St Mary's College, Blackburn

March 1997

***THE FURTHER EDUCATION
FUNDING COUNCIL***

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

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

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GRADE DESCRIPTORS

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

- *grade 1 – provision which has many strengths and very few weaknesses*

- *grade 2 – provision in which the strengths clearly outweigh the weaknesses*

- *grade 3 – provision with a balance of strengths and weaknesses*

- *grade 4 – provision in which the weaknesses clearly outweigh the strengths*

- *grade 5 – provision which has many weaknesses and very few strengths.*

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

College grade profiles 1993-96

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

FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 17/97

ST MARY'S COLLEGE, BLACKBURN
NORTH WEST REGION
Inspected September-November 1996

Summary

St Mary's College is a Roman Catholic sixth form college in Blackburn. Parents, students, employers and the head teachers of its partner schools value the college's distinctive ethos based on Catholic principles. The college offers a broad range of GCE A level, GCE AS and GCSE subjects and has developed some vocational programmes. Governors are experienced and supportive and work closely with college managers who are improving planning, operations and communications. The roles of some managers require clarification. The recruitment process is well planned and based on a clear policy which sets out priorities for admission. The college cares for its students. Staff monitor students' progress rigorously and provide additional support where needed. GCE A level results match or exceed national averages. Students' attendance and retention are high. The college is on a single site in accommodation which is efficiently used and well maintained. A measured programme of refurbishment is in progress. The college should: use its links with employers to enhance the curriculum; ensure that heads of departments fulfil their roles more consistently; develop a shared understanding of quality assurance procedures; focus staff development more on teaching and learning; and ensure that information technology is used more fully across the curriculum.

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	2
Quality assurance	3
Resources: staffing	2
equipment/learning resources	3
accommodation	2

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Science	2	Art and design	3
Mathematics and computing	3	English and modern languages	2
Business	2		
Health and care	2	Psychology, sociology and history	3

INTRODUCTION

1   St Mary's College, Blackburn was inspected between September and November 1996. The college's enrolment and induction procedures were inspected in September, curriculum areas in October and aspects of cross-college provision in the week beginning 18 November 1996. Twelve inspectors spent 49 days in the college. They visited 103 classes, examined students' work and studied college documents, including the college's strategic plan and self-assessment report. They observed a meeting of the board of governors and held discussions with governors, college managers, teaching and support staff, careers officers, students, former students, parents, and with representatives of partner high schools, the community, East Lancashire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) and higher education institutions.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2   St Mary's is a Roman Catholic sixth form college situated on a single site half a mile from the town centre of Blackburn in Lancashire. Originally founded as a school in 1925 by the Marist Fathers to provide Catholic secondary education for boys in East Lancashire, it became a mixed comprehensive sixth form college in 1978 as part of the reorganisation of Catholic secondary education in Blackburn. In 1993, the college became a designated institution under the terms of *The Further and Higher Education Act 1992.* The college enrols students who are mainly aged 16 to 19. The college day runs from 09.00 to 16.00 hours in line with that of its partner high schools. The college is the major provider of state-funded Catholic post-16 education in East Lancashire. It has the largest number of general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) entries in the area. The mission of the college is 'to provide a caring community in which young adults can grow as balanced human beings, morally, intellectually and spiritually and participate fully in the world'.

3   The college recruits students from 28 schools in the local authority districts of Blackburn and Darwen, Hyndburn, Pendle, Ribble Valley, Burnley and Rossendale. There are two grant-maintained 11 to 18 schools, a large tertiary college, two colleges of further education and two independent schools in the locality. Living standards and employment opportunities across the area vary considerably. There is severe social and economic deprivation in parts of inner Blackburn. Minority ethnic communities, currently 16 per cent of the population, face disproportionately high levels of unemployment. The decline in traditional manufacturing industries has adversely affected Accrington and Burnley. The Ribble Valley has a more prosperous economy because of developments in tourism and other service provision. Employment opportunities for school-leavers are poor in all districts of Lancashire. In 1996, the proportion of students who continued their education beyond the age of 16 in Blackburn was 58 per cent, a fall from 61.8 per cent in 1995. Sixty-eight per cent of year 11 students in the four main partner

high schools stay on in education. Forty-six per cent of these enrol at the college. The proportion of students in these high schools achieving grades A* to C in the general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) is 42.3 per cent compared with the average for Lancashire of 42.6 per cent. The average in Blackburn and Darwen schools is 33.7 per cent.

4   Twenty-five per cent of the 946 students on roll are from minority ethnic communities. The ratio of male to female students is 9:11. Enrolments have risen over the last four years by more than 37 per cent. The college's admissions policy gives priority to students from Catholic partner schools and to other Catholic applicants. Enrolments from the four main Catholic partner high schools have risen by 57 per cent since 1994. In 1996, Catholic students account for 59 per cent of the entry and make up 47 per cent of students at the college. In 1996, the college recruited 53 per cent of its entry from Blackburn and Darwen schools. Recruitment from schools outside this area shows an increase in the number of Catholic students to 26 per cent of the entry. Student numbers by age, by level of study and by mode of attendance and curriculum area are given in figures 1, 2 and 3 respectively. The college employs 62 full-time teachers and 14 part-time teachers representing 66.9 full-time equivalent staff. There are 35 support staff (28.2 full-time equivalents). A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is given in figure 4.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

5   The college has established a clear identity and role based on Roman Catholic values. Students from Catholic and other faiths are welcome. The tutorial system gives all students the opportunity for religious education.

6   The college displays a willingness to respond to and meet the needs of students in the community it serves. The present portfolio of courses is sufficiently broad to meet the needs of its 16 to 19 year old students. The college reviews its curriculum regularly and adjusts its courses as necessary. A small amount of evening provision is available, mainly for adults. However, staff in some areas of the curriculum are slow to investigate new initiatives. The college offers a broad range of GCSE, GCE AS/A level and some vocational courses. Sixty-seven per cent of students are following GCE advanced courses, and 28 per cent are working for general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs). Courses include:

*   GCE A level in 37 subjects, and five GCE AS subjects

*   the Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) national diploma in nursery nursing

*   GNVQ courses: five advanced, five intermediate and two at foundation level

*   certificates in extended studies in three science subjects

- GCSE in 13 subjects

- some basic skills courses.

7   The planning of the curriculum and timetable are sufficiently flexible to allow a wide range of options for study. Teachers choose syllabuses carefully to provide students with maximum opportunities for achievement. Students who follow GNVQ programmes can take GCSE and GCE A level subjects, but the college does not offer language units as an addition to vocational courses. The timetable prevents GCE A level students from taking GNVQ units. Thirty per cent of GCE A level subjects have modular syllabuses.   Many students spoke positively about this development and saw it as a means of allowing their attainment to be measured more frequently. A spread of health and social care programmes meets the needs of a diverse group of students. All students from these courses have progressed to either employment or higher education. St Mary's is the only local college to offer the 'parents as educators' course. It has doubled its recruitment in the year it has been running.

8   Although the range of courses is broad, the provision in some areas is limited. The computing department does not offer full-time students a vocational course as an alternative to GCE A levels. The college has a small amount of foundation provision. Together with its partner schools it has identified a need for more courses at foundation level and is beginning to expand its provision at this level. At present enrolments are low.

9   Marketing of the college is energetic and well conceived.   The marketing strategy has clear aims and performance targets. The college has conducted market analysis and used it to identify gaps in its provision. Publicity material is well written and attractively presented. Minority ethnic groups are well represented in the college's publicity.

10   The college has constructive links with 11 to 16 schools over a wide catchment area.   Head teachers describe these links as 'the richest secondary school-sixth form college liaison' they have experienced. College staff attend careers evenings at local schools to give advice on courses. Teachers work closely with colleagues in some feeder schools to achieve curriculum compatibility. Staff, students and parents value the college's commitment to contact with parents. Students' progress is regularly reported to parents who are also encouraged to attend interviews and liaison events.

11   Close links are maintained with industry and employers for work experience placements. GCE A level students have one week of work experience and GNVQ students have two weeks. A local nursing home provides work placements for students studying health and social care. Students support residents with professionalism and sensitivity during recreational outings and visits to college performances. The college has recognised the need to develop its links with industry more fully. Students have visited several industrial companies in a well-organised programme of study visits. Speakers from a range of establishments give lunchtime

lectures. Links with industry and employers are not used sufficiently to enhance curriculum development. Employers contribute to some vocational programmes. A successful two-day 'challenge of management' project held locally brought together staff and students from three colleges, employers and other post-16 providers. Curricular links with several higher education colleges are in place. Staff from these institutions attend college open evenings to help raise students' awareness of opportunities in higher education. The college has developed sound links with East Lancashire TEC, whose representative commended the college on its responsiveness to change while building on its strengths and its willingness to contribute to and support regional partnership endeavours.

12   The college has introduced a range of measures designed to promote greater awareness of equal opportunities among staff and students. A current focus is on the needs of a group of young Asian females wishing to take advantage of the college leisure facilities. Together with its partner schools, the college identifies students with special needs well before enrolment, and ensures that provision is in place to meet identified needs. Learning support is available for students identified as having difficulties. Students with sensory and physical disabilities are fully supported. The college has installed new handrails and a rest room. Although there is a lift to the library, access to the remainder of the first floor of the main building is by stairs.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

13   The board of the corporation plans ahead and monitors college activities effectively. Membership has recently been increased by one to 19. Governors bring a wide range of professional expertise to the college. Besides the principal and two staff governors, the board includes priests, solicitors, accountants, business people, an estate agent, a careers adviser and a former education officer who has experience of personnel management. The college has received the consent of the secretary of state for education and employment to appoint an additional foundation governor to replace the former parent governor. There is no student governor. Three governors are women. Members of the corporation take an interest in the college and are well informed about its affairs. They support its mission and are involved in strategic planning. The board is well chaired and well clerked. It has six committees: management and finance, audit, marketing, quality assurance, personnel and remuneration. In addition, there is a strategic planning group with joint membership of governors and senior managers.

14   Managers' reports and the information made available to the board are of good quality. Data from the management information system have improved through the purchase of new software. Governors are aware of the boundary between strategic and operational functions. Some of their activities are close to those of the management role, especially in the operation of joint committees of governors and managers. There is an

overlap of activity between the governors' quality assessment committee and the academic board, the future role of which requires clarification. Governors' supervision of staffing matters has been slow to develop. The functions of the personnel and remuneration committees have only recently been clarified as one of the responses to several issues raised in the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) audit service report. There is a programme of development for governors, and short training presentations are sometimes part of main board meetings. There is a register of governors' interests. Governors have not yet made progress towards the assessment of their own performance, though they have begun to discuss a way forward.

15   The senior management team was reorganised in 1994. It now provides more effective planning, operations and communication. There are seven members including the principal, deputy principal, finance director and the four assistant principals. The assistant principals each have cross-college responsibilities. There are six programme area co-ordinators, five of whom supervise the five academic programme areas and one who oversees vocational programmes. They have helped to focus the work of groups of departments and improved communications with the senior management team. Some job descriptions such as the role of programme area co-ordinators require clarification in relation to that of the departmental heads.

16   The college has met its own enrolment targets which have included significant expansion in the last three years. Retention is good and the governors' demand in 1995 for a 10 per cent improvement in students' examination results has been achieved. Programme area co-ordinators are making a positive contribution to the improvement of the planning and monitoring processes. However, the impact of strategic planning on the curriculum is limited in some areas. Departmental heads contribute to the strategic planning process through departmental plans and review of targets, but the quality of their participation varies. Some teachers pay insufficient attention to the strategic development of the college.

17   The college has policies in place to further the achievement of its mission. Since incorporation governors have reviewed key policies such as the health and safety policy. Managers' responsibilities for the implementation and monitoring of policies are clear. The college has an equal opportunities co-ordinator, a clear statement of policy and achievable targets.

18   The average level of funding for the college in 1996-97 is £21.19 per unit. At the time of the inspection, the college was reviewing its financial projections to make a revised return to the FEFC. The finance director has identified the costs of individual programmes. As a result, departmental heads and programme area co-ordinators are more aware of the financial contribution they are making to the college. In some curriculum areas, staff have not dealt adequately with the issue of

uneconomic group sizes, though the college has discontinued a few uneconomic courses. Staff have not developed alternative approaches to ensure more cost-effective methods of teaching and resourcing the curriculum. Staff understand the methodology used to allocate resources. Protracted periods of staff absence through ill health have increased staffing costs, which have been high in the past year. The college's income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1996 are shown in figures 5 and 6.

19   The management information system has developed and can now provide accurate and useful information to managers and the FEFC. Staff are aware of recruitment, attendance, retention, achievement and progression statistics. The college monitors students' destinations effectively; only 3 per cent of the 1996 leavers' destinations were unknown at the time of the November census. Progression to higher education and employment is good. Some departments do not make optimum use of the available information. Only a few staff use on-line access to the management information system, and some staff require further training.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

20   There is a strong commitment to providing a caring and supportive environment. The college gives a high priority to admitting students to courses that meet their needs and to monitoring their attendance and performance. Staff offer a range of services to support students during and beyond their studies.

21   Students are generally pleased with the recruitment process. The college has a clear admissions policy and priorities for admission which reflect its mission statement. The admissions process is well planned and benefits from clear objectives, including the provision of information and advice, the nature and speed of response to applications and fair consideration of applicants. Curriculum heads are members of the admissions unit which has clear responsibilities. These responsibilities include a regular review of the process. Students contribute to this review, but there is no evidence of a systematic response to findings by the college.

22   The college offers prospective students from Catholic partner schools a range of opportunities to obtain information and guidance about entry to the college. Head teachers of these schools are very appreciative of the way the college conducts these links and the information they receive about their pupils' destinations when they leave college. The college meets its stated aim of providing 'efficient, courteous, helpful and friendly service'. Information events include:

•   visits by college staff to schools in the years preceding transfer

•   information evenings

•   clinics with specialist teachers.

Not all of these opportunities are taken up by other secondary schools which are not formal partners. Written information is provided in a booklet called 'choosing your post 16 course'. However, it makes only limited reference to non-advanced courses.

23   All staff involved in interviewing students have had recent training in general interviewing skills by East Lancashire Careers Service. Staff need further training in listening to identify students' needs more effectively. The college offers to any applicant who does not meet normal course entry standards an alternative course that matches their career aspirations. The guidance given on their subject choice to students who apply for GCE A level courses is not always fully recorded. Most information sheets relate to course content and not to the differing skill and aptitude requirements of the subjects offered. The college subscribes to an independent, external service which provided an analysis of the value added to students' achievements by comparing their actual performance at GCE A level with their predicted performance based on GCSE achievements. Analysis of data for 1996 shows that 33 per cent of the 279 students surveyed in year 13 believe that they have chosen a wrong subject. The college has not used this information in a systematic way in reviews of the effectiveness of initial guidance.

24   Well-planned and effective induction programmes introduce new students to the college, their courses and to each other. In line with the college mission, staff show commitment to a caring and supportive approach to students. Students receive an informative and well-produced students' diary that is a useful source of reference throughout their time in college. Induction arrangements are not modified to take account of the needs of students who are returning to college to take a new course. The GCE A level students' induction programme in modern languages tries to smooth the transition from GCSE. The programme provides a range of learning activities that introduce students to study skills which are appropriate for their chosen course. Some subject-specific induction material is poorly presented. In some induction sessions opportunities are missed to promote interaction between students. In one session the teacher just read from the student handbook. In another, students were competing in a college quiz almost as an individual test rather than as the group activity for which it was designed.

25   Teaching departments devise their own vocationally-related tests to assess students' abilities in the key skills of literacy and numeracy. Teachers then negotiate with students the additional support needed. This support is provided both in class and by extra lessons. The college is developing systems to enable it to increase its intake and support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Observation of foundation level provision showed that teachers gave support to students without challenging them sufficiently. As a result, appropriate development of skills did not take place.

26   The tutorial system is the foundation of the college's pastoral activity. Full-time teachers are fully involved in, and committed to, students' support through the tutorial system. All full-time students belong to a tutorial group and have a personal tutor who supervises academic and personal progress and provides effective support. Senior tutors support the tutors well. A structured tutorial programme of personal education aims to deliver those elements of the mission statement that may not be covered comprehensively within the academic curriculum. The Open College of the North West validates the tutorial programme which also includes college assembly and elements of Catholic religious observance.

27   Students have ready access to a careers guidance service and qualified local careers officers who operate a rota in college. The college has clear procedures to allow students to change courses. Tutors carefully monitor attendance and progress. Students are encouraged to update their records of achievement, though a substantial number do not.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

28   The profile of the college's lesson grades is not as good as the average for all lessons observed during the 1995-96 inspection programme, according to the *Chief Inspector's Annual Report 1995-96.* In 55 per cent of the 103 sessions inspected, strengths outweighed weaknesses. The weaknesses outweighed strengths in 7 per cent of sessions. Attendance rates in the classes inspected averaged 89 per cent and ranged from 82 per cent in business to 95 per cent in modern languages. The following table summarises the grades awarded to the sessions inspected.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE AS/A level	11	21	22	2	1	57
GCSE	2	3	4	1	0	10
GNVQ	6	8	9	2	0	25
Other	3	3	4	1	0	11
Total	**22**	**35**	**39**	**6**	**1**	**103**

29   The mutual regard between staff and students helped to promote learning and encouraged students to seek assistance when needed. In most departments, schemes of work were well structured and coherent and gave due attention to assessment criteria. Teachers used them as working documents. Several schemes of work were not translated into detailed lesson plans. Staff set work regularly and returned it promptly. In the best marking practice teachers gave students detailed information on where they had made errors and lost marks. Some teachers made good use of library, workshop or laboratory facilities. Often students were not encouraged sufficiently to work on their own. There were instances of both good and poor management of small groups in the classroom.

The college strategy for information technology does not operate at programme level.

30   In science, carefully-planned programmes of work enabled comprehensive coverage of syllabuses. Teachers were committed and experienced and tried to meet the learning needs of individual students. Lessons were varied and lively; handouts and supportive documentation were of a high standard. In a few lessons the pace of work was too slow to challenge the students adequately. Because some groups were small, students were unable to benefit fully from working together. Teachers set regular assignment work of an appropriate standard. They marked it carefully and gave students detailed feedback on their progress. Most practical classes were well designed. A student in one GNVQ advanced physics class on mechanics effectively used a compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) based computer simulation to make measurements on the retardation of a crashing car. He made accurate measurements from the screen and displayed his results by graphical methods. Other members of the class worked co-operatively in small groups to analyse safety literature from the industry. In a few practical sessions, teachers did not pay enough attention to the size of the group and allowed some students to avoid taking part fully.

31   Staff in mathematics and computing presented material clearly and logically. They built up the complexity of topics step by step and advised students on more elegant solutions when appropriate. Teachers gave lessons to the whole class, so that there were few opportunities for students to learn individually or in small groups. The pace of some explanations and note-taking was too rapid to allow students to develop their understanding. Contributions from students were limited. Some teachers did not give sufficient help to weaker students before they got into difficulties. In computing there was no material for students to use for independent study; in mathematics there was no workshop activity. In some practical computing sessions a lack of clear directions from the lecturer inhibited the progress made by students. In other sessions the unreliable hardware and software affected the motivation and learning of students. In one lesson, a student's machine failed repeatedly to connect to the network; another machine he tried 10 minutes later failed similarly. He was not directed to share a machine that was working for the remaining 30 minutes. No technical assistance was called.

32   Business studies tutors planned most of their lessons well and had clear teaching methods and objectives. The pace of work was businesslike and challenging but also closely tailored to the capabilities of students. Tutors used a variety of activities in class which successfully allowed students to explore issues and to receive individual support. In a minority of classes there was a tendency to ensure that students had only the basic knowledge required by the syllabus. More able students did not sufficiently develop their ability to analyse issues. Tutors marked work thoroughly and indicated clearly the basis for their assessment. In GNVQ programmes,

several carefully-designed assignments helped students to develop skills in working in teams while introducing them to key business skills.

33   Health and social care course documentation was good. Tutors prepared the subject content of classes well and paid attention to the integration and assessment of key skills. Students' work placement log books were well structured and gave students opportunities to record their achievement of key skills and personal development and to have their competence verified. Some staff have established effective partnerships with their students. Class teaching did not always recognise the wide variation in students' ability. Sometimes tutors did not share the lesson outlines or learning objectives sufficiently with students. Some lessons ended ineffectively without a proper summary of the work covered or a clear explanation of the next assignment. Though marking standards were mainly sound, correction of students' errors was not always comprehensive. Some assignment tasks were imaginative and well focused, while others were over-prescriptive so that students lost opportunities for thinking and planning.

34   Tutors in art and design had developed clear, well-written course documentation to a common format. Staff had effectively linked related elements of the curriculum, particularly in theatre studies. Course handbooks for students were informative but the quality and presentation of assignment briefs were variable. Written briefs for students sometimes did not specify learning outcomes and assessment criteria in sufficient detail. Students were unclear about the standards expected of them. Teachers marked students' written work conscientiously and responses to students were mostly constructive and helpful, especially on written work from theatre studies students. In art and design, spelling mistakes, including those of artists' names, were rarely corrected in sketch-books and on working sheets. Teaching seldom took account of students' different abilities and experience. In one GCE A level group where some students were repeating the course, the tutor gave an identical presentation to all. Opportunities for key skills and personal development were not always clearly identified and effectively integrated with programmes. On the GNVQ course, teachers did not make sufficient use of overhead projectors as a teaching resource.

35   English teachers shared a common and largely successful approach to teaching, which placed due emphasis on the promotion of students' learning. They had exemplary information on each student in their group to help provide for individual needs. However, in a minority of cases the teaching did not consider these individual needs. Students received helpful handbooks and diaries which they used regularly. Relationships between teachers and students were productive. The pace of work was appropriate and in the rare cases where students were distracted teachers effectively returned them to study. Teachers used a variety of resources and activities in lessons to help students learn. In a series of three lessons, purposeful, and confident students read and discussed a scene from a Shakespearean

play. Next they watched the scene on video and proceeded to discuss key issues. Two groups then researched different aspects in the library. The teacher had planned the research with the librarian who was on hand to help. Students consolidated and displayed their learning. Homework was routinely set. Teachers maintained good records and there were effective arrangements to ensure consistency of marking. There was no systematic planning of the development of skills in information technology.

36   Teachers of modern languages used comparative schemes of work as working documents. Lesson plans provided a sound structure for the range of teaching activities. Tutors taught in the language being learned at an appropriate level and pace, although too often they dominated the communication. They provided a variety of learning tasks designed to sustain interest and motivation and to provide an appropriately balanced programme of language skills. In one GCE A level French session, students were involved in a range of different tasks. These included the use of a grammar software package and practice in individual listening comprehension. Students appreciated the opportunity to discuss their learning and to choose appropriate tasks to remedy their weaknesses. In several lessons, the timing and organisation of activities lacked firm control so that the lesson lost its focus and direction. Spoken language tasks were not always structured to encourage students to use language creatively and to sustain communication. Sometimes, teachers did not challenge students to develop full, coherent responses.

37   In some psychology and sociology sessions, lesson plans were not available. When they were, many were unspecific, unrelated to the individual session or unclear. The pace of work did not take account of the individual needs of students. In several lessons the pace was too slow for more able students. Though group sizes sometimes exceeded 20 students, teachers did not often arrange work in smaller groups. Textbooks, wall charts and supportive documents prepared by tutors were plentiful and appropriate in content.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

38   Students enjoy their studies and most do well in relation to the standards expected of them. In mathematics, students produce well-structured assignments, presented in a clear format. Students on GNVQ courses develop the skills of working in teams. Business students can clearly articulate the benefits of team work. Health and social care and nursery nursing students develop a professional and empathetic approach to their work. Most students in English produce well-presented written work which shows imagination and perception. Modern language students are skilled at working in pairs and small groups to prepare texts for comprehension. In some subjects the limited range of appropriate learning materials restricts the development of students' skills in information technology and there are difficulties of access to computers and software.

39   The college sets itself targets for students' achievements. The principal reports to the governing body on college performance in relation to national targets. The following table shows the college's achievement of targets for 1995-96.

Target achievements for 1995-96

Target	Achievement
To improve GCE A level performance by at least 10 per cent in terms of points per subject per student	Points score increased from 4.2 to 5.3, an improvement of 26 per cent
50 per cent successful completion on GNVQ intermediate and to exceed national pass rate for GNVQ advanced	76 per cent pass rate at GNVQ intermediate; GNVQ advanced pass rate exceeded national average
GCSE target proportion of A* to C grades of 57 per cent	59.3 per cent achieved
100 per cent pass for BTEC nursery nursing	100 per cent achieved
68.7 per cent of students achieving their full primary learning goal	Improved from 62.5 per cent in 1995 to 64.9 per cent but short of target
Target of 76.5 per cent achievement of all qualifications entered	80.1 per cent achieved
College target of 60 per cent of students entering achieving (a 10 per cent improvement on 1995) foundation target 1 (percentage achieving equivalent of level 2 NVQ)	73.3 per cent achieved
College target of 84 per cent achieving (a 10 per cent improvement on 1995) foundation target 3 (percentage achieving equivalent of level 3 NVQ)	85.8 per cent achieved

40   GCE AS/A level students achieved an average points score per entry of 4.2 (where grade A=10 points, E=2) in 1995 according to the tables produced by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE). This placed the college in the middle third of institutions in the further education sector based on this performance measure. In 1996 the average points score per entry at the college was 5.3, placing the college in the top 10 per cent of all colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure, based on the data in the tables published by the DfEE. The overall GCE A level pass rate in 1996 at St Mary's was 88.6 per cent compared with a provisional national average of 85.8. This was an improvement on the 1995 figure, which was 79.5 per cent compared with

a national average of 84 per cent. Sixteen out of 37 GCE A level subjects achieved a pass rate of 100 per cent and six had pass rates over 90 per cent. In 15 subjects, the proportion of students achieving the higher grades of A to C was higher than national averages. However, in 16 subjects the proportion achieving grades A to B were below the national averages. Seventy-three per cent of students who started their GCE A level courses at the beginning of the academic year 1994 completed their programmes in 1996. The following table shows those subjects with above and below 1996 national pass rates (for grades A to E) and the retention rates for the subjects for 1994-96.

Pass rates above and below national averages by subject for 1996

Subjects with pass rates more than 5 per cent above the national average (percentage retention rates are shown in brackets)	Subjects with pass rates more than 5 per cent below the national average (percentage retention rates are shown in brackets)
Art (81)	Business studies (76)
Classical studies (100)	General studies (51)
Computing (80)	Mathematics (58)
Economics (89)	Spanish (100)
English (84)	
Theatre studies (81)	
French (87)	
Geography (78)	
Geology (67)	
German (56)	
Home economics (100)	
Media studies (84)	
Music (77)	
Italian (80)	
Religious studies (81)	
Sociology (62)	

41 The college subscribes to an independent, external service which provides an analysis of the value added to students' achievements by comparing their actual performance at GCE A level with their predicted performance based on GCSE achievements. In over two-thirds of the subjects, students achieved better grades than predicted by their GCSE scores. Students obtained results significantly below predictions in Spanish, physical education, fashion and fabric, and further mathematics.

42 In 1996, 39 students entered for the GCE AS subject examinations. Most subjects are taught as part of the GCE A level course. Tutors advise students to take a GCE AS subject when they are not considered likely to pass their GCE A level. The overall pass rate was 67 per cent. In 1995, the national average for sixth form colleges was 73 per cent. The

proportion of students obtaining the higher grades of A to C was comparable with the national average of 37 per cent. All subjects had single figure entries except psychology which had 10 students.

43   The college offers the certificate in extended studies in science subjects to students as a bridging course from GCSE to GCE A level. In 1996, 22 students entered for chemistry, biology and physics. The percentage pass rates were 56, 50 and 100 per cent, respectively. All of the 104 students who entered for the City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) programme in information technology achieved the award.

44   In 1995, 17 students entered for the BTEC national diploma in nursery nursing. All were successful in obtaining the award. According to the tables published by the DfEE, this places the college among the top 15 institutions on this performance measure of success in vocational awards. In 1996, the first groups of students at the college completed the advanced GNVQ in art and design, business and finance, health and social care, leisure and tourism, and science. The results were all above national averages except in leisure and tourism, where they were at the national average. Overall, 83 per cent of students gained the advanced award.

45   In 1996, 29 students obtained GNVQ awards at intermediate level in five subject areas: art and design, business and finance, health and social care, leisure and tourism and science. There was a decline in the numbers enrolled to take these awards compared with the previous year when 36 students were successful. The sharpest decline was in leisure and tourism (down from 16 to 9) and science (down from 17 to 3). Except for science, all the results were well above the national average pass rate for this award. An overall pass rate of 76 per cent represents an improvement on the 1995 figure of 45 per cent. The retention rate for intermediate GNVQ was above the national average at 93 per cent.

46   Fewer students took GCSE examinations in 1996 compared with the previous year. The number of entries declined from 356 to 261. The introduction of GNVQ intermediate programmes has provided a more appropriate course for some students who would formerly have taken GCSE subjects. Between September 1994 and July 1996 the number taking and completing intermediate courses has declined as the college has expanded. Seventy-four per cent of students who enrolled in September completed their GCSE courses. In 1995, the proportion of students achieving grades A* to C at GCSE was 52.5 per cent compared with a national average for sixth form colleges of 48 per cent. In 1996, the pass rate improved to 59.3 per cent. Where 10 or more students entered, they achieved pass rates over 70 per cent in the following subjects: computer studies (71 per cent), higher level mathematics (91 per cent), childcare and development (80 per cent), media studies (79 per cent) and Spanish (91 per cent). Results were poor in astronomy (no students passed) and law (20 per cent). Thirteen students enrolled for five GCSEs in 1995. Of these, nine completed the course but only two obtained all five passes.

The pass rate of 22 per cent was the same as that for 1995 when 28 students enrolled at the beginning of the year.

47   The college attempts to keep comprehensive records of the destinations of students when they leave the college. Students indicate their intended destination before they leave in the summer term. Administrative staff and tutors then contact students in the autumn to check on their actual destination. In 1996, 414 students out of a possible 428 (97 per cent) responded. Schools from which students are recruited receive a detailed breakdown of the destinations of their former pupils. In 1996, out of 329 students who completed advanced courses, 181 (55 per cent) progressed to universities and 11 decided to take a year out before going to university. Twenty-two students returned to St Mary's and 49 went to other colleges of further or higher education. Forty-three went into employment. Of the 99 students who completed intermediate or GCSE courses 71 returned to the college, six went to other colleges, seven went into employment and two took up places on training courses. No student in health and care has yet become unemployed or failed to progress to a higher level course.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

48   The college charter is a public statement of commitment to quality assurance in 12 key areas of performance. The charter is well considered, detailed and comprehensive. It sets out clearly the entitlement of students and forms the framework for quality assurance. Where possible, entitlements are quantified. For example, the charter guarantees response times to requests for information and applications to the college in a specified number of working days. At induction, when students sign learning agreements they receive copies of the charter. The charter clearly sets out a formal complaints procedure. Good support from staff and the easy access to managers have meant that students have not used the procedure.

49   The new management team, from its formation in 1994, has taken a more systematic view of the monitoring of quality. Representatives of staff, managers and governors participate in a quality strategy group. Each of the 12 areas of the college's framework for quality is the responsibility of a designated member of staff who maintains a record of relevant data. The deputy principal is the quality manager. In January 1996, governors formed a quality committee to support the corporation board in its responsibilities of assuring quality and standards. The relationship between the duties of the quality strategy group, the governors' quality committee, the academic board and the senior management team is not clearly identified.

50   Course managers are not responsible for the investigation of their students' perceptions of their courses. The college has conducted a survey of the views of first-year students using a wide ranging questionnaire. An external agency analysed the outcomes. Staff have not fully used the

valuable information gained. The management information system provides information on examinations, attendance and retention. Managers use this information to monitor performance against the six indicators given in Council Circular 94/31, *Measuring Achievement*. Heads of department and subject teams consider that their main responsibility for quality assurance is the improvement of students' performance. Mid-course and end-of-course reviews compare individual performance with that expected by the students' prior qualifications. These course reviews are not analysed or reported in a standard way. Reports do not always include action plans, though team meetings do address issues. Course review, action planning and reporting are not clearly the responsibility either of heads of department or of programme area co-ordinators. The place of course review within the quality framework is undefined, though the departmental reports are presented to governors.

51   In preparation for inspection, course teams prepared self-assessment reports for each subject area. These reports used a computerised form to record strengths, weaknesses and points for action. Subject area reports were variable in their analysis and depth of critical evaluation. Senior managers compiled the college's self-assessment report using the subject area reports. The college's self-assessment report is written to the headings of Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement* and is well considered, realistic and self-critical. It is evaluative and identifies strengths and areas for future development. The self-assessment exercise has proved to be a valuable process for staff. Managers understand the issues that the college needs to address. The judgements of inspectors largely matched those in the college's self-assessment report.

52   Staff development is well established throughout the college. Staff entitlement is clear and supported by appropriate documentation. Training priorities are set through the departmental planning process. Programme area co-ordinators and heads of department have appraisal responsibilities outlined in their job descriptions. All staff have a formally documented annual personal review. Training needs and action plans are recorded on a detailed form. The documentation does not use college or departmental planning objectives as a basis for individual performance review or target setting. The deputy principal allocates funding from the training budget to support bids from staff. A computerised database records training and identifies staff, activities, funding, dates, providers and priorities. The database includes systematic evaluation and an action statement related to each activity. An annual staff-development review report is presented to the senior management team.

53   During the period 1995-96, 53 of the 62 full-time and five of the 14 part-time teachers undertook staff development outside college. Thirteen of the 23 support staff underwent training in the same period. All curriculum areas had some staff development but teaching and learning strategies are not a focus of staff development. Staff have not had placements or work experience in industrial or commercial organisations

to support the development of the vocational curriculum. The investment in training and development has been 0.75 per cent of the staffing budget over each of the last two financial years. There has been some additional funding through East Lancashire TEC to support Investors in People development and to sponsor middle management training.

54   Staff development has taken place to develop a team approach to the management and co-ordination of GNVQ programmes. Responsibilities for assessment and internal verification have been identified. Progress towards training and development lead body accreditation has been slow. Of the 25 full-time and three part-time staff involved in GNVQ programmes only four have obtained assessor awards. Only one member of staff has obtained the internal verifier award. Fourteen staff are at various stages of the process. Several anticipate accreditation of their submitted portfolios shortly. The slow progress is a concern in view of the number and range of the college's GNVQ programmes.

55   The college established a formal induction process for all new full-time teaching and non-teaching staff in 1995. The deputy principal has responsibility for its organisation. The process consists of a generic induction to the college followed by support from a mentor. The college evaluates induction after 10 weeks to identify areas for improvement. Managers have begun to address issues for the induction of part-time staff and are exploring the needs of promoted staff. These areas need further development. Staff say that induction and personal review make contributions to their effectiveness and development. They appreciate the well-designed staff directory and handbook. The college has not established a clear set of standards for induction and review to assure their effectiveness in meeting college policies and objectives.

RESOURCES

Staffing

56   There are sufficient well-qualified and experienced teaching staff to cover the range of programmes on offer. Of the 62 full-time and 14 part-time teachers, 90 per cent are graduates and 16 per cent have higher degrees. Ninety per cent of staff hold teaching qualifications. Twelve full-time and two part-time teaching staff have had industrial experience within the last five years. The college has recruited 25 full-time teaching staff within the last three years. About one-third of full-time teaching staff are under 40 years of age. Of the 76 teaching staff and 23 support staff, two are from minority ethnic backgrounds. A register of supply teachers is maintained. Supply teachers are interviewed and subjected to normal recruitment criteria. There are imbalances in workloads in some programme areas. The staffing of GNVQ art and design is not yet fully addressed. A major strength in staffing is the commitment of staff to work together and support each other.

57   College services are well supported by an enthusiastic and well-qualified range of support staff who represent 24 per cent of the total college staffing. There are 23 support staff in total. Only three are male. Twelve are on term time only contracts. The library is well staffed and run with one full-time qualified librarian, one full-time assistant and one part-time assistant. The five full-time and two part-time technicians provide effective support to most departments. Only one technician is responsible for information technology. Given the identified need for development of staff skills in this area the level of support for computer users is a concern.

Equipment/learning resources

58   The resources available to support learning across the curriculum areas vary significantly in quality. Science departments provide textbooks and high-quality handouts but there is a shortage of microscopes and balances to cater for the increased numbers of students. Business studies, humanities and health and social care teachers have access to a wide range of equipment such as video recorders, televisions, and overhead projectors for use in class. Health and social care students have sets of good-quality texts for class use and staff in the subject area have created a resource library in a former store area. The English department provides good-quality textbooks and handouts. In media studies, equipment of industrial standard is available and students use it to run a college radio station. In art and design, resources are barely adequate for the GNVQ programme and overhead projectors are seldom used when they could provide a useful teaching resource; there is a shortage of photographic equipment and poorly photocopied handouts are in use. Some handwritten handouts in modern languages are of poor quality and overhead projectors are not available. The audio cassette language listening facility is still operational but outdated. Multi-media resources are little used.

59   The college library provides an attractive environment in which to study. A recent extension provides 126 study places, 15,000 books and 16 CD-ROMs. The library budget for 1996-97 is £10,000, plus £6,000 for capital equipment. New software has made the catalogue more accessible, improved the service to users and enabled efficient tracking of library resources. Students' identity cards have improved security. Business students have access to an adequate range of books and CD-ROMs in the library. The staff of the English department have productive links with the college library which ensure that appropriate books and CD-ROMs are available, but there is still some shortage for the number of students taking the subject. Library stock to support the teaching of health and social care is poor. There is a shortage of materials to enable students to learn on their own using study guides and to provide additional subject support to students outside class time.

60   The college has invested £155,000 in information technology equipment since 1993. There are 95 networked workstations available

for student use and 13 separate ones. This represents a ratio of just under one machine to eight students. A further 40 machines are available for administration, management and teaching staff. There is no coherent information technology strategy to support learning across programme areas. Subject departments take their own initiatives. Business studies have recently purchased several computers for installation in the GNVQ teaching room. There are two underused computers in art and design and only one machine is available in the modern language area. At all levels of study in mathematics, students do not use dedicated software. The resource banks of materials for information technology require extending and indexing. Satellite and cable receiving facilities are available in the college but there have been problems accessing foreign language programmes.

Accommodation

61   The college uses several buildings and mobile classrooms on a single site of 6.5 hectares. The Marist Fathers lease the land to the college. Buildings occupy 1.5 hectares and a further 3.5 hectares of the site are playing fields. The college has a good sports hall on the site. Support from the National Lottery has funded the building of extra changing facilities. Twelve groups from the local community use these facilities. There is limited car parking space at the site. Space at a neighbouring church provides extra parking places for staff.

62   In the main, teaching accommodation is used effectively and is fit for purpose. All areas are clean and well maintained. The college is carrying out a refurbishment programme. One example is the addition to the hall of a glass-walled area which provides an assembly and recreation area for students. The dining room is crowded at lunch and break times in spite of this extension. As part of the college's energy conservation programme, the college is installing double-glazed, sealed units to replace draughty windows with metal frames. A small college chapel is an important focus for college worship. It has dividing doors which open on to the hall for religious services for larger groups. The hall is well equipped for theatre and music. Several college and external groups use it for performances. The information technology workshop is too small to cope with demand at peak times.

63   There are sufficient laboratories, workshops and art rooms for the current number of students. Some rooms still require refurbishment. Most science laboratories are of a high standard but have no display of students' work. Health and social care has a suite of adjacent rooms that are bright, airy and well decorated. Accommodation for art, design and performing arts is kept tidy and is appropriate, apart from one room with a pillar in the middle. In some sessions, minor problems arise in the hall or mobile classrooms because of noise from outside. Business studies rooms are of the right size and have relevant wall displays. The English and modern languages suites are comfortable and welcoming; their

classrooms and those used by humanities students are pleasant and well decorated. Despite the well-considered re-allocation of teaching space, some of the teaching rooms used for health and social care, English and mathematics are too small. Two biology laboratories are inadequate for current group sizes and the science laboratories do not have much storage space for bags and coats.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

64 The college has made progress towards fulfilling its mission. Its strengths are:

- a distinctive ethos based on Roman Catholic principles which is valued by parents, students, employers and head teachers in partner schools

- a broad range of GCE A level subjects and the development of some vocational programmes

- close and effective links with partner schools

- supportive and experienced governors, who monitor college performance closely

- senior and middle managers who are improving planning, operations and communications

- a well-planned recruitment process within a clear policy and priorities for admission

- rigorous monitoring of students' progress and provision of additional support where needed

- the care shown by staff for the students and their development

- GCE A level results which match or exceed national averages

- the high levels of students' attendance and retention

- developing procedures for quality assurance which focus on key areas identified in the college charter

- the well-used and well-maintained accommodation with a sensibly planned programme of refurbishment.

65 To make further progress the college should address the following issues:

- links with industry and employers that are not sufficiently exploited to enhance the curriculum experience of students

- the varied interpretation by the large number of department heads of their role

- the lack of a clear strategy to use students' views to inform planning

- small class sizes in a few programmes that adversely affect students' learning

- the lack of a shared understanding of a quality assurance system which includes a clear cycle of action planning and review

- staff-development activities that do not focus sufficiently on teaching and learning methods

- the lack of a coherent strategy to ensure that information technology is used across the curriculum.

FIGURES

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

Figure 1

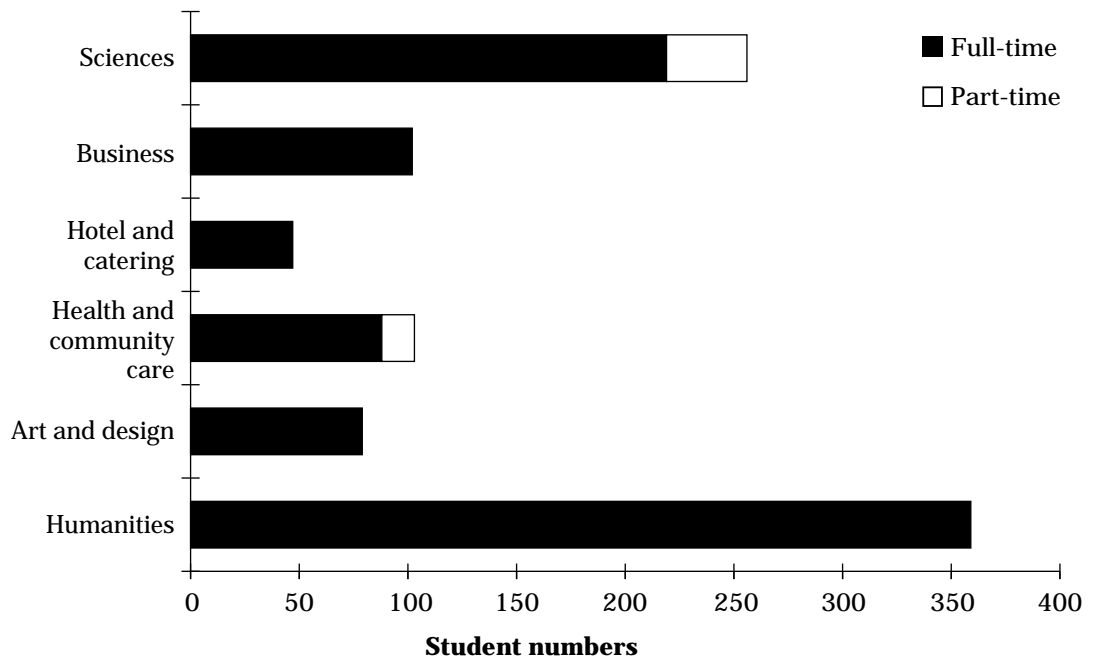**St Mary's College, Blackburn: percentage student numbers by age (as at November 1996)**

19-24 years
3%

25+ years
4%

Not known
1%

16-18 years
92%
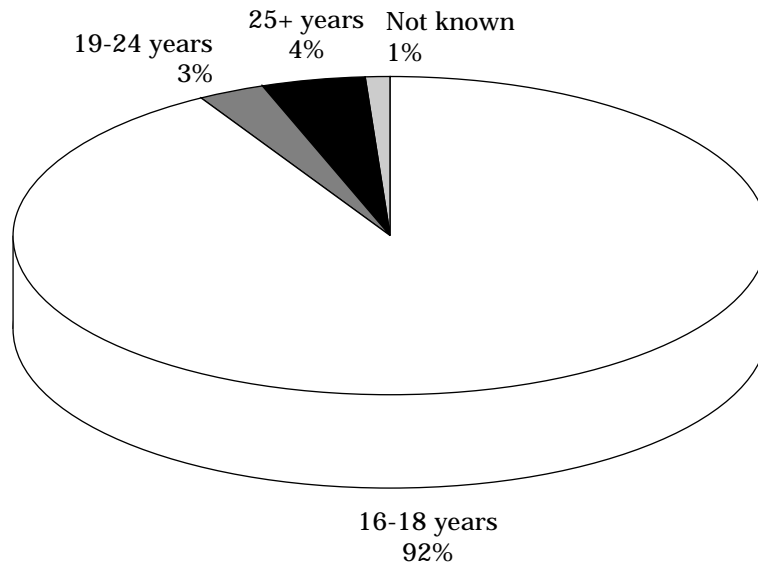
Student numbers: 946

Figure 2

St Mary's College, Blackburn: percentage student numbers by level of study (as at November 1996)

Foundation
1%

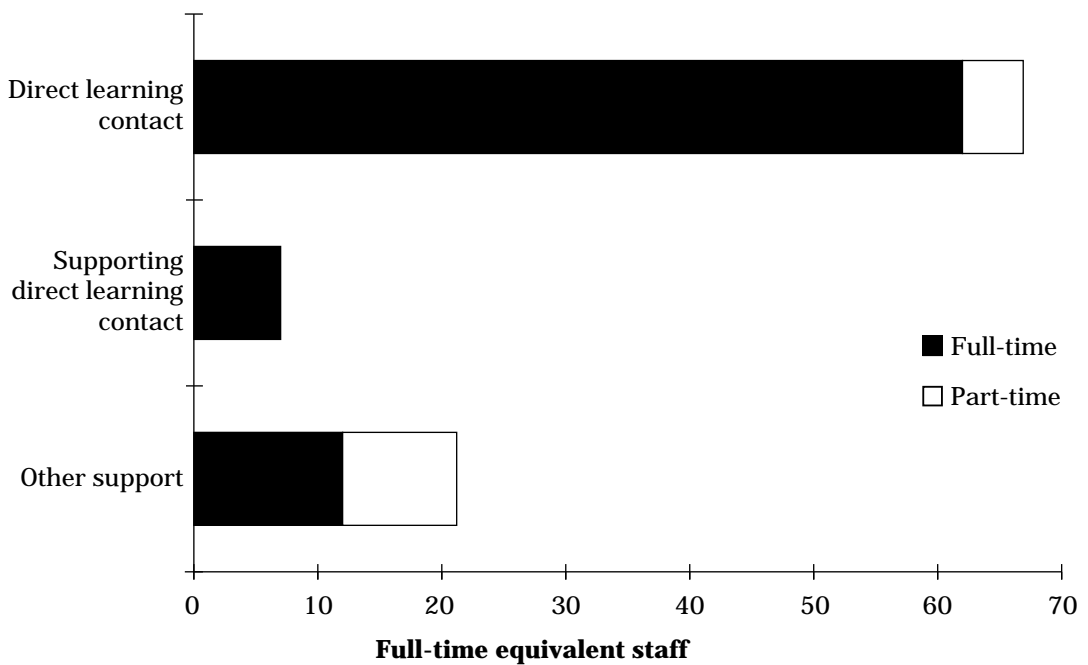Intermediate
17%

Advanced
82%
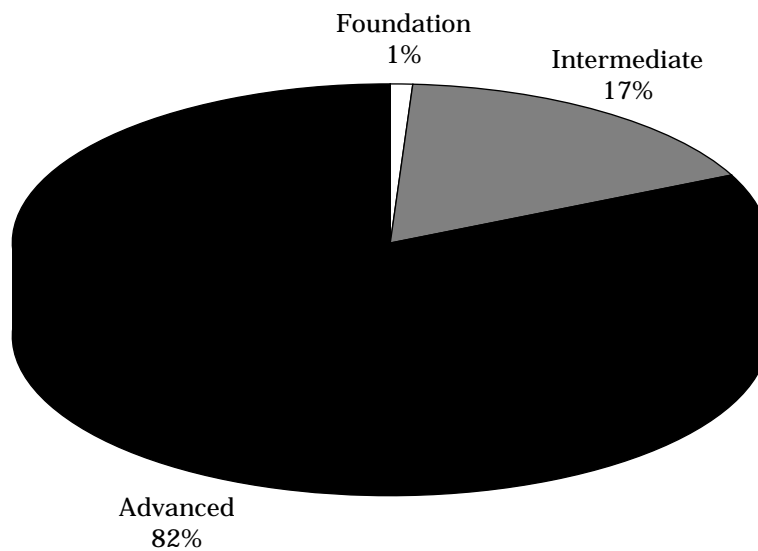
Student numbers: 946

Figure 3

St Mary's College, Blackburn: student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at November 1996)
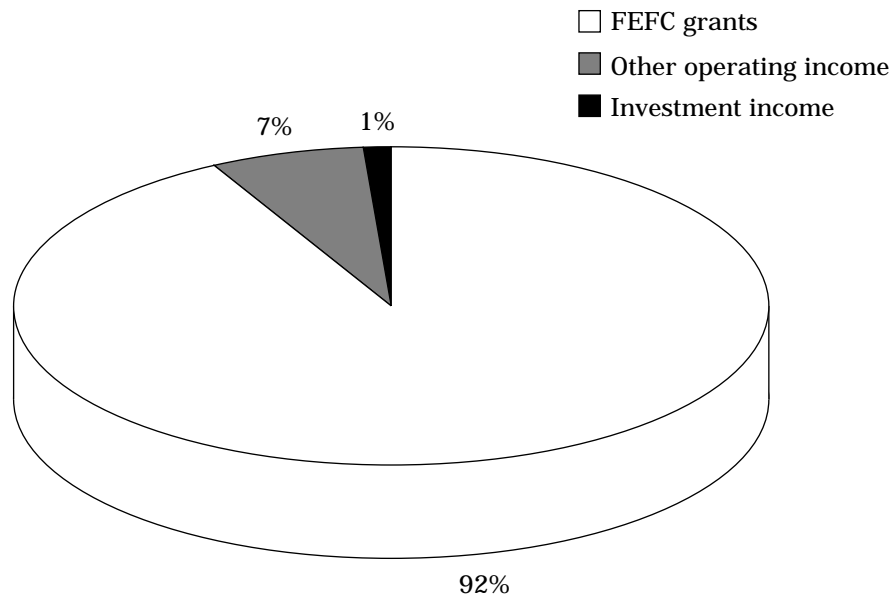

Student numbers: 946

Figure 4

St Mary's College, Blackburn: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (as at July 1996)

Full-time equivalent staff: 95

Figure 5
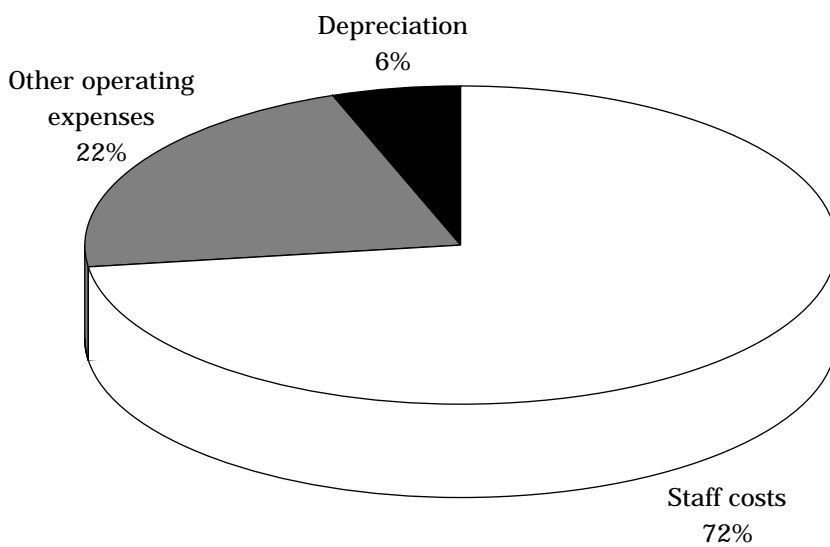
St Mary's College, Blackburn: income (for 12 months to July 1996)

□ FEFC grants
▨ Other operating income
■ Investment income

7%   1%

92%

Income: £2,633,000

Figure 6

St Mary's College, Blackburn: expenditure (for 12 months to July 1996)

Depreciation
6%

Other operating
expenses
22%

Staff costs
72%

Expenditure: £2,641,000