 – outstanding provision which has many strengths and few weaknesses
- grade 2 – good provision in which the strengths clearly outweigh the weaknesses
- grade 3 – satisfactory provision with strengths but also some weaknesses
- grade 4 – less than satisfactory provision in which the weaknesses clearly outweigh the strengths
- grade 5 – poor provision which has few strengths and many weaknesses.

Audit conclusions are expressed as good, adequate or weak.

Aggregated grades for aspects of cross-college provision and curriculum areas, for colleges inspected during 1997-98, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1	2	3	4	5
	%	%	%	%	%
Curriculum areas	9	60	29	2	-
Cross-college provision	18	54	24	4	-

Source: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1997-98: Chief inspector's annual report*
Sample size: 108 college inspections

Student Achievements

Where data on student achievements appear in tables, levels of achievement are shown in three ways:

- as expected completions, which is the number of initial enrolments on qualifications where the student expected to complete the qualification in a given year. For example, a student on a two-year programme who began their programme in October 1995, would appear in the results for 1996-97 because this is the year in which they expected to complete their qualification
- as a retention rate, which is the percentage of qualifications which the students have completed as expected (or are continuing with the prospect of late completion). For programmes of study of two years or more, retention is calculated across the whole programme, that is, from the start to the end of the qualification
- as an achievement rate, which is the number of qualifications students have fully achieved as a percentage of completed qualifications with a known outcome. Partial achievements are not shown.

Summary

Carmel College

North West Region

Inspected October 1998

Carmel College is a designated Catholic sixth form college in St Helens, Merseyside. The college produced a detailed and thorough self-assessment report. It was prepared through the college's existing quality assurance system and was validated through a grading panel, which included external representatives. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements and with all but three of the grades awarded. Judgements were well supported by evidence drawn from various sources.

The college offers courses in seven of the FEFC's 10 programme areas. Provision in four of these was inspected, together with aspects of cross-college provision. The college's emphasis upon high achievement is reflected in its high entry requirements. The college provides mainly advanced level programmes for 16 to 19 year olds, but has introduced a number of GNVQ intermediate, foundation and, most recently, entry level programmes. It has also diversified into post-advanced level courses and evening classes for adults. Courses are well managed and teaching is good. The proportion of lessons graded as good or outstanding has risen by 4% since the last inspection. Students achieve high levels of success in external examinations. Support for students is outstanding. They speak highly of the commitment of staff and their willingness to give their time to help them with

their studies. Effective management ensures that the Catholic identity of the college is maintained and developed. Managers have established structures which allow staff and students the opportunity to express their views openly. Governors have a broad range of skills and expertise. They demonstrate a clear commitment to the college and students' achievements, and monitor finances closely. Quality assurance arrangements are thorough and are an integral part of the college's activities. The accommodation strategy has led to improvements in accommodation since the last inspection. Further improvements are taking place or are in the planning stage. If it is to continue to improve the quality of its provision, the college should address: poor results on a few courses; the mismatch between its aim to broaden the range of courses and its curriculum offer; inadequate refectory provision; the failure of the audit committee to operate fully in line with its terms of reference; and the need to improve procedures in the management of the governing body.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Science	1	Support for students	1
Business studies	2	General resources	2
Art, drama, music and media	1	Quality assurance	1
Geography, history and general studies	1	Governance	2
		Management	1

Context

The College and its Mission

1 Carmel College is a Roman Catholic sixth form college occupying a single site in St Helens, Merseyside. It was established in 1987 as a result of the local reorganisation of Catholic secondary education in St Helens. In 1989, it was also designated to provide Catholic sixth form education for Warrington. Carmel College is now a designated college within the further education sector under the trusteeship of the Archdiocese of Liverpool.

2 The economy of St Helens has experienced a major decline for several years and now over 80% of local companies employ only between one and 24 people. Unemployment is higher than the national average and most job losses have come from the traditional industries of glassmaking, coal, engineering and pharmaceuticals. Merseyside suffers from a low level of educational attainment and professional qualifications and has European Social Fund objective one status. The college competes for students with a large number of other post-16 providers. Within a radius of about 15 miles there are four other sixth form colleges, five large general colleges of further education and nine school sixth forms. Students come from the range of local partner schools, but the college also draws students from the wider geographical area, including Warrington, a prosperous new town with unitary status. The number of full-time students at Carmel College has grown by more than 21% since designation in 1993. Formal collaborative links exist with both St Helens College and Warrington Collegiate Institute. Carmel College has always maintained good working relationships with the local education authority (LEA) and with St Helens Chamber of Commerce, Training and Enterprise. Additionally, the college has excellent relationships with higher education institutions, notably the University of Liverpool of which Carmel College became the first associate college in 1997.

3 The college offers courses leading to the general certificate of education advanced/advanced supplementary level (GCE A/AS level), the general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) and the general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) at advanced, intermediate and foundation levels. In September 1998 it introduced an entry-level GNVQ. Its contemporary studies courses, which are taken by all full-time students, are accredited by the Open College of the North West. The college has introduced an art foundation diploma course and delivers the foundation year of three degree courses, offered in conjunction with the University of Liverpool. Almost all of the college's students are aged between 16 and 19 years and are full-time students, but there is a range of evening provision for adults.

4 The college's accommodation comprises five main buildings, with the oldest teaching block dating back to the 1960s and more recent ones added in 1992 and 1995. The student forum, a new recreational area for students, was completed in 1997 to address the issue of student overcrowding mentioned in the previous Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) inspection report. At the time of this inspection, building was in progress to replace the last of the temporary buildings. The college has committed itself to constantly improving access for students with restricted mobility by providing lifts and ramps, and the recent removal of temporary classrooms has made all of the college accessible to wheelchair users.

5 The college's mission is 'to strive to be a centre of educational excellence, opportunity and support, within a caring, Christian environment'. As a Catholic college with an ecumenical outlook it welcomes students of other denominations and faiths and seeks to play an active part in the community, creating mutually enriching educational, business, parish and community partnerships. Carmel College sees the raising of the level of educational attainment as its major contribution to local and regional economic regeneration.

Context

The Inspection

6 The college was inspected during the week beginning 12 October 1998. The inspection team had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and reviewed information about the college held by other directorates of the FEFC. The college chose to use data on students' achievements derived from the individualised student record (ISR) for the three years 1995 to 1997 to inform the inspection. Inspectors considered data from 1998 where these were made available by departments. The inspection was carried out by nine inspectors, working for a total of 35 days in the college, and an auditor working for five days. Inspectors

observed 55 lessons and examined students' work. Inspectors also examined documents provided by the college to support its self-assessment report and held meetings with college governors, managers, staff, students and other interested parties, including representatives of local schools and St Helens Chamber of Commerce, Training and Enterprise.

7 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1997-98. Of the lessons inspected, 80% were judged to be good or outstanding and 5% less than satisfactory. These figures are better than the average figures for colleges in the sector inspected during 1997-98.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GNVQ A/AS level	17	15	4	1	0	37
GNVQ	5	2	2	0	0	9
Other*	3	2	2	2	0	9
Total (No.)	25	19	8	3	0	55
Total (%)	45	35	15	5	0	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1997-98 (%)	19	46	29	6	0	100

Source for national average: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1997-98: Chief inspector's annual report*

*includes GCSEs and tutorial provision

Context

8 The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1997-98.

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Carmel College	16.9	90.5
National average, all inspected colleges 1997-98	10.4	77.0

Source for national average: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1997-98: Chief inspector's annual report*

Curriculum Areas

Science

Grade 1

9 Inspectors agreed with the strengths and most of the weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report. Some acknowledged weaknesses were rectified before the inspection. Eleven lessons were observed.

Key strengths

- good teaching
- good and improving pass rates in all GCE A level subjects
- GCE A level chemistry and physics grades above expectations
- excellent achievements by students completing the GNVQ advanced science programme
- good progression to science-related courses in higher education
- effective curriculum organisation and management
- well-appointed, resourced and serviced laboratories

Weaknesses

- some laboratories too small for the size of some classes

10 The inspection covered GCE A level courses in biology, chemistry and physics and GNVQ advanced science. Despite comparatively high entry requirements, enrolments on GCE A level courses have expanded significantly in the last three years. The college introduced the GNVQ advanced science course in 1995. Science staff offer an introductory course to foundation students and teach on GNVQ intermediate and advanced programmes in health and social care. In partnership with the University of Liverpool, the college has introduced three foundation-year degree level

courses in biology, science and engineering, and computer information systems.

11 Science teachers form a closely knit team and work well together. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment report that teaching is well planned and carefully organised to encourage students' learning, to provide an appropriate variety of learning experiences and to promote the progressive development of students' skills. In a second-year GCE A level class students carried out practical work rapidly and effectively. They were able to derive chemical equations and perform calculations in order to assist them with the deductions required by the experiment. Teachers encourage students to make contributions during lessons. Students regularly assess their progress with teachers and set individual goals for improvement. Teachers routinely set, mark and return work to students. Marking is fair and carefully done. Teachers often make detailed and helpful corrections to students' work. The self-assessment report acknowledges that the use of information technology (IT) in the curriculum is limited, but much of the students' work is wordprocessed and some experiments demonstrate the use of data capture facilities.

12 The college's self-assessment report refers to the good and sometimes excellent examination results that students have obtained. In biology, chemistry and physics well over 90% of students sitting the GCE A level examination in the last three years have been successful. In all three subjects the higher grade pass rates have substantially exceeded national averages in some years. For the last three years, GCE A level achievements in chemistry and physics have improved upon expectations based on the students' GCSE results. In biology, many students achieve GCE A level results that are broadly in line with those predicted by their entry qualifications. The college's self-assessment report acknowledges occasions where retention in GCE A level biology fell below college targets, but, in the main, retention rates in all science programmes are good.

Curriculum Areas

13 All members of the first group of students who completed the GNVQ advanced science programme in 1997 were successful. The proportion of them obtaining merit awards was more than twice the national average. Two-thirds went on to related courses in higher education, the remainder directly to employment. The college's self-assessment report indicates that, of the students who were successful in GCE A level science subjects in 1997, over 90% went on to higher education. More than 80% of students who took chemistry or physics, or both, in 1997 are continuing with science-based studies. Of these 25% are studying chemistry and 34% physics or engineering. Some 20% of students successful in GCE A level biology went on to biological courses at university.

14 Teachers are well qualified with appropriate degrees and teaching qualifications. Technical staff offer efficient, high-quality support. Staff and physical resources are effectively deployed and managed. Text books are provided for all subjects. Computers, relevant programmes and other IT equipment are readily available in a room close to the science laboratories. Video equipment is frequently and effectively used in teaching. Some projection facilities require attention. Student groups are large for the size of some rooms. The well-appointed laboratories are, at times, overcrowded. Staff are vigilant and students comply with safety policies and procedures. Good use is made of posters and wall displays to promote laboratory discipline, create a subject identity in rooms and corridors and help students with career choices.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in science, 1995 to 1997

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GCE A level biology	3	Expected completions	*	107	140
		Retention (%)	*	75	86
		Achievement (%)	75	97	91
GCE A level chemistry	3	Expected completions	*	62	88
		Retention (%)	*	89	90
		Achievement (%)	80	100	99
GCE A level physics	3	Expected completions	*	36	47
		Retention (%)	*	83	81
		Achievement (%)	81	97	97
GNVQ advanced science	3	Expected completions	**	**	13
		Retention (%)	**	**	77
		Achievement (%)	**	**	100

Source: college data

*data not available

**course not offered

Curriculum Areas

Business Studies

Grade 2

15 Inspectors observed 12 lessons covering GCE A level business studies and GNVQ foundation, intermediate and advanced business programmes. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report, but concluded that some of the strengths were overstated.

Key strengths

- good teaching
- high achievement rates on the GNVQ advanced course
- excellent use of business links
- effective arrangements for ensuring consistency of standards
- detailed assessment and reviews of students' progress
- good links between course review and planning
- feedback from students sought and acted upon

Weaknesses

- decline in enrolment on GNVQ intermediate course
- pass rates on some courses below college targets
- failure of some teaching to take account of students' needs

16 Students are well motivated and their relationships with staff are particularly good. As the self-assessment report states, students are well informed about courses and what is expected of them. Course handbooks are detailed and informative. Schemes of work are of a high standard. Most lesson plans include aims and objectives and methods for achieving them. Most teaching is good. Lessons include a variety of appropriate activities to promote

students' learning. Students regularly work collaboratively in groups to share knowledge and develop teamworking skills. Occasionally, group work is used when whole-class teaching or individual tasks would be more appropriate. Notes taken by students in class or from textbooks are sometimes poor.

17 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that work experience and links with local firms raise students' awareness of realistic and up-to-date business issues. External visits, business links and student residential are used to enrich students' experience. In one GNVQ advanced class, students who had just returned from a team-building residential were using their experiences to explore different leadership styles. Following a visit to a local manufacturing firm, students in a GNVQ foundation class devised a presentation to show how different departments function in a business. GCE A level students develop a sound understanding of business principles through their research projects.

18 In response to issues raised in the last FEFC inspection, a programme area co-ordinator now has responsibility for all business courses. There is a clear link between curriculum planning and college objectives. Staff make good use of value-added data to monitor and measure students' performance. Students' views are sought through questionnaires and meetings between student representatives and staff. Students' views are acted upon. In response to concerns about their understanding of assessment requirements, GCE A level students compiled a guide to assessment objectives which is displayed on classroom walls. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that there are particularly effective systems for ensuring that standards of assessment are consistently applied.

19 Staff are appropriately qualified. Specialist resources in the library and in the subject area have recently been improved. The stock of textbooks has been increased and additional

Curriculum Areas

software for business use has been acquired. Business students are required to use IT, including the internet, during their course. Classrooms are well maintained and contain relevant displays of business-related material.

20 Students' achievements in business are generally good and some are outstanding. Most students on the GNVQ advanced course gain distinction or merit grades. Retention rates on this course have improved over the last two years from 76% to 91%. The numbers of GNVQ intermediate students enrolled has declined from 15 in 1994 to nine in 1996. Retention and achievement rates have declined over the same period, although they still compare favourably with national averages. Relatively few students

progress from the GNVQ intermediate course to the advanced. In 1998, more students left the college to take the advanced course in other colleges than stayed at Carmel College. The college recognises the low pass rate on the GNVQ foundation course as a weakness and has introduced an entry level award this year to cater for the range of ability which the course attracts. GCE A level results improved in 1997. At 93% they were well above the national average for sixth form colleges whereas in the previous year they were around 10% below. In two out of the three years 1995 to 1997, the percentage of grades C or above has been above the sixth form college average.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in business studies, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1995	1996	1997
GNVQ foundation	1	Expected completions	13	**	8
		Retention (%)	92	**	100
		Achievement (%)	8	**	25
GNVQ intermediate	2	Expected completions	15	9	9
		Retention (%)	73	78	67
		Achievement (%)	91	100	83
GCSE	2	Expected completions	32	25	10
		Retention (%)	100	84	80
		Achievement (%)	50	48	63
GCE A level	3	Expected completions	*	79	78
		Retention (%)	*	89	86
		Achievement (%)	84	73	93
GNVQ advanced business	3	Expected completions	*	29	23
		Retention (%)	*	76	91
		Achievement (%)	100	85	88

Source: college data

**course not offered

*data not available

Curriculum Areas

Art, Drama, Music and Media

Grade 1

21 Inspectors observed 13 lessons covering GCE A level visual and performing arts subjects. They agreed with many of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report. They considered that some of the perceived weaknesses were overcritical but identified others that were not recognised in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- many examples of outstanding teaching
- effective management of the curriculum area
- good range of extra-curricular activities to enrich students' experience
- a stimulating learning environment
- high pass rates on most GCE A levels
- reflection of college's values in curriculum content and methods of teaching

Weaknesses

- too short amount of lesson time for practical work
- GCE A level theatre studies pass rates below national figures

22 The programme area offers a wide range of visual and performing arts subjects at GCE A level. The curriculum offer is able to accommodate specialist subjects, some of which have only one teacher. Management of the area is effected formally through a series of structured meetings and informally through the accessibility of the programme area co-ordinator. Courses are well planned and schemes of work clearly structured. In one case, an exemplary scheme of work was displayed for student reference. Students normally require high GCSE grades to enrol on courses though portfolio evidence is also

considered in cases where it is appropriate. Students are supplied with informative handbooks. Staff are punctilious in monitoring students' progress.

23 The standard of teaching in the lessons observed was almost always good and often outstanding. Lessons are clearly planned to provide an effective balance of student-centred research and more formal teacher-led methods. Emphasis is given to work in pairs and to group work, where appropriate. Teachers actively encourage full participation of all students in lessons. Students are expected to share their ideas and conclusions when questioned by their peers and staff. Examples drawn from real life are used to illustrate concepts. For example, a media class was shown extracts from the film 'The Wild One' and then asked to analyse the reasons for its banning following its original release. The content of the curriculum and the way in which it is taught reflect the mission of the college. Students are encouraged to recognise the spiritual, moral and ethical issues raised by their work and Christian theatre groups have visited the college. However, there were a few examples of inappropriate behaviour in lessons which went unchallenged by staff. The college timetable allocates periods of time for practical work which are too short to allow students time to experience a full range of learning activities. However, students' learning is enhanced by enriching experiences beyond the requirements of the syllabuses. Students make visits to theatres, concerts, and galleries in this country and abroad and take part in public performances. The use of peripatetic music staff and artists-in-residence provides students with appropriate vocational insights. These strengths were recorded in the self-assessment report.

24 Students are highly motivated and stimulated by their studies. The standard of work seen by inspectors was high. Students are confident and articulate. As stated in the self-assessment report, students perform well in public examinations; pass rates in GCE A level

Curriculum Areas

art, music and media for the last two years have been higher than national averages. Pass rates in GCE A level theatre studies have been below national averages over the three years 1995 to 1997. Progression to higher education is good, particularly for students on the foundation art diploma course. The college is understandably proud of the recognition individual students have achieved in national competitions.

25 Teachers are well qualified, enthusiastic and conscientious. Staff development initiatives are encouraged and supported. Accommodation

is currently being adapted to cope with the growing and diversifying provision. The new premises should alleviate some current problems in art and design areas which are often congested because of group sizes and where noise can be a distraction because of the open plan design. Though the music suite is self-contained, its layout is not always appropriate for ensemble playing. Students have access to a good range of facilities. Most specialist equipment and teaching aids are of a high standard.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in art, drama, music and media, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1995	1996	1997
GCE A level art studies fine art	3	Expected completions	*	45	65
		Retention (%)	*	76	88
		Achievement (%)	100	91	89
GCE A level media studies	3	Expected completions	**	**	30
		Retention (%)	**	**	97
		Achievement (%)	**	**	96
GCE A level music performance	3	Expected completions	*	6	8
		Retention (%)	*	100	88
		Achievement (%)	80	100	100
GCE A level fashion textiles	3	Expected completions	20	42	13
		Retention (%)	75	55	100
		Achievement (%)	64	61	100
GCE A level theatre studies	3	Expected completions	*	17	20
		Retention (%)	*	94	85
		Achievement (%)	89	44	82

Source: college data

*data not available

**course not offered

Curriculum Areas

Geography, History and General Studies

Grade 1

26 Inspectors observed 13 lessons at GCE A level and GCSE. With few exceptions, they agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- effective teaching
- outstanding curriculum management in history and geography
- high pass rates on GCE A level courses
- good retention rates
- promotion of awareness of moral, ethical, social and environmental issues in courses
- extensive learning support at curriculum level
- comprehensive assessment of students' work
- dedicated, hard-working and caring staff
- environments which are conducive to learning

Weaknesses

- weaknesses in the teaching of general studies

27 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that students' learning experiences are rich and varied and that teaching is good. Lessons have clear aims and objectives and are supported by a variety of high-quality resources. The development of key skills is part of the aims of lessons. Teachers encourage students to take an active part in the learning process. In a history lesson, students worked in pairs to produce overhead transparencies and posters to be used in presentations in the next lesson. Geography

students work through enquiry based activities which promote individual learning. An increasing use of IT as a learning tool is evident, particularly in geography.

28 Curriculum management of the area is effective, particularly in geography and history. There is purposeful leadership and close liaison between the programme area co-ordinator and course managers. Documentation is comprehensive and up to date. Over the past three years significant curriculum changes have taken place. The college no longer offers GCSE history or GCSE geography. Modular courses have been successfully introduced in history and geography. All subjects support the core values of the college in promoting an awareness of moral, ethical, social and environmental issues. A GCE A level group in general studies looked at issues surrounding animal rights, and a geography lesson challenged students to think about the implications of urbanisation. There are some weaknesses in general studies provision. Timetable space is shared with general religious education and contemporary studies. As a result, some confusion between subjects exists in the minds of students and inadequate time is allocated to general studies. Some inconsistency in the induction of students on the purpose of the general studies courses is recognised in the subject self-assessment report and some steps have been taken to address this.

29 Support for students within the programme area is strong. Comprehensive induction courses in history and geography establish good foundations. Teachers are dedicated, hard working and supportive of students and of each other. They give generously of their time to provide additional support and guidance to students. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the review and assessment of students are strong. Sensitive marking of students' work in history and geography and regular assessment and recording of work are key features. History staff have an action plan for addressing individual

Curriculum Areas

students' needs and, as the self-assessment report indicates, a start has been made on developing teaching and learning methods which are differentiated to take account of individual students' needs. Good-quality learning resources are in place. They are regularly reviewed to ensure that they meet the needs of courses. Resources for general studies courses are kept in the learning centre. A guide to these resources is currently being produced for students. Classrooms for geography and history have attractive wall displays and provide good learning environments.

30 Students' achievements are very good and mostly above the national average. In GCE A level geography, the pass rate has consistently improved, reaching 98% in 1997 against a

national average of 90%. In the same year, general studies maintained a pass rate of 90% against a national average of 81%. The percentage of grades C or above in all GCE A level courses for the same year was higher than the national average. GCSE general studies pass rates also exceed the national average. Value-added data show that GCE A level geography students achieve better results than predictions based on their GCSE scores indicate. Retention figures compare favourably with the benchmarking data for 16 to 18 year olds in sixth form colleges. Attendance at lessons observed by inspectors was good, but there were signs in registers of some irregularity in attendance.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in geography, history and general studies, 1995 to 1997

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GCSE geography	2	Expected completions	23	13	12
		Retention (%)	91	85	100
		Achievement (%)	100	36	50
GCSE history	2	Expected completions	16	12	+
		Retention (%)	88	75	+
		Achievement (%)	93	67	+
GCSE general studies	2	Expected completions	**	383	407
		Retention (%)	**	99	100
		Achievement (%)	**	72	71
GCE A level geography	3	Expected completions	*	59	75
		Retention (%)	*	88	87
		Achievement (%)	84	94	98
GCE A level history	3	Expected completions	*	54	57
		Retention (%)	*	80	91
		Achievement (%)	79	84	90
GCE A level general studies	3	Expected completions	**	272	434
		Retention (%)	**	100	97
		Achievement (%)	**	87	90

Source: college data
 +below five students
 **course not offered
 *data not available

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 1

31 Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths cited in the self-assessment report and some of the weaknesses, but found that some weaknesses had been overstated.

Key strengths

- outstanding support and guidance arrangements
- a range of activities that ease transition between school and college
- good systems for supporting academic progress
- wide range of personal support
- opportunities for spiritual, moral and social development
- high-quality careers provision
- promotion of the college's core Christian values in relationships

Weaknesses

- failure to meet needs of some intermediate students
- uneven teaching of the contemporary studies programme

32 Carmel College has successfully established the caring Christian environment that is a key element of its mission. The words of one student to inspectors, 'there is always someone there', were echoed throughout the inspection week in a variety of ways. Prospective students have various opportunities to familiarise themselves with the college. Liaison links with Catholic partner and associated schools are customised to fit particular circumstances. Year 11 pupils can speak to college staff and students at open evenings and in their own high schools. Students from special schools are able to attend the college on a link course. Students are very positive about the help they are given in

choosing their courses. Informal interviews are held with Carmel College staff to discuss the initial choice of course and a 'new student conference' in the summer term allows them to sample lessons in their chosen subjects. There is a pre-enrolment evening for prospective students of evening classes. The college has a 'partnership in progression' agreement with local colleges for students who do not meet what the college describes as its 'stringent entry requirements' for courses. It arranges for these students to seek further impartial advice. There is a thorough general induction to the college for full-time students.

33 The contemporary studies programme delivers general religious education, GCSE and GCE A level general studies and student support and guidance. The programme is delivered at three levels; advanced, intermediate and foundation. The intermediate level group is significantly larger than the advanced or foundation level groups. Contemporary studies groups meet daily and follow an accredited programme in personal effectiveness, career development, personal and social awareness and religion and spirituality. Inspectors witnessed the friendly, supportive relationships within the tutorial groups. The college identified in its self-assessment report that the teaching of this programme was uneven and inspectors confirmed this. In two outstanding sessions, well-prepared tutors using skilful and sensitive questioning engaged the students in reflective and thought-provoking activity. In another session, students were unchallenged by the activity and their attention waned.

34 The academic progress of students is well supported. Students are given helpful feedback and draw up detailed and specific action plans for learning. The college makes good use of the predicted grades derived from students' GCSE scores in setting targets for individuals. The study centre, which is designed to offer literacy, IT and numeracy support, is in the early stages of development. Students who use it value it.

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However, they see it as a place to go to if they have a difficulty rather than as a resource that can help them to develop their skills.

35 The chaplaincy is an excellent resource. A lay chaplain and a local parish priest work closely with students. An extra dimension is provided by the Anglican curate who has recently joined the team. They have created a welcoming, inclusive atmosphere. The chaplains offer a confidential listening service and pastoral support to all staff and students. Students are able to take part in meditation, justice and peace activities, the weekly Mass and the faith-sharing group. Students respect the sacred space where services and quiet prayer take place. Every year the whole college participates in a One World Day when lessons are suspended to allow them to reflect on global issues. Students' responses to this activity are overwhelmingly positive. The college makes good use of a nearby Jesuit spirituality centre to provide enrichment days for curriculum areas. Students find these enjoyable and helpful. Major events in the life of the college and feasts of the Church are marked by services. The liturgy is sensitively created to speak to young people. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that there are varied activities to suit a wide range of interests and needs and that a programme of worship is available which is responsive to 'a Catholic college with an ecumenical outlook'.

36 As the self-assessment report indicates, the college has strong links with St Helens Careers Service which supplements the careers provision within the college. Careers education units within the contemporary studies programme have been developed to meet the needs of different student groups. A series of events is organised throughout the year to help students make informed decisions. Students rate highly an annual 'higher education awareness conference' which gives them valuable advice. An attractively produced higher education handbook keeps students, parents and

guardians informed of key elements. There is a job-seekers group which offers practical help in making applications and interview techniques. There is also an annual 'vocational awareness conference' when students can work with industrialists. The careers guidance suite is attractive and well stocked. Careers software is available on each of its 20 computers. Careers tutors receive annual updates on new initiatives and employment trends. They do not undertake training in interview skills. The large majority of students are positive about careers guidance. Careers arrangements have achieved the recognition of quality award from the Merseyside Technical Vocational Education Initiative/St Helens Chamber of Commerce, Training and Enterprise and have been used as a case study by the Department for Education and Employment to illustrate good practice.

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General Resources

Grade 2

37 The college produced two separate self-assessment reports, evaluating premises and health and safety separately from library and IT resources. Inspectors agreed with the strengths and some weaknesses identified in both sections of the report.

Key strengths

- high-quality buildings in a good state of repair
- efficient and effective management and use of accommodation
- good access for wheelchair users throughout the college
- a well-managed, heavily used library

Weaknesses

- insufficient recreational and private study space for students
- shortage of up-to-date learning support materials and IT workstations in the library

38 The college is located in five well-appointed buildings on a single site owned by the Archdiocese of Liverpool. The college, in its self-assessment report, claims a 'strategic awareness of the impact of improved accommodation on educational provision'. The planning and implementation of the accommodation strategy reflects this. The accommodation strategy is supported by a planned maintenance programme which has led to significant improvements to the building stock since the last inspection. New accommodation includes a building providing 14 classrooms to replace former mobile classrooms. Substantial rearrangement of rooms has given a subject identity to much of the accommodation. During the inspection extensive new accommodation was under construction to house art and design

courses and a media, film and video centre. A new recreational and group study area for students has been built adjacent to the refectory. A beautiful window designed on the theme of 'The Holy Spirit, bringer of Peace and Love' by a former student greatly enhances this area and reinforces the college's core values. Surveys of students' perceptions indicate that the provision of recreational and group or private study space is still inadequate for the number of users and the self-assessment report acknowledges that this is a weakness. The refectory, which awaits refurbishment, is crowded at lunchtime.

39 As noted in the self-assessment report, rooms are well furnished and their utilisation is efficient. Accommodation is well suited to its use and in good repair. The whole college is fully accessible to wheelchair users with the exception of the study desks on the library mezzanine floor. The college self-assessment report cites this as evidence of its commitment to equal opportunities, inclusiveness and the Catholic ethos. The college chaplaincy is designed for flexible use and is well respected and well used by students. The religious artefacts in this area, which include another student-designed window, help to sustain the spiritual ethos of the college. There is a well-kept gymnasium and a fully equipped fitness centre which, together with playing fields, provide for many of the students' sporting needs. Most teachers have work areas close to their classrooms. Some have computing facilities. In addition, there is a large staff room and a workroom with IT facilities, including an internet connection.

40 The ratio of modern computers to full-time equivalent students is 1:9.5. Computers for student and staff use are networked throughout the college and there are electronic links with other colleges and with the University of Liverpool. Not all students make use of IT. The college self-assessment report acknowledges this and indicates that there is less activity in some curriculum areas than in others. Students

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stated that the limit of 10 simultaneous internet connections across the college causes delays in connection at some periods of the working day.

41 The attractive learning and business centre provides over 150 individual study desks for students. As stated in the self-assessment report, it is well managed. Close links between librarians and teachers benefit students. In a GCE A level biology lesson on the topic of conservation the teacher clearly directed students to additional source material in the geography section of the library. Pertinent material derived from the internet was also distributed to students in the same lesson. In addition to the central purchase of library stock, curriculum leaders can make bids for a small amount of funding to improve the bookstock for their subject area. Bids are judged against appropriate criteria by the librarian and outcomes reported to the library committee, which is made up of students, curriculum leaders, senior tutors and the librarian. Some subject areas still have too small a stock of books. The computerised catalogue records stock and its availability, but does not monitor usage automatically. The self-assessment report recognises the lack of up-to-date learning support materials. The centre opens for over 12 hours a day on two days of the week and for 11 hours on two others during term time. Opening hours during vacations enable students to study, complete assignments and have access to careers information.

Quality Assurance

Grade 1

42 The college, in its self-assessment report, identified the main strengths and weaknesses in its quality assurance arrangements, but overlooked some weaknesses.

Key strengths

- strong commitment to continuous improvement
- quality assurance procedures for all aspects of the college's work
- clear links between quality assurance and college planning
- robust internal inspection arrangements
- an effective staff appraisal system
- good staff development arrangements
- the use of students' views to evaluate courses and services
- effective sharing of good practice within the college and with external partners

Weaknesses

- some development plans and self-assessments lacking detail in evaluation or improvement strategies
- underdeveloped monitoring of charter commitments and equal opportunities

43 The college has made considerable improvements to its quality assurance arrangements since the last inspection. The commitment to continuous improvement, cited in the self-assessment report, is demonstrated by the principal's involvement in the quality assurance team and the appointment of managers with specific responsibilities for quality assurance. There are clear links between quality assurance, development planning and strategic planning. The college's partnership with two other colleges is used effectively to share and develop good practice.

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A comparison of the college's value-added arrangements with those of a partner college has led to proposals for improvement. A staff handbook clearly sets out the systems and procedures for assuring quality in all aspects of the college's work. The college review system guarantees that each curriculum and college support area is reviewed annually by the principal. The college identified this as a strength in its self-assessment report and this was supported by inspectors.

44 Performance is measured against a wide range of targets. In addition to retention, achievement and value-added data, reviews consider the delivery of charter pledges and equal opportunities. Systems for collecting data to monitor performance in these last two areas are underdeveloped. This was recognised in the self-assessment report. Progress on action plans resulting from the review process is monitored by the quality assurance team and reported to governors. Improvements have been made as a result of reviewing and target-setting. Several curriculum areas identified as a weakness the lack of use of IT to support the learning process. Improved access is now available and further actions for improvement feature in the college's development plan for 1998-99. However, the standard of team development plans varies, particularly with regard to the setting of measurable targets. Some plans do not identify clear strategies for improvement.

45 A range of evidence is used in reviewing performance. Questionnaires are used to ascertain students' perceptions and these are supplemented by 'focus' groups which allow students the opportunity to express their views more fully. Students can clearly identify a range of actions taken in response to their views. The views of staff, governors, external verifiers and examiners, and other external parties are also taken into account. There is systematic graded observation of lessons throughout the college. This is in addition to peer observation which is

used as a development activity to share good practice. The graded observations are undertaken by the quality assurance team and form part of the self-assessment process as well as staff appraisal. The profile of grades awarded by the college between 1996 and 1998 correspond closely with that found during the FEFC inspection. Internal inspections are carried out by the quality assurance team each year. Staff in areas being inspected first carry out a self-evaluation. Inspection teams sometimes include external representatives. Staff in the areas inspected discuss the outcomes of the inspection with the internal team and produce an action plan. The internal inspections, particularly of curriculum areas, are considered a strength by the college in its self-assessment report and inspectors agreed with this judgement.

46 An effective appraisal system is in place for all staff. The process is sufficiently flexible to be used for staff who are part time or peripatetic and to cover all grades of staff. The system covers performance targets, role clarity and staff development needs. There has been an annual staff development plan for each team based on individual appraisal, team priorities and the strategic objectives. This will continue annually and the new programme area co-ordinators are undertaking regular performance monitoring and review as part of their role. Lesson observations and other internal inspection outcomes inform staff development plans for individuals and for the college as a whole. The college has recently had its Investor in People award renewed.

47 The self-assessment process, which builds upon existing quality assurance procedures, is comprehensive and involves all staff and governors. Each team of staff, in the curriculum and support service areas, produced its own self-assessment report. The reports were validated by a grading panel which included senior managers, governor representatives and external consultants. The process was

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thorough. The report itself is very detailed and comprehensive and has a clear emphasis on students' learning experiences. Most of the report is evaluative though some sections are more so than others. All areas produced action plans to address weaknesses and most include plans to build on existing strengths. Action plans do not contain timescales, indicate those who have responsibilities for implementing the action required or show how the progress of the plans will be monitored.

Governance

Grade 2

48 Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths reported in the self-assessment report and identified an additional strength and two additional weaknesses. The governing body was actively involved in its own self-assessment and the report is well organised and detailed. The action plan lacks timescales and responsibilities for action.

Key strengths

- commitment, experience and expertise of governors
- effective contribution to strategic planning
- active participation in the college's self-assessment
- effective monitoring of students' achievements
- strong links with the student body

Weaknesses

- deficiencies in aspects of the management of the governing body
- ineffective audit committee

49 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is adequate. The

governing body substantially conducts its business in accordance with the instrument and articles of government. It also substantially fulfils its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC.

50 There are 19 governors, comprising 11 foundation governors nominated by the trustees of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Liverpool; one nominated by St Helens Chamber of Commerce, Training and Enterprise; three community governors; one parent governor; two staff governors; and the principal. The college benefits from the exceptional range of skills and experience of governors. Their areas of expertise cover human resource management, accountancy, the law, education and local business. Governors take an active role in the college. Several of them have specific college roles covering a variety of areas such as links with industry, special needs, and the chaplaincy. A skills audit of governors has recently been performed. Governors have a strong link with the student body. This strength was not identified in the self-assessment report. One particular governor attends weekly student council meetings which enables students' views to reach the college management and governing body. The president of the student council makes presentations to the governing body on student activities and issues. Governors receive training on relevant issues but, as noted in the self-assessment report, there has been a lack of consistency in the induction process for governors. A more formal programme has now been organised.

51 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report's judgement that the governing body effectively contributes to the strategic planning process. It supports the Roman Catholic ethos which is at the centre of the college's mission. Governors hold an annual planning event in order to confirm the college's strategic direction. Attention is paid to the financial implications of the strategic plan. Progress is monitored against the annual objectives throughout the

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year. The governing body effectively monitors students' achievements and is assisted in this task by the principal's annual report. Governors are involved in the quality assurance procedures of the college and have taken an active role in the self-assessment process. They receive summaries of internal inspection reports and monitor the progress of action plans. The governing body has been slow to establish and formally monitor targets in respect of its own performance. Governors completed an evaluation questionnaire in 1997 and considered a set of indicators in September 1998 but these have not yet been formally approved and tested.

52 There is an effective appraisal arrangement for the principal, a point identified in the college's self-assessment report. The appraisal leads to the setting of key tasks for the principal which are related to the college's strategic objectives. Progress is reviewed twice during the year and the final report is formally received by the remuneration committee. Appraisal of the clerk to the governing body has not been carried out appropriately.

53 Inspectors did not fully agree with the self-assessment report that there is an appropriate and effective committee structure. There are five committees: finance, estates and marketing; audit; search; personnel; and remuneration. The finance, estates and marketing committee has monitored the college's financial position in accordance with its terms of reference. The audit committee has not operated effectively. It has failed to ensure that the college's audit needs were met during 1997-98. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report.

54 The self-assessment report notes that the governing body conducts its business in accordance with the instrument and articles of government. The inspection team did not fully agree with this assertion. They found deficiencies in aspects of the management of the governing body. The appointment of governors and the establishment of their terms of office are dealt with unsatisfactorily. On one occasion

during 1997 this resulted in a meeting being inquorate, a fact not detected by the college. Governing body and committee minutes do not always document recommendations and approvals. The governing body conducts its business openly. Minutes of meetings are available to the public upon request. The governing body has standing orders, a code of practice on whistleblowing, a code of conduct and a register of interests. Some of these areas are in need of further improvement in order to accord fully with best practice. Details about the governing body and its key decisions are clearly stated in a staff bulletin.

Management

Grade 1

55 The self-assessment report is detailed and lengthy. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the report but found a few additional weaknesses. Many of the weaknesses in the report had been addressed by the time of the inspection.

Key strengths

- strong leadership
- clear management emphasis on importance of teaching and learning
- effective involvement of staff in college planning
- good communications and clear reporting procedures
- good financial management
- effective deployment of staff and efficient use of other resources
- productive use of comprehensive market research
- excellent links with external agencies
- timely and relevant reports on students' progress and course performance

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Weaknesses

- admissions policy not fully compatible with the college's distinctiveness statement
- inconsistencies in the promotion of equal opportunities for all student groups

56 The college benefits from strong leadership. There is clear understanding of the issues facing the college and the sector. The mission statement informs strategic aims and operating objectives, which are shared and supported by staff. As the self-assessment report states, the annual planning and review calendar is carefully scheduled to foster the involvement of all staff in developing strategic and operating plans. The college has adopted a distinctiveness statement which affirms its position as a Catholic college with an ecumenical outlook. Although managers and staff show great commitment to maintaining the college's Catholic ethos, the distinctiveness statement is not wholly compatible with the marketing and admissions policy. There has been no broadening of the range of courses at intermediate level. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report.

57 The college places great emphasis on equal opportunities. An equal opportunities committee on which teaching and support staff and students are represented meets regularly. The college has adapted accommodation to give improved access to students with restricted mobility, produced guidelines on the use of language in curriculum and social situations and published criteria to inform the evaluation of teaching and learning. There are inconsistencies in the promotion of equal opportunities for all student groups, a weakness not identified in the self-assessment report. In particular, there are no clear progression routes within the college for students recruited onto GNVQ intermediate courses from Catholic

partner schools who do not achieve a merit or distinction. Students who achieve a pass grade at intermediate level are given advice about alternative career routes.

58 Inspectors supported the self-assessment report's view that the management structure is clear and effective. It successfully ensures co-ordination between the curriculum and pastoral provision. Good communication systems keep staff well informed and enable them to raise issues and concerns. College and team meetings are organised at times when staff are able to attend. Minutes of meetings are available in the staff room. In addition, there are twice-weekly full staff briefings by the principal and daily and weekly college bulletins which are shared with students. Staff value and make use of managers' open door policy.

59 Senior managers keep the quality of teaching and learning under close review. The college sets challenging targets for courses and senior managers review these twice a year. Careful deployment of staff and other resources has enabled the college to increase student numbers and diversify provision within a climate of decreasing funding. College recruitment targets have been consistently achieved. Curriculum leaders use information from the marketing unit, together with data gathered through liaison with Catholic schools, to set accurate course recruitment targets.

60 Marketing informs and supports the college strategy of becoming a centre of academic excellence. Publicity is designed to attract high achieving students and the college has successfully promoted an image of high attainment. The marketing unit gathers information from a wide range of sources and analyses it to identify demand and opportunities. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that it has excellent and beneficial links with external agencies, including the LEA and St Helens Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise and Training. The college's

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computerised management information system ensures timely data returns to the FEFC, a strength noted in the self-assessment report. Though managers do not, as yet, have direct access to course and student performance information, they receive regular reports on attendance and retention, and can request reports on groups or individual students at any time. Such reports are provided quickly and are used effectively in curriculum planning and review.

61 The FEFC audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is good. The finance team is appropriately structured, qualified and experienced. The finance director prepared a detailed self-assessment report in respect of financial management which was well organised and included a comprehensive evidence base. Managers monitor the college's financial position closely and have recently established financial targets to assist them further in this task. At the time of the inspection, the average level of funding unit was £16.13, compared with the sector average of £17.00. The college is financially sound. The unaudited 1997-98 financial statements reveal an operating surplus, positive general reserves and net current assets. Further operating surpluses are forecast in the next three years. Management accounts and budget monitoring reports are clear and easy to use, though the content of the accounts could be expanded. The internal and external auditors did not identify any significant weaknesses in their most recently available annual reports.

Conclusions

62 Inspectors found the college's self-assessment report comprehensive. It is very detailed, with separate graded reports within each cross-college section. Consequently, it is long. The report focuses directly on students' experiences at the college. All areas have produced an action plan. Most actions are

specific and useful but a minority are generalised. Timescales and those with responsibilities for action are not identified in the action plans, though they have been incorporated into the college's development plans for 1998-99. Inspectors generally agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report, although some weaknesses recognised by inspectors had not been identified. Some strengths and weaknesses included in the report were not considered to be significant by inspectors. Many weaknesses which had been acknowledged had been addressed or were in the process of being addressed by the time of the inspection. The self-assessment report provided a useful basis for the inspection.

63 Strengths and weaknesses identified during the inspection are listed under each section of this report. The main strengths and weaknesses are identified in the summary.

College Statistics

Student numbers by age (July 1998)

Age	%
Under 16	0
16-18 years	76
19-24 years	3
25+ years	21
Not known	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (July 1998)

Level of study	%
Foundation	13
Intermediate	11
Advanced	67
Higher education	4
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	5
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (July 1998)

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	290	130	29
Business	116	72	13
Hotel and catering	15	0	1
Health and community care	29	0	2
Art and design	72	15	6
Humanities	551	145	48
Basic education	15	0	1
Total	1,088	362	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 24% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (July 1998)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	57	2	2	61
Supporting direct learning contact	8	4	0	12
Other support	25	0	0	25
Total	90	6	2	98

Source: college data, rounded to nearest full-time equivalent

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1996	1997	1998
Income	£3,229,000	£3,414,000	£3,404,000(est)
Average level of funding (ALF)			
Out-turn to 1997; funded 1998	£16.81	£15.44	£16.06
Payroll as a proportion of income	71%	74%	71%(est)
Achievement of funding target	110%	121%	100%(est)
Diversity of income	10%	10%	11%(est)
Operating surplus	£137,000	£12,000	£89,000(est)

Sources: Income – Council Circular 97/35 (1996), college (1997 and 1998)

ALF – Performance Indicators 1996-97 (1996 and 1997), Funding Allocations 1997-98 (1998)

Payroll – Council Circular 97/35 (1996), college (1997 and 1998)

Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1996-97 (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

Diversity of income – Council Circular 97/35 (1996), college (1997 and 1998)

Operating surplus – Council Circular 97/35 (1996), college (1997 and 1998)

Students' achievements data

Level	Retention and pass	Students aged 16 to 18			Students aged 19 or over		
		1995	1996	1997	1995	1996	1997
1	Expected completions	125	51	49	116	184	178
	Retention (%)	94	78	88	79	80	78
	Achievement (%)	80	55	70	61	58	76
2	Expected completions	593	875	707	74	125	102
	Retention (%)	91	91	95	74	74	81
	Achievement (%)	92	62	61	76	35	57
3	Expected completions	–	1,660	3,171	–	57	69
	Retention (%)	–	86	91	–	70	87
	Achievement (%)	80	87	91	76	50	74
4 or 5	Expected completions	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Retention (%)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Achievement (%)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Short courses	Expected completions	15	47	15	25	99	n/a
	Retention (%)	100	96	93	100	98	n/a
	Achievement (%)	93	91	71	88	82	n/a
Unknown/unclassified	Expected completions	28	26	39	158	114	2
	Retention (%)	71	100	97	74	83	100
	Achievement (%)	55	88	54	98	85	100

Source: ISR

–ISR data not collected

*ISR data may not be reliable

n/a not applicable

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