

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

**Shena Simon
College**

March 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 FEFC's quality assessment committee.

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

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GRADE DESCRIPTORS

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

By June 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

Activity	Inspection grades				
	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 23/96

SHENA SIMON COLLEGE
NORTH WEST REGION
Inspected May-November 1995

Summary

Shena Simon College is a sixth form college in Central Manchester which operates in an area of intense competition from other colleges and schools. The college is responsive to the many communities it serves. There have been difficulties in reaching target enrolments. A good range of coherently planned GCE A level and GCSE courses are provided mainly for school leavers who wish to study full time. Over the last two years vocational courses and evening classes have begun. Governors give generously of their time and are open about their proceedings. Senior managers have insufficient time for strategic planning and are too engaged in operational matters. There are no staff with specialist qualifications in finance or personnel management, but advice is taken from governors or consultants. Few systems guide the work of the college as a whole and this results in inconsistent practices between departments. Students find staff helpful and supportive. Staff teaching on some vocational courses have insufficient technical expertise and industrial experience. Guidance is given to all students on entry, but initial assessment is not universal. Individual tutorial support is given, but there is no college-wide programme. Schemes of work are good and lessons well planned using a range of activities. Learning support is not well organised. Some examination results are at or below national averages and there are poor levels of retention and attendance. A quality assurance system has been established with concise, clear documentation. Monitoring and evaluation have been introduced, but the use of performance indicators is underdeveloped.

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

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Science	3	Art and design	3
Mathematics and computing	3	English	2
Business	3	Languages and classical civilisation	3
		History, psychology and sociology	3

INTRODUCTION

1 Shena Simon College, a sixth form college in Central Manchester, was inspected between May and November 1995. There was an early inspection of humanities in May. Arrangements for the enrolment and induction of students were observed at the beginning of September. Further specialist inspections took place in October and aspects of cross-college provision were inspected in the week beginning 20 November.

2 Altogether, 12 inspectors were involved for a total of 54 inspector days. They visited 105 classes, examined a selection of students' work and studied a wide range of college documents, including the college's self-assessment report. They observed a full meeting of the board of governors and held discussions with governors, college managers, teaching staff, support staff, students, past students, parents and with representatives of local schools, the Manchester Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), the local education authority (LEA), the Education Business Partnership, and industry and institutions of higher education.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

3 Shena Simon College was established in 1982 when schools in Manchester were reorganised. Until 1986, pupils from the former Central High School for Girls continued to be educated alongside post-16 students. The college occupies a single site in the centre of Manchester adjacent to the universities. The building is on a restricted site and has no grounds. It has housed educational activities since it opened in 1897 and was awarded grade II listed status in 1994. Five per cent of the building is currently leased to the Manchester Dance Centre.

4 The college is located in the business district of Central Manchester. It does not serve a residential community. City regeneration is bringing people back into Central Manchester but is providing for higher education students and adults rather than families. Access by public transport is easy and the college consequently draws its students from a wide area, though the majority come from the City of Manchester.

5 The majority of students are 16 to 19 years old, with a growing proportion of 19 year olds. In the second year of provision, part-time enrolments have risen from 135 to 382, double the target. Over 90 per cent of evening students are aged over 20. The 833 full-time students on roll at December 1995 represent 88 per cent of the planned target. Of these, 11.6 per cent were enrolled on foundation level courses, 24.7 per cent at intermediate and 63.7 per cent at advanced, or level 3 of the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) framework. Enrolments by age, by level of study, and by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figures 1, 2, and 3, respectively. The student population is racially mixed, in the proportions given in the following table.

Ethnic origin of the student population

Ethnic origin	%
White	48
Asian	22
Afro Caribbean/African	10
Chinese/Hong Kong	5
Other	4
Undeclared	11

6 The aim of the college is to provide high-quality education in a supportive and caring environment. It contributes to the wide choice of post-16 education in Manchester and has recently become involved with other colleges, higher education institutions and the city's education department in a cross-city and cross-sector initiative to raise standards of achievements in Manchester. It is contributing to the strenuous efforts being made to encourage more students to continue in education. There are particular concerns over the poor financial support arrangements available to students over 19 in an area of great poverty.

7 In September 1995 there were 65.2 full-time equivalent teaching staff providing daytime courses. Four of these together with 11 others amounting to 1.3 full-time equivalent staff teach in the evening. Twenty-one support staff are employed in the administrative, clerical and technical areas. Two caretaking staff and 1.5 full-time equivalent doorkeepers are also employed. The caretakers supervise contract cleaners. Catering is provided on contract by the local authority catering service. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents is shown in figure 4.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

8 The college offers a wide range of courses, particularly at General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level). During the daytime there are courses for GCE A levels in 33 different subjects, one GCE advanced supplementary (AS) subject, 28 GCSE subjects and General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) in six vocational areas. The GNVQs have recently been developed and in four of the six areas they are available at all three levels. There are also two Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) national diplomas in media and performing arts. The college offers 23 evening and short courses and is planning to extend the short courses to provide for local employers. In order to provide additional support to its daytime students, courses such as English for speakers of other languages, a certificate in information technology and a keyboarding course are offered.

9 In some subjects careful choices of syllabuses have been made in order to meet identified needs and they attract good numbers of students.

There is insufficient evidence of moves to offer more flexible-study arrangements, although there are a few modular courses which provide greater flexibility for individual students. For example, because of timetable constraints, advanced GNVQ science students are not able to include GCE A level mathematics modules in their programmes. The college has made little progress in its development of resource based learning, or open and distance learning. The numbers of students enrolling for psychology, sociology, history and mathematics at GCE A level are declining and the range of courses offered in computing is limited.

10 The college is responsive to the needs of potential students in the communities it serves. Although most provision is for 16 to 19 year old school leavers, more recent initiatives have extended the age range of students recruited and provided differing patterns of attendance. The college has conducted some market research to identify the need for its services. It makes substantial use of student questionnaires to obtain their views and monitor their level of satisfaction on a range of issues. Minority ethnic groups are well represented with the profile of students largely reflecting the balance within the communities from which the college recruits. The college has identified the local business community as an area to which it should respond.

11 Links with local 11-16 schools are very well developed. There is strong competition from other post-16 providers both within the city, and in the area of Greater Manchester. The TEC which covers the Manchester, Tameside, Salford and Trafford authorities funds work in 34 post-16 providers and this demonstrates the level of competition. There are particularly close links with 16 local schools and staff of the college make regular visits to these to talk to pupils. The college is also represented at careers conventions and parents' evenings at these schools. A series of taster days for year 10 school pupils is organised during which they are introduced to four subjects over two half days. Schools speak positively about the opportunities provided for pupils to make informed choices about their future courses. The information provided by the college to schools on the achievements of ex-pupils is highly valued. The college is discussing ways of providing GNVQ progression from courses in four schools. A limited number of link courses operate.

12 The college has recognised the need to improve links with local employers. A new industry links co-ordinator has recently been appointed and the principal of the college chairs the local Education/Business Partnership Board. During the previous 18 months over 20 staff have spent between one and five days in local industry as part of the teacher placement scheme. The majority of GNVQ students have work placements and this develops links with local industry. A young engineers club with 12 student members works actively with a large local employer. The group is currently working on a project for a disabled people's flying club.

13 There are constructive links with the LEA, the TEC, parents and the community. The developing evening and short-course programme is

increasing opportunities for people from the locality. Links with the city's Chinese community are particularly strong. Good contacts are maintained with parents who receive regular reports on progress and are able to attend consultation evenings. The college has strong links with the careers service, with which it has a good relationship. It makes substantial use of the service and regular visits are made by advisers who offer individual interviews and group work. The careers service is also represented at enrolment and at open evenings. These links are co-ordinated by a designated member of the college staff. International links, including those in Europe, are very restricted.

14 Marketing of the college and what it has to offer has recently assumed more central importance. During 1993, external consultants were employed to advise on how marketing activities might be best organised. As a result there is now a marketing team and a marketing manual and a marketing plan are being developed. A realistic budget has been assigned for marketing activities during this current year. The quality of the marketing materials is very high and they promote a good corporate image of the college. In spite of these initiatives, the college has failed this year to meet its targets for enrolments of full-time students. There is a need for staff generally to embrace and support the new strategies.

15 The college has recently developed policies covering equal opportunities. Although there is little evidence of formal structures and procedures to monitor and support the implementation of these policies the college is clearly responsive to their requirements. Language support is available for those having difficulties with English and the college provides for students who have special learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Staff are not always aware of national issues and policies. Until recently, responses to these have tended to be on an individual or departmental, rather than a college basis.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

16 The inspection occurred at a time of change in the governance and management of the college. The board of the corporation appointed a new chair in September 1995 and there are currently three vacancies for business governors. One vice-principal retired in the summer of 1995 and the principal is to retire in December 1995. A new principal is now in post. The curriculum is provided through specialist academic departments but some of the newly-introduced vocational courses do not have a departmental home or other support. The heads of the academic departments do not feel involved in some recent college developments. Progress on initiatives which affect the whole college has sometimes been slow.

17 Members of the board of the corporation work energetically for the benefit of students, staff and the local community. The board is maturing rapidly as a corporate organisation; its role and procedures are becoming more clearly defined, although there is some way to go. Eleven of the

15 members are independent, one is a parent and there are two members of staff in addition to the principal. Governors have a broad range of expertise, which includes architecture, banking, higher education, industry, law and personnel management. There is no student member and currently only one woman governor. Eight governors have been associated with the college since before incorporation. Training has been available for governors and for the clerk, who is a senior manager of the college. It has been effective in reinforcing the distinction between governance and management. Governors seek to foster an atmosphere of openness; corporation meetings can be attended by members of the public as observers, though few staff take the opportunity to attend. A recently-formed staff-governors' forum has had two lively debates.

18 The board of governors normally meets five times a year. The five committees of the board are attended by the senior manager with responsibilities which match the remit of the committee. Terms of reference for these committees have yet to be properly established. Governors work effectively together, share their considerable expertise with college managers and offer their services to college staff.

19 The senior management team has six members: the principal, vice-principal, and the four managers responsible for finance and resources, buildings, administration, and college development, respectively. With the exception of the principal and the administrative manager, senior managers also have teaching responsibilities. There is a lack of professionally-qualified people to support the finance, property or personnel functions. The team meets weekly. Much of the business discussed is related to operational details and there is insufficient attention to strategic issues. As a result, college developments have been fragmented. Members of the teaching staff have been given direct management responsibility for specific aspects of the college's operation. These include quality assurance, GNVQ co-ordination, and the work in the evenings. All staff have recently updated, accurate, job descriptions. Some senior managers have a particularly broad range of responsibilities.

20 All members of the senior management team are expected to attend the regular meetings of the heads of academic departments, and of the senior tutors. This is an inefficient use of senior management time. Senior managers set the agenda of the meetings of departmental heads. Much of the business involves the dissemination of information. The departmental heads feel distanced from the decision-making processes. They have had little involvement in some major decisions which directly affect their areas of responsibility. By contrast, the senior tutors work well as a team and are actively improving aspects of the college's operation which affect tutors.

21 A college-wide schedule of meetings allows the heads of the academic departments to meet regularly with the teachers in their departments and the senior tutors to meet with tutors. Lines of responsibility within

departments are generally well understood. The departments continue to operate with considerable autonomy. Course and departmental managers collect important indicators of their performance, for example completion rates, examination pass rates and destinations. They vary in the use which they make of this information. Before the recent appointment of the quality manager, this information was not collected in a systematic way across the college. The teaching and resourcing of core skills such as mathematics and information technology, which affects many departments, have been insufficiently co-ordinated. The library and reprographics sections are well managed.

22 In the summer of 1995, all teaching staff took part in discussions about the future direction and values of the college. The senior managers distilled the outcomes of this work into the current mission statement and a related set of draft policies for curriculum, equal opportunities, health and safety, learning support, pastoral care, quality assurance, staff development, student attainment and student conduct. Policies on information technology complement the curriculum policy. Each of these policy statements includes a defining mission, strategic objectives, a clear responsibility chain, and operational targets for 1995-96. Senior tutors helped to develop the pastoral care policy, and are actively working towards its targets. However, some of the heads of departments fail to recognise their role in developing the policies and are playing little part in putting them in place.

23 The college's current strategic planning documents were largely developed by the senior managers with little involvement of middle managers or others. As a result, most staff are not familiar with the plans and share no sense of ownership of them. The recent revision to the plan was discussed more widely, but the board of governors played little part in its development. Its structure follows Council guidelines and includes operating statements with objectives carrying clear responsibilities for their delivery, target dates, and resource requirements. At the end of the 1994-95 academic year, departmental heads were required, for the first time, to review their departments' activities in a structured way and to produce a development plan for 1995-96. The process has yet to impinge upon whole-college planning.

24 There are few working groups or committees through which teachers and their managers can directly affect aspects of college operation. The GNVQ co-ordinator meets monthly with the leaders of the GNVQ courses. An active marketing team also meets regularly. Some of the operational targets within the new policies include setting up revitalised cross-college groups.

25 A well-developed computer-based management information system provides good support to staff at a variety of levels. Regular reports provide accurate information on student records and finance. The staff have confidence in the information provided and senior tutors, in particular,

make good use of the system. Further development is needed of the system for monitoring students' attendance. Training is required so that more staff can access and make use of the information and reports that are available.

26 The college has managed a programme of voluntary early retirement in order to reduce operating costs, although some posts have been refilled with recently-qualified staff. There has been an overall decrease in staff numbers and a substantial saving in the salaries budget but class sizes remain small in many courses. Staff with an appropriate level of industrial or commercial experience have not been attracted to teach on the vocational programmes.

27 The college is meeting its statutory obligation under *The Further and Higher Education Act 1992* to provide collective worship and some religious education for those who wish to receive it. Rooms are set aside at the beginning of each college day and staff are on hand for supervision and advice.

28 In 1994-95 the college's unit of funding was £21.28. The median for sixth form colleges was £19.89. For 1995-96 the college's unit of funding is £20.74 and the median for sixth form colleges is £19.37. The college's income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1995 are shown in figures 5 and 6.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

29 The acting curriculum manager is responsible for liaison with schools, recruitment and initial interviewing. Student surveys show that the information they receive from the college prior to their application is clear and written in a style that they can easily understand. They also feel that on contacting the college they are given a friendly and helpful reception. They receive impartial advice. Due emphasis is placed on student potential, progression and career aspirations. Records of achievement are used at interview. Applicants particularly welcome the regular contact with the college between their interview and enrolment. This consists of newsletters and good wishes for their examinations.

30 Enrolment procedures are well planned and generally efficient. Staff involved are welcoming and deal competently with the wide range of student problems that is encountered. At different stages in the process, students receive advice which may be conflicting and they need further help in reaching decisions about their area of study. Better signposting and shorter queues would improve the enrolment process.

31 There is no college policy on diagnostic testing for students at the beginning of their studies in order to identify any learning support they may require. In modern languages there is no initial assessment of new students but there are arrangements to bridge the gap between GCSE and GCE A level by making a careful selection of approaches and topics in the early stages. In mathematics, there is appropriate diagnostic testing but

the information so gained is not then used to determine individual programmes of study. There is some modification of the curriculum for mature students in GCE A level art, although this does not include the formal accreditation of prior learning.

32 Student induction takes place in the first week of term. Students are moved to normal timetabled classes as quickly as possible. Although the induction programme is short, some duplication of information occurs during presentations to different groups. The induction procedures are based on the student handbook and diary which is issued to all students at enrolment. The booklet sets out a version of the college charter, the equal opportunities policy and a number of key procedures for complaints and discipline. There is useful information on support and guidance, careers, finance, student facilities and health and safety. Students are advised of their entitlement to the services the college provides. Staff are well briefed. Progression opportunities are emphasised and clear messages are given about the high standards expected of students and the level of staff support which is available. Students are appreciative of the induction processes.

33 In English, students are provided with good-quality written information and guidance at the start of all courses, and at key points during the year. In mathematics, induction booklets give comprehensive, clear and well-presented information about the structure and assessment of courses, with advice about study skills. In business, though induction is intended to be a uniform process, students felt that it was not well focused nor thorough. Ten per cent of all the college's students changed their courses within the first six weeks.

34 The vice-principal oversees the pastoral system and manages a team of five senior tutors, each of whom looks after a team of group tutors. All teaching staff have tutorial responsibilities. Tutor groups are selected at random. They are not based on the students' or tutor's subject specialism. However, the GNVQ tutorial system is more likely to be based on common subject interests between tutor and student. Group tutorials of 10-20 minutes per day are held for all students. At these sessions attendance is checked, information disseminated and work returned. Some of this time was not used effectively. For example, an extra register was called in addition to class registers. Some staff prefer these short sessions to fewer, longer pastoral periods. There is no structured college tutorial programme which might cover issues of relevance and interest to all students. Termly tutorial weeks are used to review individual students' progress and action planning is undertaken.

35 There is no provision for individual tutorial time as an entitlement for GCSE and GCE A level students. In contrast, GNVQ and BTEC courses incorporate weekly tutorial periods. There is good support and guidance for students on the programme for GNVQ foundation students in art and design, but staff are unwilling to be demanding about punctuality and attendance because they are afraid that students will leave. Individual

tutorial support is readily forthcoming and valued by the students in art and design courses, although the arrangements are unsystematic. In mathematics, students have easy access to informal support from staff whose room is close to teaching rooms. Students are free to knock and ask for help at lunchtimes and breaks. In English, individual students are given both planned and informal tutorial support, within classes and elsewhere. This is important during the extended writing and investigative tasks which GCE A level and GCSE students have to undertake. Students indicated that staff were unstinting in the time and help they offered.

36 The tutorial system is ineffective in coping with the problems of student absence, especially in GCSE groups. Attendance records are maintained at most lessons and monitored weekly by the heads of department who provide returns for senior tutors. The responsibility for action on poor attendance rests initially with group tutors, but finally with senior tutors. A few students respond positively to staff efforts to improve student attendance. For example, one 16 year old who missed school regularly for two years was achieving almost 100 per cent attendance on the art foundation programme and was taking GCSE history as an additional subject. In the mathematics workshop there are no records of attendance nor of the purpose of visits made by students. Such records would help to ensure that students' needs are effectively met.

37 Records of achievement are maintained and students are expected to develop individual action plans in consultation with their tutors. In computing, records of achievement are maintained alongside portfolios of assessed work. The art department gives such records low priority, and action planning is limited to what is required for GNVQ assessment.

38 There is a well-established counselling service with a clear referral system for personal counselling and guidance. Student surveys inform the continued development of recruitment, guidance and counselling procedures. There is good practice in the strong support given to students to get them involved in the assessment and planning of their own learning. Students know the criteria used for their assessments. Students applying to higher education contribute to their own references. The students read their subject teachers' reports and discuss and sign them before they are incorporated, by the group tutor, into the references for the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS).

39 The close working relationship with the careers service provides particularly effective contributions to the curriculum on GNVQ courses. Two careers officers attend college for one day each week. Careers information does not contribute significantly to business courses. Monitoring of GCSE student destinations is poor and some staff are uncertain about where their full-time students go after they finish college courses.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

40 Sixty-four per cent of the 105 sessions inspected had strengths which outweighed weaknesses. In 10 per cent of classes weaknesses outweighed strengths. The following table summarises the inspection grades which were awarded.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE AS/A level		13	24	13	2	0	52
GCSE		1	19	9	4	0	33
GNVQ		1	7	4	4	0	16
Other		0	2	2	0	0	4
Total		15	52	28	10	0	105

41 During the specialist inspections, on average, 72 per cent of students on roll attended their classes. Poor student attendance was noted by inspectors in a number of subjects. In five classes observed in history, psychology and sociology the absence of students still on roll was 60 per cent. In mathematics, attendance at GCSE classes last year averaged 65 per cent and ranged from 54 per cent to 81 per cent. Punctuality is poor in a number of lessons. Students speak of personal and financial problems that affect their learning progress at the college.

42 Courses in most subjects were well planned. Students were set work regularly, and it was carefully marked in modern languages, humanities and English. Art and design students received advice as to how they should develop their work further. Not all mathematics work was marked, and science students would have benefited from more detailed feedback on their work. The recording of students' progress was good in science and English. In computing, students were responsible for some of their own record keeping.

43 Science assignments were well planned. Course content was closely linked to examples from industry. The standard of teaching was high. Teachers knew their subjects well and used a variety of teaching materials. Information technology skills were incorporated into practical assignments. When lessons were curtailed because of poor student timekeeping, the effectiveness of the teaching was undermined and some practical work was left incomplete. In physics, but not the other sciences, diagnostic tests were used to identify students' weaknesses in core skills such as numeracy.

44 The better sessions in mathematics had clear aims and objectives. There was appropriate emphasis on basic principles. Schemes of work linked topics to be covered with chapters in the textbook but contained no details of teaching methodology, marking and grading policies or statements about the frequency of homework. In most groups there were

regular checks on students' understanding and learning. Teachers' questions were challenging but not so difficult that students were unable to respond sensibly. The weaker sessions lacked a sense of purpose, presented insufficient challenge to students and did not take enough account of individuals' needs. Teaching in computing was good. Students were well motivated and the range of exercises set extended their knowledge and skills. Their project work was thoughtful and relevant; topics were related to industry, commerce, science, the public service and students' own family interests. Those requiring individual attention received it, though sometimes after an lengthy period of waiting whilst other students were seen.

45 Teachers of business carefully planned sessions in order to use students' strengths, build their confidence, assist their understanding and maintain their motivation. Students were taught in mixed ability groups and the needs of the more able students were sometimes overlooked. The keener students easily assimilated even the most abstract theories. In a successful class on the relationship between business activity and the environment, students explored the problems of scarcity, choice and the allocation of resources. During the class the teacher used a good range of supporting materials. Students on GNVQ courses were often organised in groups so that they could help one another to improve such skills as observation, information seeking, problem solving and the communication and presentation of ideas. Some students did not write or speak with confidence. A minority were uninterested, poorly motivated and able to concentrate only for short periods.

46 Schemes of work in art and design and in performing arts and media studies were carefully linked to the students' intended qualifications. There were good working relationships between staff, and with students. In one or two sessions the lack of pace in the work slowed down learning. The range of teaching methods employed was limited. In the GNVQ advanced programme the assessment system was appropriate, but there was too little vocational focus in the work set. In the foundation programme students received sympathetic guidance in core skills alongside their specialist studies. Students were beginning to understand the skills they would need in professional practice.

47 Teachers of English respected their students, listened to them, valued their views, and nurtured their skills in productive, purposeful lessons. Different strategies were used to challenge, interest and motivate students and an appropriate balance was maintained by teachers between challenging and supporting them. Nonetheless, a few students remained passive in lessons. A demanding second-year GCE A level language class dealt with the revision of stylistics. Students had each collected examples of idiom, cliché, metaphor, euphemism, and humour from a range of texts including newspapers and advertisements. These were used to remind the students of a range of linguistic features. In general, the teaching gave little emphasis to the consolidation of learning at the end of sessions and

the recording of the many good points made by students in discussion. All GCE A level students undertook investigative and extended work. Marking and the moderation of standards of work were of high quality.

48 English for speakers of other languages was a strength in the college. There were a number of ways in which students could have access to this provision. The quality of teaching and learning was good. Students from a range of courses received well-organised support. However, some students repeating English courses did not have their needs for English for speakers of other languages support assessed.

49 Teachers' expectations of modern languages students were appropriate. Classes were well managed and the pace of the work was always good. Teachers involved all students in the work in hand, though students did not have the opportunity to work in pairs. The subject matter and teaching styles used in many lessons were lively and interesting. Methods of preparing students for examinations were skilful and, in several instances, innovative. There was no departmental approach to recording students' progress.

50 Good teaching methods and materials had been developed by history, psychology and sociology staff. Regularly set assignments were carefully marked and returned with helpful comments. Good emphasis was laid upon key skills and sound examination techniques. Marking in sociology was not standardised. The problems of small classes and irregular attendance by students undermined the planning of courses and limited the progress of the better attenders. It was difficult for staff to cover work properly or obtain regular written assignments from a significant number of students. Some students leave courses because they cannot meet coursework deadlines.

51 The college was responding well to the needs of the few students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. There have been few students using wheelchairs at the college because of problems of access to the building. A number of hearing impaired students were enrolled on college courses. The college does not possess the staff expertise or equipment to cater for students with severe learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

52 Examination results are generally at or below national averages though there are some notable exceptions. Retention, attendance and punctuality are poor. The college acknowledges that, until recently, there has been little cross-college analysis of examination results or retention. An initial analysis of retention for 1994-95 first year GCE A level and GNVQ courses reveals that, of 505 enrolments, 289 (57.2 per cent) students were still on courses in the summer term.

53 Although numbers were small, all students who completed the final year of study on the vocational courses included in the Department for Education and Employment 1995 performance tables were successful.

This places the college among the top 10 per cent of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure. However, a high proportion of those enrolled in the final year do not achieve the full qualification. Of 280 students registered on GNVQ programmes in 1993-94, 60 gained full certification. The college's own analysis recognises that this is an area where it needs to 'make major improvements'.

54 One hundred and seventy-two students, aged 16 to 18, entered for GCE AS/A level examinations in 1994-95 scored, on average, 3.5 points per entry. This places the college among the middle third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure, based on the data in the 1995 performance tables published by the Department for Education and Employment. A high proportion of students are not included in examination statistics as they left their courses prematurely. In a number of GCE A level subjects, including pure and applied mathematics, some science subjects and theatre studies, retention rates over the two years of the courses were between 40 per cent and 60 per cent. In contrast, all GCE A level dance students completed their course. Retention on one-year GCSE courses was also variable. All GCSE art students and 84 per cent of sociology students finished their courses, whereas only 33 per cent of those initially enrolled on the GCSE media studies programme completed it.

55 Examination results in 1994-95 vary across subjects. In computing and some science subjects GCE A level pass rates at grades A-E are below the national average for sixth form colleges. College figures show pass rates of 72 per cent for chemistry, 68 per cent for physics, 66 per cent for biology and 67 per cent for computing. All these are improvements over results for the previous year. The pass rate of 85 per cent for human biology is good. Mathematics GCE A level results overall are improving and this year are close to national averages; all further mathematics students who took the examination were successful as were 88 per cent of those examined in pure mathematics and mechanics. However, there are poor results in GCE A level mathematics and statistics with a pass rate of 45 per cent. GCSE grades vary, with some improvements as a result of new syllabuses being introduced. The proportion of GCSE grades A-C in electronics is good at 83 per cent, but biology and physics are poor with 18 per cent and 36 per cent respectively. GCSE mathematics results show that for the last two years over three-quarters of students have improved their performance by at least one grade.

56 There are some good results in English at GCE A level and GCSE. In 1993, 96 per cent of GCE A level English literature students passed and in 1994 the figure was 90 per cent. In 1993, the English language GCE A level results were in line with national norms, but in 1994 only 56 per cent gained grades A-C. The programme area of art and design and performing arts achieves results generally in line with national standards; GCSE art and design and drama are well above average. Humanities and social

sciences and business studies results at GCE A level and GCSE are generally below national averages.

57 Written work prepared by social sciences and humanities students often shows good levels of knowledge and understanding. Although there is a considerable range of achievement in writing at GCE A level in English language and literature, all students write coherently, make some progress over time and produce some work of merit both in essay writing and extended pieces. They read and write about their texts with understanding. The more able GCE A level students develop a strong personal voice in their writing, write accurately and at length and show some flair and originality. GCSE students' writing also covers a wide range of achievement but many progress to write coherent pieces covering a good range of genres and forms. GCSE literature students clearly enjoy and respond well to their texts and produce well-crafted, thoughtful and sometimes perceptive writing.

58 The skills being achieved by students in language classes vary. Some GCE A level students are able to answer demanding questions, have an appropriate knowledge of vocabulary and are able to understand and respond to extended use of the foreign language by teachers. Accents are often satisfactory or better. Students can produce extended written work at an appropriate level. In other instances there are poor oral skills and responses are limited to brief utterances. Some students work well below the required level orally and in writing.

59 Students are developing a realistic understanding of the skills and professional practice associated with performing arts and media studies. Students on the GNVQ advanced art programme are not getting sufficient experience in a range of specialist study to prepare them adequately for higher education or employment. Students' drawing abilities lack confidence.

60 In most mathematics classes students are able to discuss mathematical principles with knowledge and understanding. In computing the second-year GCE A level group have produced good project group work but, in general, students experience difficulties with the technical language of computing. Students work hard and effectively, especially in practical sessions. Science courses have low achievements overall, yet there are examples of high individual student achievements. For example, one student on an electronics GCE AS course has made excellent progress; on entering college he needed extra learning support but he subsequently obtained an intermediate GNVQ in science where his dissertation was found to be outstanding.

61 Core skills are being better developed in some areas of the college than others. Students of English draft assignments effectively and improve their first attempts, often using wordprocessing. The majority of these students contribute sensible points to discussion and back up their ideas with evidence and reasons. Art and design GNVQ students are acquiring a

good range of core skills to underpin their specialist studies. Business students are making sound progress in developing listening and speaking skills but writing skills and number work remain weak. In mathematics and business, information technology skills are not being fully developed.

62 The college is trying to improve the information it collects on leavers destinations. Figures indicate that in 1994-95, 89.9 per cent of the 94 students gaining two or more GCE A levels went into higher education. They were from a cohort of 162. There is less reliable information on the destinations of students from other courses as a large percentage of students' destinations are unknown to the college.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

63 After consultation with staff involved, a quality system which sets a standard approach has now been established for academic departments. There is now a consistent approach with the production and identification of appropriate performance indicators. The system is, however, at an early stage and its effectiveness is yet unproved as the full cycle which will include monitoring and evaluation has not yet been completed. Course reviews have taken place for the first time and staff have found this to be a useful process. Student survey results have been incorporated into these reviews. Quality handouts and files of standard documentation have been compiled for all key areas, including governance, finance, marketing and buildings.

64 The college has been slow to adopt a system which will enable systematic comparison between students' achievement on entry and at the end of courses. The lack of added value calculations prevents the departments from having a clear overview of their students' achievements. Students often come to the college with examination grades which are below average. Some departments have begun to analyse improvements in achievements. There is, as yet, no college policy to record such data in any systematic way. The college recognises that there is still a great deal of work to be done to monitor and evaluate the quality system established and increase the consistency of its operation.

65 The college's charter is presented in a booklet but its style and language are very formal. Students' rights are stated in very general terms with some caveats and few measurable standards. The section for employers is mainly a description of current business links but there is a small section on employers' rights. Staff are unsure about the charter's purpose with respect to employers. Parts of the charter have been rewritten to make it easier to understand. These extracts are distributed and discussed with all students at induction. The charter was being reviewed at the time of the inspection.

66 The college has a clearly-defined, draft staff-development policy which is linked to the college's strategic objectives. Roles and responsibilities are clearly identified in the achievement of these objectives.

Funds are allocated for specific objectives and this generally means that all training is linked to the college's strategic plan. The staff development budget, although small at 0.3 per cent of revenue, is supplemented by contributions from the TEC. The personal development portfolio which has just been introduced could be an effective mechanism for the identification of staff-development needs. As yet, it is not effectively used for this purpose.

67 In 1994-95 all teaching staff attended in-house training on the use of information technology. Sixty-nine per cent of the teaching staff participated in additional staff-development events.

68 Support staff have a well-planned staff-development programme clearly linked to college needs and accompanied by an appropriate budget. Of the support staff, 33 per cent had individual training in 1994-95 and all staff are to be involved in a planned programme for 1995-96. There are no staff-appraisal systems in place at the moment. Although the college is committed to obtaining Investors in People accreditation, progress has been slow as staff were not involved in the planning process and have little awareness of its concept.

69 As part of its response to inspection requirements, a self-assessment report was produced by the quality assurance manager under the headings of the inspection framework outlined in Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. Only the senior management team saw this document, although there was consultation with other staff during its production. The document picks out the strengths of the college and identifies areas requiring improvement. Many of the judgements in the report were consistent with the findings of the inspection team, although there were some omissions. The document did provide useful background information to support the inspection process.

RESOURCES

Staffing

70 In general, staff are well qualified. Of the 73 daytime teaching staff, 92 per cent have degrees or similar educational qualifications; 18 per cent have higher degrees and 85 per cent have teaching qualifications. Thirty-nine per cent of the 25 support staff have a degree or similar higher education qualification and one member has a higher degree. Of these support staff, 46 per cent are employed full time and the remainder work in term time only. Administrative and clerical staff make up 28 per cent of the total. There are reasonable proportions of males and females amongst the staff, but the proportion of staff from minority ethnic backgrounds does not match that of the student population. There is no professionally-qualified accountant supporting the college management team nor anyone with extensive personnel experience. There are two library staff and this is barely adequate to support the number of students. Occasionally, the library has to close for short periods when staff are not available.

71 Teachers for non-vocational courses, such as GCE A level and GCSE, are well qualified and experienced. There are gaps in the skills and experience of staff needed for the new vocational courses. Many teachers on GNVQ courses do not have the industrial and business qualifications nor the experience necessary. The college has had some success in obtaining for staff short-term work-experience placements with local organisations, typically of a few days duration. Fifteen staff are being trained as assessors for vocational courses but have not yet qualified. Eight staff have had GNVQ training in specific areas such as core skills and assessment. Few teachers are being retrained for vocational qualifications. Occasionally, teachers of one specialism have to offer courses in another. Most teachers on vocational courses are in need of training in the use of the specialist equipment used in industry and commerce.

72 Support staff are well qualified and, in general, sufficient in number. They give good support to the departments for the non-vocational courses. The variety of computers used in the college has resulted in a shortage of appropriately-experienced technician support. Some of this work is being performed by teaching staff. The move to vocational courses has created more work for technicians. No plans are yet available for the retraining or redeployment of technicians to support such courses.

Equipment/learning resources

73 In general, there is sufficient provision of teaching equipment. Blackboards are normally used, with a few whiteboards available. Overhead projectors are available for staff if they need them. Video players are just sufficient but more audio recorders could be useful for the teaching of foreign languages. Equipment for photographic development and enlargement is obsolete and unsatisfactory for teaching. There is good editing equipment for the visual arts. There are a small number of conveniently placed photocopying machines for staff use, together with a well-equipped reprographics section which provides a centralised and cost-effective document design and production service.

74 In the library there is a wide range of materials. Shelves are clearly labelled and the stock catalogued on a computer database and protected by a security system. The bookstock in the library is now 9,800 items, but many texts are still held in the departments. Actual spending on new books is approximately £10,000 per year, a comparatively low amount. There is a need to remove obsolete items from the shelves. There are sufficient numbers of computers in the library, but they are of different types and cause problems for students and staff who may be unfamiliar with a particular machine. Compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) databases in the library can be accessed by all staff and students.

75 Within departments there is good provision of desktop computers. Machines and software are largely standardised within, but differ between departments. In total, there are about 120 machines of different types

and of different ages. Two different networking systems are used. A variety of software application packages and operating systems are used. An attractive new information technology centre is equipped with modern personal computers. The lack of standardisation across the college prevents effective and efficient use of the computers and does not enable economies of scale to be achieved. Some machines are in specific subject areas but they are not reserved for use in those specialisms. They are located in clusters on the different floors of the building and there is access for all staff and students when machines are not being used for specialist purposes. The variety of computers in use means that hardware and software equipment maintenance is difficult. Workbooks and manuals have to be provided for different machines and software.

Accommodation

76 The college is located in the heart of the Manchester business community. Transport from the surrounding areas is good and some students view positively the prospect of studying in the centre of the city. The building dates from Victorian times and matches the surrounding architecture. It is a grade II listed building. A programme of re-refurbishment has started which initially concentrates on the building fabric and is phased over a number of years to match available cash flow. The location gives rise to security problems from intruders. The college is successful in controlling this. Access for wheelchair users is difficult at present because there is no ramp and streets outside are congested. Inside, a lift and wide doors give adequate access.

77 A good variety of rooms is available. There are large areas suitable for examinations, a theatre and a dance floor, and rooms suitable for small classes or storage. In general, they are suitable for the existing and planned provision. Most classes within a subject area are held in adjacent rooms. An exception is the art and design and media studies department which has widely separated facilities inhibiting interaction amongst staff and the effective usage of resources. The library area, and its associated study room, occupy a central area in the college but block a main corridor.

78 The internal structure results in poor space utilisation. The classrooms have high ceilings and are separated by wide corridors. The acoustics in some rooms are poor and the single-glazed windows and partitions allow noise from the corridor and outside to disturb the lessons taking place. Few of the wooden or hard floor surfaces are carpeted and much noise is generated internally. Heat loss is a problem in winter; many staff and students complain of the cold. Heat build-up in summer or glare through the large windows is also a problem. The ambience of the reception and circulation areas is poor and perpetuates an out-of-date image. The standard of decor is also poor and only the information technology centre has been modernised recently. Room utilisation is poor. Use is mostly limited to 09.00-16.00 during term time, apart from a few evening classes and the loan of some rooms to the local Chinese community

on Sundays. There is an excess of unused floor space. Plans to lease spare capacity to local businesses in return for private funding for refurbishment are being considered.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

79 The strengths of the college include:

- responsiveness to the communities that it serves with a good range of courses leading to GCSE, GCE A level and GNVQ
- governors who have an appropriate range of expertise, give generously of their time and promote openness in their proceedings
- staff who are helpful to and supportive of students and foster a close working relationship with the careers service
- coherent planning of courses, good schemes of work and individual lessons which are well planned and use a range of appropriate activities
- a quality assurance system with concise, clear documentation and quality handbooks for key curriculum and support areas of the college
- a single site of character positioned in the city centre.

80 To make further progress, the college should address the following:

- some poor retention and attendance rates
- examination results which are below national averages in some subjects
- the need to establish a more coherent college-wide tutorial programme
- inadequate initial student guidance and assessment and insufficient learning support
- the further development of monitoring and evaluation processes and greater use of performance indicators
- an absence of whole-college systems and poor co-ordination between departments, resulting in inconsistent practices
- the lack of staff with sufficient technical expertise and industrial experience to teach vocational courses
- the absence of specialist expertise in areas such as finance and personnel management
- the lack of time for senior managers to engage in strategic planning rather than operational matters.

FIGURES

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- 1 Percentage enrolments by age (as at December 1995)

 - 2 Percentage enrolments by level of study (as at December 1995)

 - 3 Enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at December 1995)

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

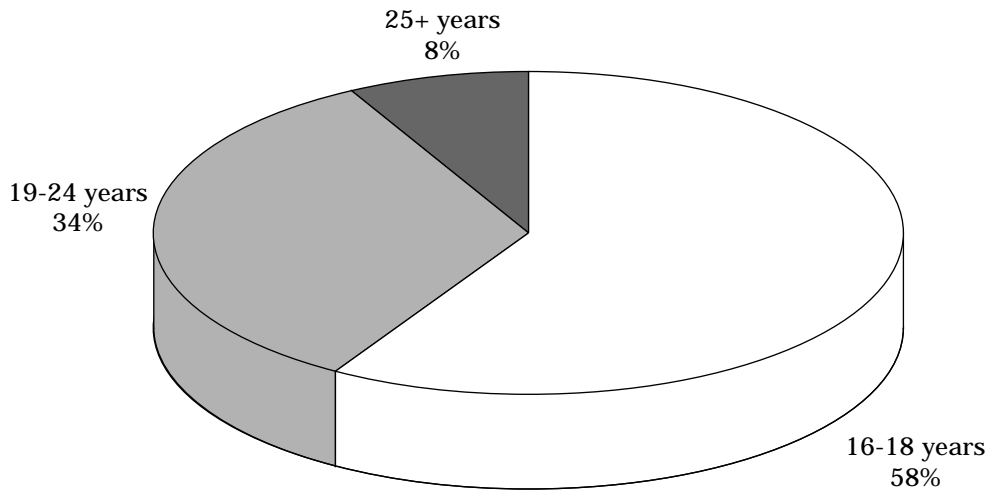
 - 5 Income (for 12 months to July 1995)

 - 6 Expenditure (for 12 months to July 1995)

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

Figure 1

Shena Simon College: percentage enrolments by age (as at December 1995)

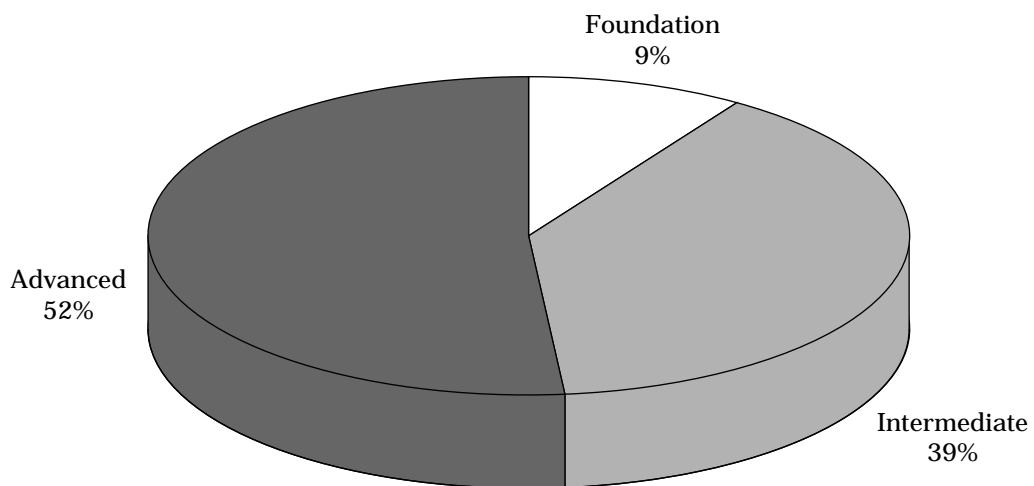


Enrolments: 1,215

Note: this chart excludes two enrolments under the age of 16.

Figure 2

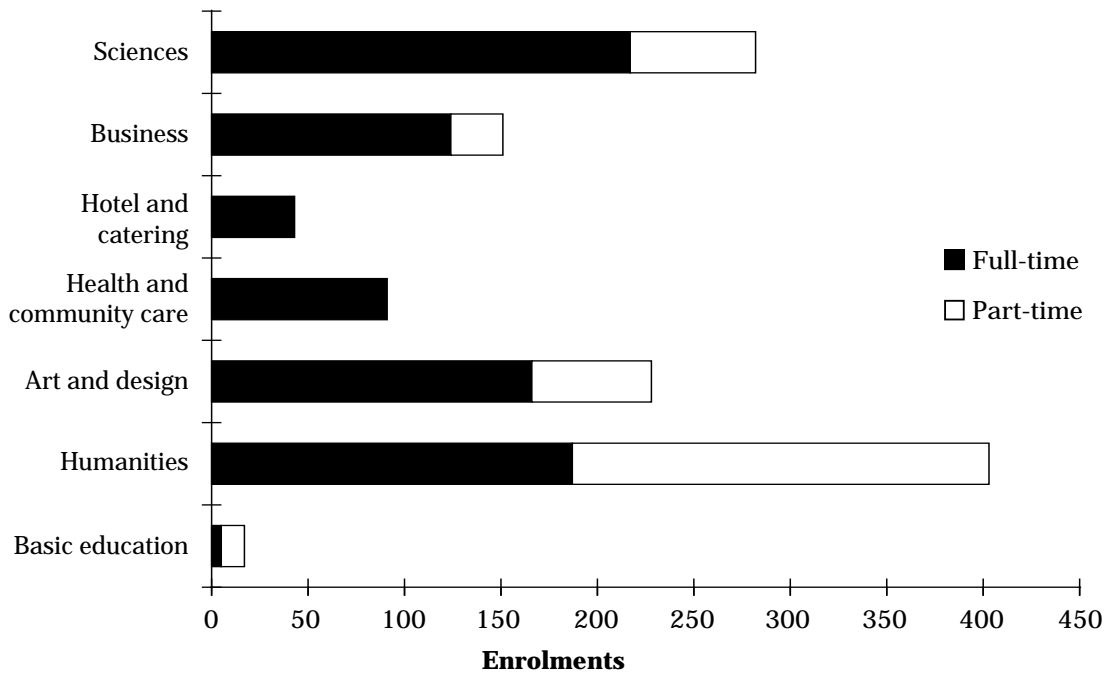
Shena Simon College: percentage enrolments by level of study (as at December 1995)



Enrolments: 1,215

Figure 3

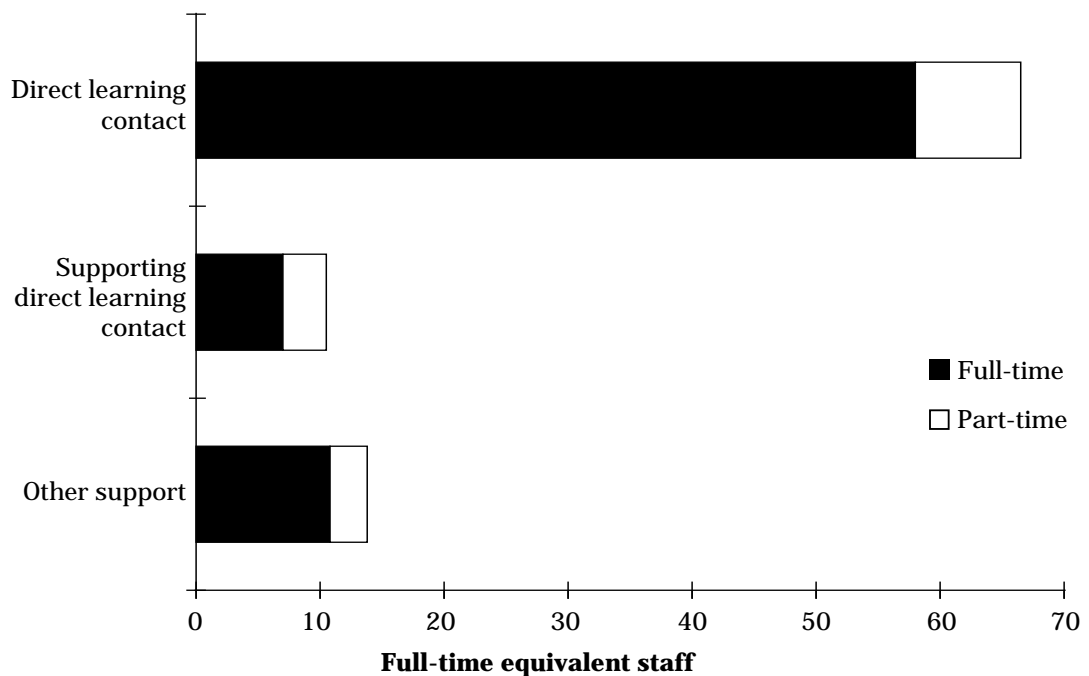
Shena Simon College: enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at December 1995)



Enrolments: 1,215

Figure 4

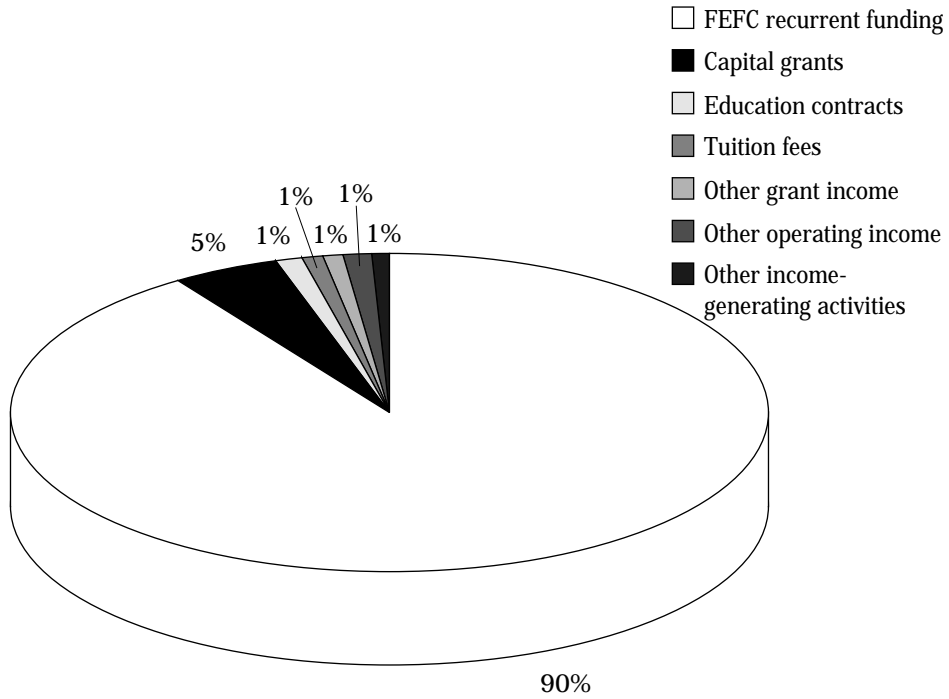
Shena Simon College: staff profile - staff expressed as full-time equivalents (as at December 1995)



Full-time equivalent staff: 91

Figure 5

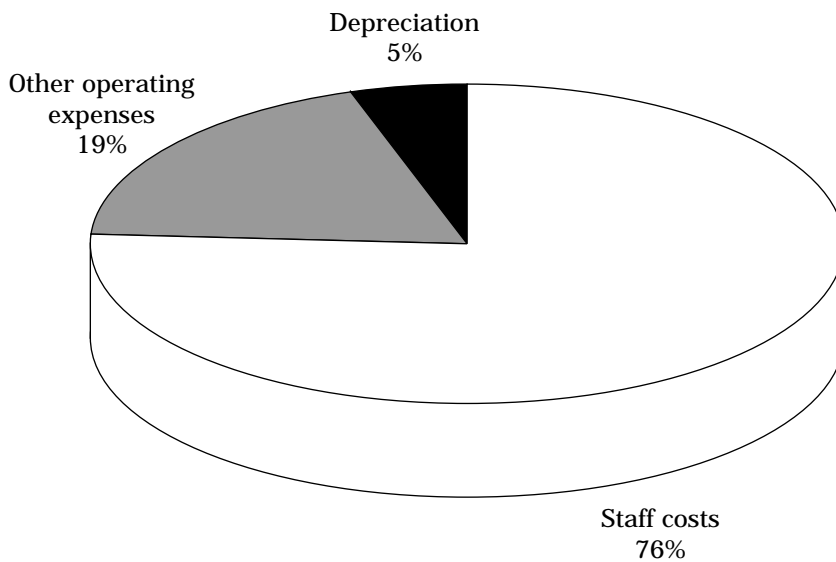
Shena Simon College: income (for the 12 months to July 1995)



Income: £2,801,000

Figure 6

Shena Simon College: expenditure (for 12 months to July 1995)



Expenditure: £2,958,000

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