

**REPORT  
FROM THE  
INSPECTORATE**

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# **Holy Cross College**

**March 1996**

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**THE  
FURTHER  
EDUCATION  
FUNDING  
COUNCIL**

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**THE FURTHER EDUCATION  
FUNDING COUNCIL**

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

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

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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**

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

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# FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 22/96

## HOLY CROSS COLLEGE

### NORTH WEST REGION

Inspected February-November 1995

#### Summary

Holy Cross College is a sixth form college in Bury which offers an effective academic education to its students who value its strong Catholic ethos. Links with parents and guardians and the local community are strong. Governors take a supportive interest in the college. Pastoral care is a major strength and a high priority: the college's structured organisation and friendly discipline are valued highly by students and their parents and guardians. The quality of the teaching is good and students are mostly successful in achieving their learning goals. Staff are fully qualified to teach the existing curriculum and are responding well to the pressures caused by management reorganisation and other necessary changes. The range of courses which the college offers is being slowly extended by the introduction of new vocational courses. At present, a significant minority of students are unable to follow suitable courses of study. Support for students with learning difficulties on mainstream courses is sound. Problems of physical access prevent the college from admitting students with restricted mobility. Buildings are generally well maintained and the college is making the best use it can of some unsuitable accommodation. The dramatic growth in student numbers is causing pressure on the existing buildings. Effective management information systems are in place. Many strategic initiatives of the college are not fully developed. The college should: produce a better strategic plan incorporating realistic targets, timescales and resource implications; develop clear strategies for planning and implementing policies on quality assurance, equality of opportunity, staff development and accommodation; and involve students and governors more in these processes.

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

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

<b>Curriculum area</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Curriculum area</b>	<b>Grade</b>
Mathematics and information technology	2	Art and design	2
Science	2	Social sciences	2
Business	2	Modern languages	2
		English	2
		Other humanities	2

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## **INTRODUCTION**

1 Holy Cross College was inspected in three stages. The college's enrolment and induction procedures were inspected at the start of the autumn term 1995. Specialist inspections took place in February, April, September and October 1995, followed by a cross-college inspection in November 1995. Eleven inspectors took part in the inspection for a total of 53.5 inspector days. Inspectors visited 106 classes and examined students' work. Meetings were held with college governors, the senior management team, teaching and support staff, past and present students, parents and guardians, local employers, careers officers and staff of local schools. Discussions took place with a representative of Bolton and Bury Training and Enterprise Council (TEC). Inspectors examined college policy statements, minutes of committees, working papers and documents relating to aspects of college organisation.

## **THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS**

2 Holy Cross College is a Catholic sixth form college, formed in 1979 as a result of the reorganisation of Roman Catholic education in Bury. It was part of the local education authority (LEA) until its designation in 1993. It occupies a single site in a residential area. The buildings formerly housed Bury Convent Grammar School. Part of the building was an old convent, dating from 1878. It is now used as classrooms and offices. Science laboratories were added in the 1950s and a large sports hall was constructed in 1964. The college is under the trusteeship of the Daughters of the Cross, who own the property. It is located in the diocese of Salford and has strong links with the local parishes. The first lay principal took up his post in January 1994.

3 The newly reorganised senior management team consists of the principal, the deputy principal, five assistant principals and the director of finance. Assistant principals have a half-time teaching timetable. The teaching staff work within eight departments each of which has its own head: business technology, creative arts, English, humanities, mathematics, modern languages, religion, and science.

4 Pupils leaving Bury schools at 16 have a wide choice of destination. The college's major partner schools are two Roman Catholic schools in Bury. There are long-standing connections with the neighbouring Anglican high school, and developing partnerships with other local high schools. Just over 50 per cent of the students are Roman Catholic. Minority ethnic groups make up 3.65 per cent of Bury's population and are represented by 6.3 per cent of the students in the college. Other post-16 providers in Bury include a tertiary college, Bury College, which operates on four sites, one of which is a quarter of a mile away from the college. There are three independent grammar schools. None of the secondary schools maintained by the local authority has a sixth form. Two sixth form colleges, two further education colleges and another tertiary college are within seven miles of Bury town centre. A further five colleges, including three Roman Catholic colleges, lie within a 10-mile radius.

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5 Bury's total population is 176,760. At the time of inspection, the unemployment rate for Bury was 6.5 per cent, compared with an average of 9.2 per cent for the North West as a whole. In 1994, the percentage of 16 year-old pupils continuing into further education was 65 per cent, compared with an average of 59 per cent for the North West. Most of the workforce in Bury is employed in the services sector; medical and health services employ 11.42 per cent of the workforce. The manufacturing sector has declined since 1987.

6 The college has more than doubled in size in the last six years. There are currently 1,110 students, of whom all but five are aged 16-18. There are 1,015 students following General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level) courses and 95 on one-year courses leading to the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) qualifications. A new and, as yet, limited range of General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) is followed by 41 students in conjunction with GCE A level and GCSE courses. Enrolments by level of study and by curriculum area are shown in figures 1 and 2. The college employed 78 full-time staff and 23 part-time staff, of whom 59 were involved in direct learning contact. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 3.

7 The college aims to respond to the spiritual, physical and intellectual needs of students aged 16-19 within a Catholic environment. The college mission aims to provide an education of good quality; to develop the whole person spiritually, morally and intellectually; to achieve high standards in all that it does; to value each member of the college community as a unique person and respect his/her needs; to develop a safe, supportive and structured working environment; to provide courses which meet the needs of its students; to prepare its students for life as responsible citizens; to be an active part of the local community and to strive constantly to improve the services offered to students.

#### **RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION**

8 The college offers a range of 31 GCE A level subjects. These satisfy the college's traditional market. The number of GCSE subjects is now reduced to 12. A limited number of RSA Examinations Board (RSA) subjects and computer literacy courses are available. The recent introduction of an advanced GNVQ course in business and an intermediate GNVQ in health and social care and the GCSE combined science course is providing more suitable routes for some students. Those students taking vocational courses are encouraged to study GCE A level and GCSE courses at the same time. Newly-introduced subjects include theatre studies, media studies, physical education and psychology. GCSE science has replaced chemistry and physics. Some subjects have been dropped and modular programmes are offered in mathematics, theology and science. There is constant monitoring of the effectiveness of the curriculum through the academic board. A clear mechanism now exists to make positive

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changes in the curriculum and in syllabuses. This process was agreed by the academic board in September 1995.

9 All students follow compulsory religious education and complementary studies programmes. There is a high level of attendance at all lessons and the college has established an attendance target of 80 per cent which is monitored through the electronic registration system. Attendance is particularly high in religious education. Students commit themselves to regular attendance in all subjects through the learning agreement: failure to keep the agreement can eventually lead to a student being asked to leave the college.

10 The present portfolio of courses is not sufficiently broad enough to enable the college to meet its aim 'to provide courses which meet the needs of our students'. A significant minority of students are taking subjects at GCE A level which may not be suited to their abilities and interests. The college recognises that its present one-year programme of GCSEs is increasingly unsuitable. Individual subjects taken by those students for whom GCSE may not be relevant are often not accredited.

11 The extra-curricular opportunities are an important factor for many who choose the college. Students are encouraged to discuss spiritual and moral issues in a supportive environment. The Catholic ethos demonstrates itself through respect and care for others.

12 Staff are made aware of Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) policies and other developments by newsletters, briefings and presentations, including one on the funding methodology. Staff realise the need to expand participation in further education.

13 There are extensive links with local high schools of all denominations. The college recruited students from 45 schools in 1995, a rise of seven schools since the previous year. There were significant increases in recruitment from many schools. Local schools perceive the staff of the college as professional, welcoming and extremely helpful. Departmental staff organise visits to schools, visits from teachers and pupils to the college and subject liaison meetings at the college. Open evenings are publicised through feeder schools. The college has some placements in local primary schools for those students wishing to become teachers.

14 There are continuing and effective links with the LEA which organises various meetings for school heads and college principals. There are close links with the careers service, the sensory support service and the schools' psychological service.

15 The college provides opportunities for students to obtain experience of higher education. Students are actively encouraged to attend open days at higher education institutions. The college is a member of the Campaign for the Promotion of the University of Salford whose finance director is a college governor. There are close contacts with the Liverpool Institute of Higher Education through a pre-teaching compact and various partnership



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projects. The religious education department has links with Trinity and All Saints College, Leeds.

16 The college meets local TEC staff regularly and the working relationship is close and positive. The TEC has approved the college's strategic plan and welcomes the developments based on their partnership. There is support from the TEC for the purchase of computers, for salaries for two members of staff (a network manager and the record of achievement co-ordinator), for funding training for staff new to GNVQ teaching and for the college commitment to secure Investors in People accreditation. There is also funding to support staff in careers education and guidance, for the purchase of software and other equipment in the careers library and for an electronic Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS). The college benefited especially from advice on marketing. The college is a member of the Bolton and Bury sixth form working group of the TEC.

17 There are links with local employers through work placements for students and the young enterprise initiative. Some individual departments, especially science and physical education, have good links with employers. The college is a member of the local chamber of commerce and the Bury education and business partnership. Some local companies work with the college to promote an understanding of industry. A week at the end of the summer term is named as industry week. However, offers of placements for teaching staff in industry from local companies have not been taken up.

18 The college has exceptionally strong contacts with parents and guardians. The commitment of parents and guardians to the college is very high. They appreciate the balance between discipline and freedom which the college offers and value the Catholic ethos. They believe strongly that the college should keep its present character and stay with the present market. They appreciate the need for a wider curriculum range. Parents and guardians are sent invitations to open evenings and most come with prospective students. During the course of two years, parents may expect to receive five progress reports and be invited to at least three parents' evenings. Attendance at parents' evenings is high. If difficulties relating to students arise, parents and guardians are contacted and the student concerned monitored by college staff. At the time of the inspection, 19 students were being monitored in this way.

19 There is an effective promotional plan with updated operational statements. Targets for recruitment have been exceeded and the college has grown by 22 per cent over two years, partly due to better marketing. The college uses local population data effectively to identify its future market. Local labour market information provided by the TEC is of little assistance as most college leavers move on to higher education and national employment markets. A comprehensive range of questionnaires monitors customer satisfaction and the information is well used to adapt the

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marketing strategy. There were over 700 responses to an extensive survey of year 10 pupils in schools in the summer of 1995. This provided the college with useful information which has led to changes in publicity materials and other aspects of recruitment and enrolment. There are also surveys of those who withdraw their applications but the response rates to these surveys tend to be low. Other surveys have related to the charter, induction and enrolment, registration, careers and resources. Some students claim they have done so many evaluation questionnaires that they are no longer taking the surveys very seriously.

20 Within the Roman Catholic community, the college is seen as significant in completing the educational provision for Catholic children. The college belongs to the Bury education Catholic group and the diocesan heads group. Local priests help at college masses and parishes are informed of open evenings and other events. Students are involved in parish activities outside the college through community service, musical events and charity work. The college could do more to promote itself formally to local Catholic parishes and its community. The connections that are established tend to lack a clear framework.

21 Applications are welcomed from all faiths, although Catholic students are given priority. There is a significant number of non-Catholic students and the college recruits well from the local minority ethnic groups. There is an even gender mix. The aim is to take 16-19 year-old full-time students but the college might accept adult students if they applied. There has been no marketing directed at adults.

22 There is no separate provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Integration of such students is not promoted satisfactorily. The range of the curriculum and practical problems of access limit recruitment to students with physical and sensory disabilities rather than those with learning difficulties. For the small numbers with physical and sensory difficulties which the college is able to accept, the support is good. The building is generally unsuitable for wheelchair access.

23 An equal opportunities policy is developing slowly since discussions on how to approach the writing of a college policy started in November 1994. A member of the senior management team is responsible for the development of the equal opportunities policy. A draft policy is before the senior management at present. It is hoped to obtain governors' approval by Easter 1996. A committee of volunteers, all of them women, is producing this policy and designing guidelines. This group meets weekly and is trying to interest the rest of the staff and obtain their assistance.

#### **GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT**

24 Governors are very supportive of the college and fulfil their duties effectively. They have a clear understanding of the college's mission and ethos. There are 19 governors, including 11 foundation governors who are nominated by the Trustees. There are three sisters from the religious

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order of the Daughters of the Cross who are trustees of the college, two staff governors and one TEC representative. Governors have a range of professional and business skills and expertise in audit, finance, personnel, surveying and employment.

25 The chair of governors gives time generously to the college and also provides an important link between the college and the networks within the Catholic sector. Many of the governors attend formal social functions and college open events, although there are no arrangements in place for them to meet formally with staff and students. Direct communications between governors and members of staff are weak, though some informal social links are being considered. Governors do not take part in any internal college committees and have only recently been invited to join an in-service training day. Governors have no formal links with students.

26 Governors received some training at designation and continue to be informed about developments within the sector at their termly meetings, but little formal training takes place. Subcommittees in audit, personnel, finance and remuneration meet regularly. All meetings are well prepared and documented, and are well attended by governors. A register of interests is in place and governors have recently agreed for themselves a code of conduct, though it is unclear how this will be monitored. The majority of the foundation governors have served the college for a long time. The long-serving governors are a force for stability, but there are some inevitable tensions in responding to the changed role of the college within the new sector. One effect is that governors are giving insufficient direction to the college as it faces change after designation. There is no clear strategy or sense of urgency of the need to reach a resolution to complex accommodation and property tenure issues.

27 The college statement of mission and aims has been agreed by governors and staff. The current strategic plan is being revised and there is opportunity for consultation between governors and staff. The revised plan incorporates a risk and needs analysis but so far includes only limited data. Essential elements are not yet in place. The strategic planning process lacks vision and rigour. There is no clear structure to allow governors to monitor developments within the college, for example, in tracking the achievement of operational goals. The planning process does not, at present, include references to resource implications. The schedule for completion of key targets in the current operational plan is congested at points. There is variation in the departmental operating statements; many do not connect clearly with college goals and most lack measurable targets which are linked explicitly to the college's strategic plan.

28 Staff and students regard the senior management team as approachable figures around the college. The senior management structure has recently been established and staff are working to their new responsibilities. The new senior management group of eight has five members who teach half-time. The responsibilities identified for each

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individual are disparate and do not clearly allow them to take the lead on particular strategic priorities. The planning of the accommodation strategy, in particular, has been delayed because of the absence of a clearly-designated responsible senior manager. The college management structure has defined lines of communication and accountability but below the senior level many communications are unnecessarily duplicated.

29 There are weekly senior management meetings and each member of the senior team meets individually once a term with the principal to discuss developments within his or her particular area. Departmental heads also meet annually with the principal to review progress. Regular meetings are held within departments and subjects areas. There is little opportunity for the discussion of cross-college issues.

30 The academic and pastoral boards function separately although the college is considering merging the two groups. Allocation of responsibility for important policies is clear but many are still only in draft form and progress is slow. Subject managers do little to initiate developments. The college buys in expertise from the local authority to cover personnel, payroll and health and safety functions. New job descriptions are being developed for all staff but some are still vague and ineffective in clarifying what is expected from more junior staff holding positions of responsibility.

31 A major strength of the college is the development of its own management information system. The team responsible for management information has designed the system so that it is responsive to staff needs. Staff responsible for the system have looked first at good practice in other colleges and tailored their design to meet college needs. A range of modules inter-connect to provide and make data accessible in sophisticated forms. They track students through the college from recruitment on to their destination and give relevant data for several areas of college development. Added value data are sent to all departments at the beginning of the year. A questionnaire surveyed staff requirements but many staff are not yet fully aware of the possibilities which such a system provides. Many staff do not yet have direct access to the system, which is not networked across the college, and are dependent on management information system staff who compile reports. Departments are not systematically using the information they receive to assist them in forward planning. The plan for the future of the system is unclear and decisions have yet to be made regarding the development of the college network and staff access to the system.

32 In 1994-95 the college's level of funding was £17.06 per unit. The median for sixth form colleges in 1994-95 was £19.81 per unit. For 1995-96 the college's average level of funding is £17.08 per unit and the median for sixth form colleges is £19.37. The college's estimated income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1996 are shown in figures 4 and 5. The college estimates that their previously low level of funding will be further reduced this year due to uncontrolled numbers of

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enrolments. This is imposing tight financial constraints and is limiting the achievement of college goals. After a period of considerable difficulty, a new financial management system has been introduced and qualified staff appointed. A recovery plan has been effective and the college has been able to make efficiency savings in some areas such as insurance and purchasing. The finance director gave training to governors and staff on the FEFC-funding methodology. Staff are now budget holders and responsible for their own areas. Individual departments are now funded using the same formulae as the college. Budget holders receive regular monthly reports. Staff have only recently begun operating as budget holders. Some are finding the transition difficult and need further training. There is little income generation.

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

33 There is a comprehensive range of pre-enrolment activities with partner high schools, including open days, talks, careers conventions and interviews. Current college students return to their old schools to help with liaison, running group sessions and giving advice. During enrolment and induction they guide new students around the college. Prospective students value their contribution in helping to put them at ease. The enrolment process is efficiently organised. There has been a thorough training for those involved in this process. The system ensures that there are opportunities for checking the accuracy of completed forms. There is clear evidence of unbiased guidance by staff, although there was a difference of opinion in one curriculum area about the grades required for entry.

34 The induction programme is thoroughly organised; staff are well briefed and have detailed support materials. This ensures a consistent experience for the students in different tutor groups. The programme is logically ordered. It gives the students a good grasp of the college and its ethos through a range of unusual and stimulating activities which they clearly enjoy. Many students commented with appreciation on the opportunities which were provided to establish friendships. The final assembly in particular, was a unique experience. Students were reminded that their entry into the college represented a fresh start for them; they were asked to write their GCSE results on a piece of paper and then hurl them away to symbolise this. It was fun for the students and provided a clear message and sense of community. There are several opportunities to reinforce the student charter and amplify points in the learner agreement. However, the time allocated for some activities, such as a visit to the induction fair, is excessive, and some rooms are too small for the planned group work. The standard of publicity materials about the complementary studies programme is inconsistent. Following an evaluation, improvements such as those needed to create a more even quality of presentations at the fair, are already being planned for 1996.

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35 Diagnostic tests in numeracy and communication skills were administered to all new students. The communications skills test proved a useful part of the induction programme by adding a disciplined and challenging task. In contrast, the level 1 numeracy test used was too basic to detect some learning difficulties. No diagnosis of information technology skills was made. Tutors marked the tests of their own students. This gave them an understanding of their students' abilities and adds to their involvement in the learning support system. Of the 790 students who took the diagnostic tests, 176 were referred for additional support. Of these, 101 have been timetabled for additional support.

36 The college has made a speedy and effective start to learning support arrangements. There are 23 fully-staffed timetabled slots in the resource centre each week. More than half of students timetabled to attend support sessions have already done so. The methods used to identify additional student support requirements in communications are rigorous. A wide range of resources to support learning has been developed. Students value this additional support and feel it is improving their performance. For example, students studying GCE A level English literature have improved their ability to plan essays and to interpret questions. However, there are insufficient resources for learning support in numeracy. The support for students in information technology is inadequate because of poor student access to computers. Many subject lecturers give additional support to students in the form of extra lessons and subject-focused clubs at lunchtime and after college.

37 There is a comprehensive tutorial programme supported by detailed guidance for personal tutors. Pastoral care and tutorial support are well managed and informally monitored. There is effective support for tutors. Each of the six year-tutors has a group of 5 to 12 personal tutors with whom they meet formally once a week and informally each day. There are regular training sessions on relevant topics for tutors, and this year new tutors have received induction training on their duties. All year-tutors have recently attended a counselling course and more than 20 tutors have volunteered for this course during 1995-96. Currently, levels of full professional counselling qualifications are low. The careers assistant has a counselling qualification and students are referred to her before outside help is sought. Students have commented on the lack of an independent counsellor available in the college. The college's judgement is that this is not desirable.

38 Students are allocated to tutorial groups to ensure a balance of gender, courses chosen and schools attended. Each student has a personal tutor whom they meet daily. The structured programme is allocated over two hours a week. Students suggested that some tutorial time could be better used. Current and former students value the support which staff provide and say that the quality of this support is a major strength of the college. However, some students believe that the large increase in student numbers has had a detrimental effect on the level of this support.

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39 Recording of achievement is well developed in the college. It builds on the national records of achievement which 94 per cent of students bring with them during induction. In a staff evaluation of induction, staff felt that there was insufficient time to work with students on their records. Prospective students are encouraged to bring their records to interview and, in 1995, over half did so. Regular reviews with subject teachers and tutors help students to identify their strengths and weaknesses. However, in some subject areas, recording of progress requires better action planning. Students in the first year produce a personal statement in July and they believe that this helps their higher education applications. All students leaving the college in 1995 had a record of achievement.

40 There is a highly co-operative relationship between the college and the local authority careers service. Two of the careers advisers work as part of the careers team and attend all relevant meetings and reviews. The majority of students interviewed, including some former students, were satisfied with the careers advice and support for their applications to higher education. Tutors are well prepared to support students with their UCAS applications. The procedure for moderating and ensuring the quality of the applications involves personal tutors, year tutors and careers staff. It is thorough and effective. Students perceive a pressure on them to proceed to higher education. Guidance is offered to students following one-year courses of study. Guidance for students on the two-year programmes of study going into routes other than higher education is unsatisfactory. There is a lack of informed advice about progression to vocational education or employment. In 1994-95 this affected 30 per cent of students leaving the college. The college has just begun to address vocational and employment opportunities as a result of evaluation findings.

41 Attendance is tightly monitored using a computerised electronic registration system. After three successive, unexplained absences parents are contacted. Each tutor receives weekly a comprehensive computer printout showing the attendance record of each student from the start of term. However, the manual registration at daily tutorial unnecessarily duplicates the electronic system. There are nine 'swipe' points around the college, but student numbers mean that there is intense pressure on these points. Some students arriving on time cannot record their presence sufficiently early and are recorded as late-comers. Communication with students on how the 80 per cent attendance rates are calculated is not sufficiently clear. Those not attaining the required level of attendance may have to pay their own examination fees.

42 The new student council is composed of volunteers. It has negotiated some improvements to the college, including extra seating in the common room and a drinks machine. The student council does not have a budget from the college but the principal has agreed to buy name badges to raise the profile of the members. There are no student representatives on the governing body, academic and pastoral boards and other college committees, except for health and safety.

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## TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

43 Of the 106 sessions inspected, 69 per cent had strengths which outweighed the weaknesses. For GCE A level classes the figure is 77 per cent and reflects the high quality of teaching in all programme areas at the higher academic levels. Weaknesses outweighed strengths in only 3 per cent of sessions. The following table summarises the teaching grades awarded.

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

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE AS/A level		16	47	24	2	0	89
GCSE		3	5	3	1	0	12
GNVQ		0	2	3	0	0	5
<b>Total</b>		<b>19</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>106</b>

44 Classes are generally well disciplined and friendly, and conducted with humour and mutual respect between teachers and students. Most courses have well planned schemes of work. In many instances, however, these are not translated into detailed lesson plans. The college day has recently been restructured into 50-minute periods. Some staff are finding it difficult to adapt their lessons to this shorter time span. Learning is generally supported by attractively-produced handouts and other materials. A variety of teaching methods is used, ensuring that students' interest is sustained. Small group work is frequently used in lessons and, generally, is effectively handled by teachers and students alike. In some sessions, however, the crowded physical conditions make movement around the room difficult. This dictates the structure of group work and causes difficulties for teachers who monitor progress by circulating amongst student groups. Severe overcrowding is beginning to threaten the good working habits and affect the quality of students' learning.

45 In mathematics and computing, lessons make use of a variety of teaching methods. In one well-structured mathematics session, the teacher first explained an aspect of statistical theory to the students. Their interest was engaged and their understanding checked by means of frequent questions. The students then worked on a practical exercise in small groups. Learning was supported by the use of a well planned worksheet that was completed as part of the exercise.

46 In biology, chemistry and physics, the quality of teaching is high. There are clearly-defined aims and objectives which are shared with students who, in many cases, keep them in their files. In the classroom, students' skills, knowledge and understanding are challenged and extended. Learning is effectively reinforced by the use of a variety of teaching and learning aids. The curriculum is enhanced by the opportunity for students to work towards Creativity in Science and Technology Awards. Twenty students achieved these in 1994-95. A further 16 students



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extended the range of their studies by successfully completing Liverpool University enrichment projects.

47 In business studies, teaching and learning is generally well organised and relevant to commercial life. Tutors make their expectations clear to students. Students are willing to ask questions and contribute to discussions. The bank of well-produced and up-to-date learning materials is a valuable resource for teachers. Learning is enriched by activities that enable students to experience business practices at first hand. For example, the carefully-designed 'understanding industry' project matches talks from industrialists to follow up visits to factories.

48 Most classes in theatre and media studies, music and art are skilfully taught. In one media studies session, when the commentary on a video failed, the teacher turned this to positive advantage by asking students to concentrate on shots which reflected image and lifestyle which was consistent with the aim of the session. Students are generally set demanding tasks that allow them to develop a wide range of competencies. The exception is in art where the range of options is narrow. In one lively theatre studies session students were suddenly and unexpectedly challenged to use their bodies to spell out the word 'help' as part of a study on posture. This they successfully did, with evident enjoyment. In a few sessions, however, students were subdued and the range of teaching strategies was very limited.

49 In modern foreign languages all the teachers have excellent oral skills. This enables them to fulfil the departmental policy of conducting all lessons almost entirely in the language being learned. Students see the foreign language as a natural means of communication and a few even attempt jokes and puns. Teachers constantly update their subject knowledge. As a result, lessons are frequently enlivened with short discussions on the day's news or on taped extracts from foreign news broadcasts. Pair and small group work are effectively used but question and answer sessions are less constructive. Learning resources are well produced and plentiful. Classroom learning for some students is enriched by foreign exchanges. Innovative work experience involves students in teaching languages in local primary schools. The University of Oxford Delegacy Local Examinations Syndicate GCE A level syllabus was introduced in 1993. The decision was made not to include the literature option. This means that students' experience of longer texts and works of imagination is severely limited.

50 In the English department teaching is generally sound. The study of literature is based on an interesting and wide ranging selection of texts. This reflects teacher rather than student choice. Lessons are thoroughly prepared, with well-produced handouts and a variety of activities. However, lesson plans are not widely kept. Those that are, identify content rather than methods of assessment or learning outcomes.

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51 In history, geography and politics, the teaching is knowledgeable and competent. Attention is given to individual needs. Considerable attention is also given to creating helpful learning support materials. For example, the statistical technique of chi squared analysis proved to be difficult for most geography students. Competence for a whole class was achieved by issuing each student with a critical path handout. Those with a good mathematical background worked unaided, whilst others received individual attention according to need. All students arrived at the correct answer. Most lesson plans emphasise content at the expense of learning outcomes and the identification of core skills development. Better use could be made of interactive learning methods.

52 In psychology, sociology and Christian theology teaching is generally of high quality. In the best lessons, there is a spirit of unbiased enquiry and due regard for evidence and logical argument. This was not, however, always the case in some of the sessions with larger groups.

53 In September 1995, GNVQ programmes in business at advanced level and health and social care at intermediate level were introduced. In health and social care, the schemes of work do not adequately reflect or indicate what is happening in the classroom. Students work in a purposeful manner to the standards laid down by the co-ordinator. There is positive use of action planning. A system for recording when students meet assessment criteria is being introduced. The library gives practical help and support for students working on assignments. A residential event held early in the course was effective in helping the students to bond together as a group. In both GNVQ programmes the integration of core skills is underdeveloped.

#### **STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS**

54 The majority of students achieve their learning goals and many continue their studies at university. There are significant gaps in 1995 destination figures, with 13 per cent of students as yet unaccounted for. Of those who completed GCE A level studies, 59 per cent are so far known to have progressed into higher education. Eighteen per cent continued in further education. A further 10 per cent went into employment. Of the 66 students completing intermediate level courses, 43 per cent continued their studies at Holy Cross College, 7 per cent went into other further education and 6 per cent took up jobs. Retention rates are analysed in detail for all subjects. Reasons for leaving college or for changing course are centrally recorded and the information made available to relevant staff. For 1994-95 the retention rate for the college was high at 97 per cent.

55 From 1993-95 the overall pass rate in GCE A level at grades A-E has remained between 82 per cent and 83 per cent. The average pass rate for 18 year old students in sixth form colleges in 1994 was 83 per cent. In 1995, students taking two or more GCE AS/A level examinations scored, on average, 4.7 points per entry (where A=10, E=2). Those taking fewer

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than two GCE AS/A levels scored 4.4 points. This places the college in the top third of the colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure, based on the data in the 1995 tables published by the Department for Education and Employment.

56 The pass rates in most subjects in the 1995 GCE A level examinations are at or above the national average. Good results are achieved in many subjects, with 100 per cent pass rates in business studies (modular syllabus), Christian theology, English literature (syllabus A), further mathematics, media studies, Elizabethan history and Spanish. The average percentage of GCE A level passes at the higher grades of A-C was 46 per cent for 1995.

57 GCSE courses are provided for those wishing to resit English, mathematics, French and sciences. Results in English were above the national average for sixth form colleges in 1994; 67 per cent of students gained A-C grades compared with a national pass rate of 53 per cent. There are also high pass rates in sociology and business studies. Results in mathematics for students on intermediate level courses are poorer than those for students retaking the subject alongside GCE A levels. GCSE courses in Italian and computing, which have recently been successfully introduced to enrich GCE A level courses, achieved in 1995 pass rates at grades A-C of 100 per cent and 82 per cent, respectively.

58 In science, students enjoy their work and talk about it enthusiastically. They work effectively in groups and carry out practical work competently and safely. For example, in one lesson they worked in teams to solve a practical problem and then demonstrated their experiment to the whole class. However, although students were achieving appropriate levels of knowledge and understanding in some lessons, examination results for 1994 and 1995 were below national averages in all science subjects.

59 Mathematics and computing attract large numbers of students. Approximately 40 per cent of students follow courses in mathematics and approximately 12 per cent courses in computing. GCE A level results in mathematics are above national averages. Those at GCSE in mathematics and computing are satisfactory. Students are generally well motivated and are able to describe their work clearly and with understanding. A relatively high proportion of students from each of these subject areas proceed to take subject-related degrees.

60 In business studies, results in examinations compare favourably with national averages. Most students progress to business-related degrees or employment. Students speak highly of their courses. They profit from the variety of teaching approaches and the vocational dimension. Not all group work sessions are sufficiently supervised to ensure that all students are deriving equal benefit.

61 Theatre studies, media studies, art and music are popular courses with expanding student numbers. Examination results for 1995 are at or

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above the national average for A-E grades in all but art. In art and music, A-C grades are lower than the national average. Students are articulate and confident. Their critical skills are well honed, enabling them to comment in an informed way on their own work and that of others. They demonstrate a sound understanding of the formal elements of their particular subject. In humanities there are impressive results at GCE A level and students have the chance to develop statistical skills.

62 In English and in modern foreign languages, students are enthusiastic and work well in and out of class. In English, the retention rate has dropped from 94 per cent in 1994 to 88 per cent in 1995. No explanation has been sought. GCE A level results have improved steadily over the past three years in all areas except literature and are above the national average. Students are developing oral skills confidently. In modern languages at GCE A level, the pass rate at A-E grades in 1995 matched or exceeded national averages, but A-C grade pass rates in French and German fell below them. Student note taking in modern languages is well developed. Vocabulary and grammar records are rigorously maintained and their contents thoroughly learned and tested.

63 A small number of students enter for RSA and Pitman examinations in typewriting and wordprocessing. Computer literacy and information technology is also offered. Pass rates are consistently high. Some students gain certificates in lifesaving, first-aid and the Central Council for Physical Recreation Sports Leaders Award. These achievements reflect leisure interests. They also serve to enhance job and university applications. There are too few opportunities for those studying sciences, art and music to develop or use information technology skills.

64 In general, students enjoy their studies. They clearly appreciate the commitment and support shown by staff in helping them to achieve their goals. They participate actively in lessons and work co-operatively and enthusiastically with their teachers and their peers. Many of the students and their parents speak approvingly of the college's insistence on attendance throughout the whole of its fairly short working day. They believe that this encourages good working habits and promotes the growth of a community spirit.

#### **QUALITY ASSURANCE**

65 Staff draw confidence from the high standards of students' achievements and consider these to be proof of their teaching success. Rigorous evaluation takes place at departmental and subject levels. Progress is being made to develop a quality assurance policy and procedures which are supported by staff and governors. The recent management restructuring now guarantees that senior management responsibility for this work is clearly identified. However, systems to assure uniformity of approach to quality issues across the college are not in place and middle managers are still unclear about their responsibilities.

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More work remains to be done to raise staff awareness of the necessity for quality assurance procedures and to guarantee that existing good practice is shared and standardised across the college. The lack of standardisation currently leads to some inconsistencies in the students' experiences.

66 There is no co-ordination or overall system for ensuring quality in cross-college areas. Individual areas conduct their own reviews; for example, the reprographic service, management information services and the library, are carefully monitored and publish a review of their provision. The quality of technician and administrative support has not yet been reviewed by the college.

67 Not all staff are sufficiently aware of quality assurance procedures or of the need to develop them. Most heads of department attended an external conference on value-added measures and the college devoted a training day to quality and inspection issues. Departmental evaluation and reviews are not formally shared across the college or between departments, nor are the reviews which the principal conducts termly of the assistant principals' activities.

68 There is a well-established tradition in the college of conducting evaluation surveys. A range of opinions is surveyed, including those of students at the college, students who turn down places, high-school staff and pupils, parents, and college staff. Students are encouraged to complete the questionnaires. The results of the surveys are summarised and discussed but rarely lead to the production of clear action plans which identify realistic action, timescales, responsibilities and resource implications. There are examples of actions being taken as a result of these surveys. For example, the quality of departmental handouts in English and modern languages has been improved, the information provided to one-year students has been extended and the timing of mock examinations has changed. Some departments undertake specific subject and course evaluations. In addition, there is an annual cross-college survey which includes the implementation of the charter completed by all students meeting together in groups. A mixture of random and targeted activities, such as the completion of records of achievement, have been surveyed through sampling techniques. Surveys lack central co-ordination. The tendency is for newly-developing areas to seek immediate feedback. In many cases, students are not told of the purpose and outcomes of the surveys. The large number of surveys is producing some disillusionment amongst students. A centralised evaluation cycle, concentrating on key phases of the year and asking uniform questions would reduce confusion and allow the development of year-on-year comparison for future benchmarking and target setting.

69 The college has begun to define some performance indicators centrally; others are in use by staff working in specific areas. For example, the pastoral board has established performance indicators which involve the collection of statistics on retention, attendance, punctuality and

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students' involvement in extra-curricular activities. The pastoral board also uses informal discussions with staff and students to evaluate students' reasons for applying to the college and students' progress during tutorials. These are then reviewed. Despite clear data from management information systems on retention, achievement, and destinations, some departments show little understanding of the implications of the data and are unsure how to use performance indicators. In some areas there is an absence of targets; in others, targets are not realistic. Results are carefully analysed by each department. Reasons are sought for any rise or fall in pass rates. The results of the analysis are the basis for operational planning at department level and are debated by members of the governing body. The college is in its second year of using a system which calculates the value added to students' previous attainments. Some staff make good use of this. Others tend not to use the analysis to develop action plans for the future. More use could be made of value added analysis as a force for change.

70 A student charter is distributed to all students at induction. It is also published in the student handbook. Despite this, many students reported that they were not aware of the charter. Students and governors were not involved in the development of the charter. It is confined to general statements of intent and lacks specific service standards. Some students say they are unhappy with the tone of the charter in that it sets out expectations which the college has of them, but makes no firm commitments to provide them with certain services in return. Students welcome the clarity of the complaints procedures. Since its introduction, there have been no written complaints.

71 The college has identified weaknesses in its previous induction process for new staff. To address these, a group of newly-appointed staff were consulted for their views and a staff-development task group was formed to develop a new programme. This recognises induction as a process which continues throughout the year. The group developed a checklist to ensure full coverage of important topics. It is now revising the staff handbook. This will support and supplement the useful departmental handbooks which exist in some areas.

72 A strategy for staff development which includes drafting a staff-development policy and procedures is in process. Standard documentation for applying for and evaluating activities has recently come into use. Staff development is open equally to all staff. This includes part-time staff, who receive payment if they attend events. A good provision of activities is held in the college itself. As yet, there is no clear link between staff development and meeting the college's strategic-planning objectives. Only 16 per cent of last year's 152 events related to corporate objectives and there are no written criteria to enable individual applications to be prioritised against these objectives. Much activity relates to the attendance of teaching staff at external events. Last year, only 6 per cent of support staff attended external events. Key policies, such as that for equal

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opportunities, still need to be supported by staff development. The staff-development budget has recently been reduced to 0.75 per cent of the total college budget.

73 The existing appraisal scheme involves one interview every two years which the college and its governors now feel is too long a cycle. Starting with the senior management, nearly half of the staff have been through the process which they find supportive and valuable. Progress is variable; in some departments, all staff have been appraised, in others, very few. The principal has not been appraised. The process applies equally to all other staff and involves teaching and task observations. Some training for appraisal has taken place. However, this programme now lacks momentum and the college intends to develop a new process over a shorter timescale. The link between appraisal and staff development is haphazard. The college's commitment to securing Investor in People status should assist them in promoting this.

74 The college has produced a self-assessment report which addresses aspects of its operation using the headings identified in Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. The inspection team found the report well balanced and realistic. Its conclusions and issues matched the main findings of the inspectors. The consultation processes involved in producing the report were valuable to the college and the intention is to make this internal evaluation an annual event.

## **RESOURCES**

### **Staffing**

75 There is a high degree of commitment from all staff to the college. They give generously of their time to support the students in their care. They are well qualified and experienced with the expertise necessary for the range of courses offered. Most are deployed on work which is relevant to their expertise. All teaching staff have a teaching qualification and 97 per cent have a first degree in a relevant subject. Many are also examiners for their subject. The numbers of staff have increased by 45 per cent over the last four years while student numbers have also grown in a similar proportion. The student to staff ratio is 17.22:1. Members of the senior management team have a half-time teaching commitment.

76 Many teachers lack recent industrial experience. The low number of part-time teachers employed by the college does not provide an adequate counter-balance for this. Placements for teaching staff have been offered in local industries but there is insufficient take-up of these offers. Industrial placements for staff on the GNVQ programme are under consideration. Only two of the staff currently delivering the GNVQ programme hold the necessary Training and Development Lead Body assessor and verifier awards, although the other 14 staff are now working towards achieving these.

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77 There is a good gender balance of staff on most courses: 60 per cent of teachers and 79 per cent of support staff are women. This ratio is not reflected at senior management levels where 12 per cent of the senior management and 37 per cent of the heads of department are female.

78 All support staff are qualified and experienced. There are particularly high levels of expertise amongst the library staff. In some areas, technician and administrative support was judged to be inadequate. For example, there is no modern languages technician. Teaching staff and technical support staff work well together. Support staff attend all relevant meetings and are represented on some groups, such as the staff-development working party.

### **Equipment/learning resources**

79 There is sufficient equipment of a satisfactory quality and a comprehensive supply of consumables in most areas. There is a good range of up-to-date specialist equipment in music. In contrast, there are insufficient tape recorders in languages and specialist equipment is limited in art and textiles.

80 There is no programme for replacing major equipment. Budget holders are not able to carry forward any underspend to the following year and this makes expensive items difficult to fund. There is no maintenance programme for existing equipment.

81 Student access to computer workstations is inadequate. The overall ratio of students to computers is 22:1: although this represents an increase over the previous year's ratio of 31:1, it is still high. All the computers take software which is of an industrial standard. Seven computers have compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) database facilities. Students have difficulty in gaining access to computers. Since most of the networked computers are located in rooms where classes are timetabled this limits drop-in access. Staff have access to 10 computers for the development of teaching materials; a staff to computer ratio of 7:1. The budget allocation for new computers was £60,000 in 1994-95 and the college is seeking further to improve its stock of computers in 1995-96.

82 The small college library provides a satisfactory service to most students and is well stocked with a broad range of texts. There are 12,500 books and 142 cassettes and videos. Newspapers and 46 periodicals are taken regularly. The selection of fine art books is expensive with many recent titles. There is a representative range of English, history and sociology textbooks but increased recruitment of history students means there is a shortage in this area. There is also a comprehensive stock of language dictionaries. Additional texts are held by departments, but these are not catalogued through the library.

83 There are 101 private study places on two floors in the library and learning support centre. These are insufficient for the number of students. There are a further 98 private study areas throughout the college but some



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of these are reserved for resource-based learning for specific subject areas and tend to be greatly underused as a consequence.

84 The librarian and the heads of department are budget holders for the purchase of text books. Co-operation between them is good but the system can cause difficulties when priorities have to be made or new courses developed with scarce resources.

### **Accommodation**

85 The college faces major problems in accommodating twice the number of students for which its buildings were originally designed. Overcrowding is affecting all aspects of the students' experience in college. So far, no effective strategy has been identified to manage the severe overcrowding on the campus. There has been a routine space survey. The college recently produced a condition survey, linked to a planned maintenance programme, and has commissioned a report from a local firm which gives several alternative approaches for tackling the accommodation problems. Response to advice has been slow. Work is taking place to develop proposals for a new building to incorporate a new library resource centre, additional teaching places and possibly a sports hall.

86 The college occupies a crowded single site limited to 1.1 hectares. The narrow entrance on the main road is not well signposted. The three principal buildings are constructed in a variety of styles dating from the late nineteenth century. Extensions to the main building were added in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The convent building, which used to be the sisters' residence, came into use by the college in 1993. The buildings are all two or three storeys high with the exception of some newly-assembled single-storey temporary modular units which are used as classrooms.

87 The grounds and surrounding area give a welcoming first impression to visitors. The external repair of the buildings is generally good considering their age. The interior of the buildings is well maintained and decorated and free of graffiti. There are attractive displays on the walls of many teaching rooms. All areas of the college are kept clean except for the student common areas which are generally untidy. The college uses its own maintenance team to undertake necessary repairs.

88 Access for people with restricted mobility is difficult to every part of the complex but is impossible to all first and second-floor rooms. There is no operational policy to overcome this shortcoming. Even when the recent erection of the modular units offered an opportunity for action, no suitable access was provided.

89 Many of the teaching rooms are small; they were not designed for teaching purposes. Revised timetabling is only a partial solution to the problem. Most departments have dedicated suites of classrooms, but this method of room allocation means that many classes are overcrowded

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while other rooms in the college are underused. Overcrowding is particularly severe in English, languages, business studies and sociology. The quality of teaching is affected and opportunities for group work are restricted.

90 The laboratories are spacious, except in biology. Music and theatre study areas provide a stimulating learning environment. The art room is restricting and does not realistically reflect current needs. It is unsuitable for the production of large pieces of work. The library is too small for the number of students in the college. The upper section is designated the learning support centre, but access up a narrow spiral stairway is poor.

91 The college has a contract with the local authority to provide advice on health and safety issues. An officer comes in regularly. An advisory survey covering part of the building took place in March 1995. Progress on implementing its recommendations, even when this would not be expensive, is slow. Concerns were raised about escape from some areas in case of fire. Corridors and stairways are constricted by storage of materials and boxes. At the time of inspection, no fire drill had taken place since the pre-arranged one in March which had an unsatisfactory evacuation time. A local firm has been commissioned to advise on the installation of alarms and smoke detector appliances.

92 There is extreme pressure on the students' social areas. The canteen is severely overcrowded, particularly at peak times such as lunchtime when there are no arrangements for a staggered lunch break. Students were observed sitting on the floor to eat their meals.

### **CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES**

93 The college, working within its strong Catholic ethos, has the following strengths:

- high-quality teaching which incorporates a notable variety of teaching methods
- GCE A level results which match or exceed national averages
- effective commitment to academic and pastoral support
- well-supported religious education and complementary studies
- innovative features contributing to the successful enrolment and induction process
- strong contact and involvement with parents
- committed and qualified staff
- significant recent progress on the development of strong management information and financial systems.

94 If it is to succeed in achieving its aims, the college should address the following issues:

- the serious concerns relating to accommodation and the lack of a co-ordinated approach to the problems of overcrowding

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- the inadequate strategic planning process which fails to give a clear direction to the college
  - the significant minority of students who are unable to follow suitable courses of study
  - absence of a clear link between management responsibilities and the development tasks to be undertaken
  - the wide variability of methods of quality control
  - the lack of an overall strategy for the provision and development of information technology
  - the slow development of policy and procedures for equality of opportunity.

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## FIGURES

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- 1 Percentage enrolments by level of study (1995-96)

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  - 2 Enrolments by curriculum area (1995-96)

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

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

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

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

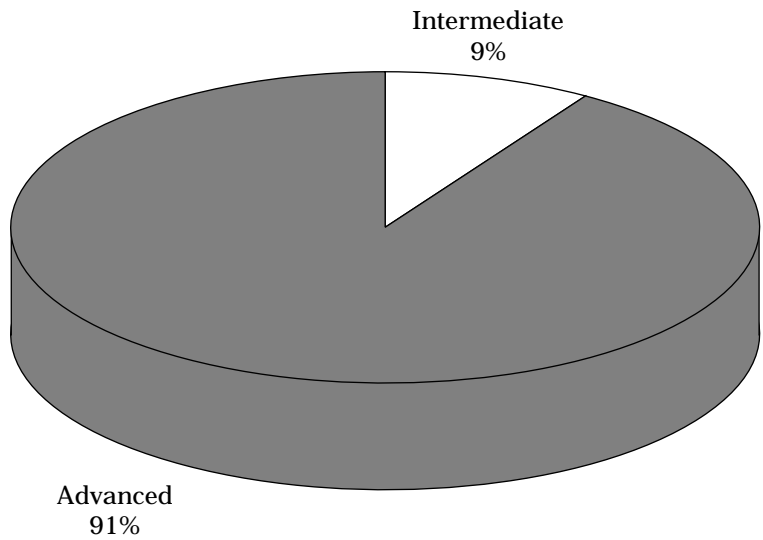
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**Figure 1**

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**Holy Cross College: percentage enrolments by level of study (1995-96)**

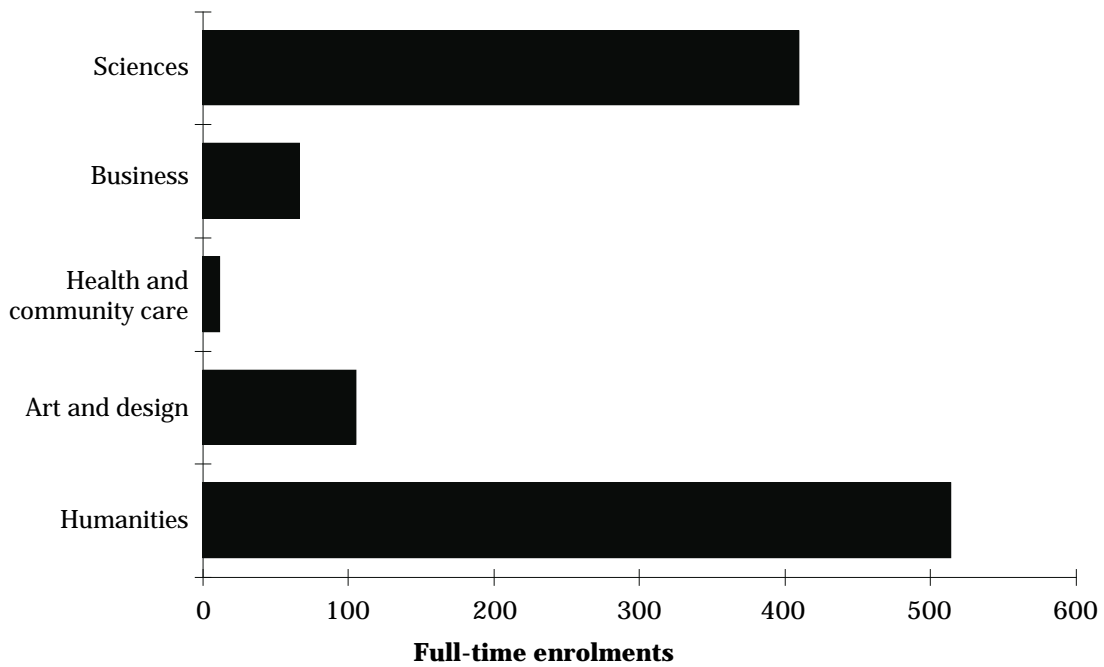


Enrolments: 1,110

**Figure 2**

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**Holy Cross College: enrolments by curriculum area (1995-96)**



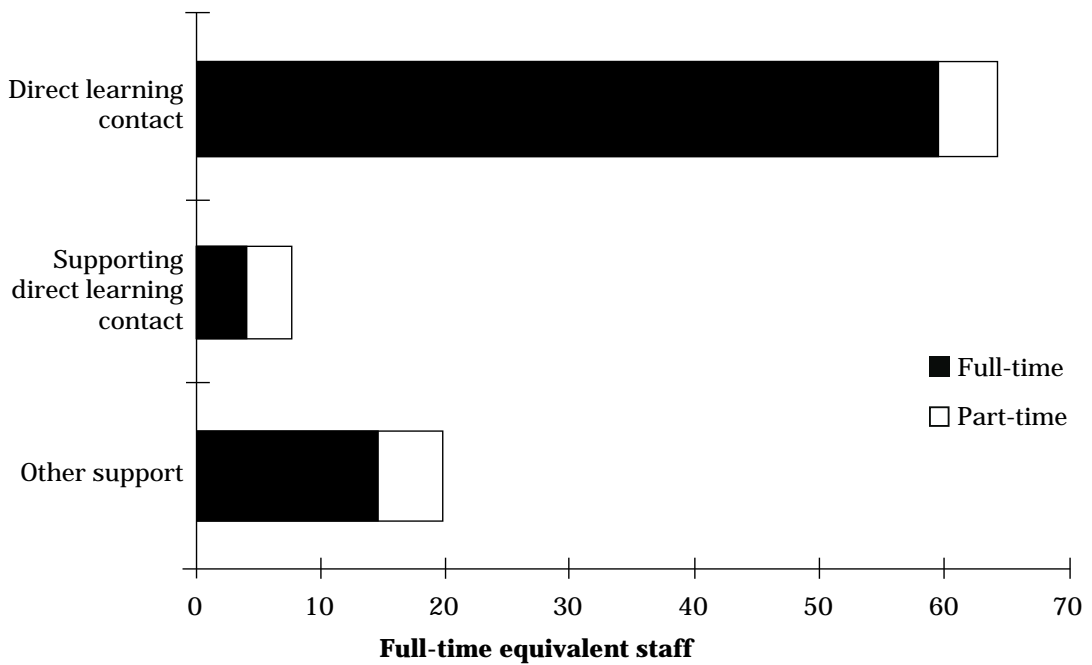
Enrolments: 1,110

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**Figure 3**

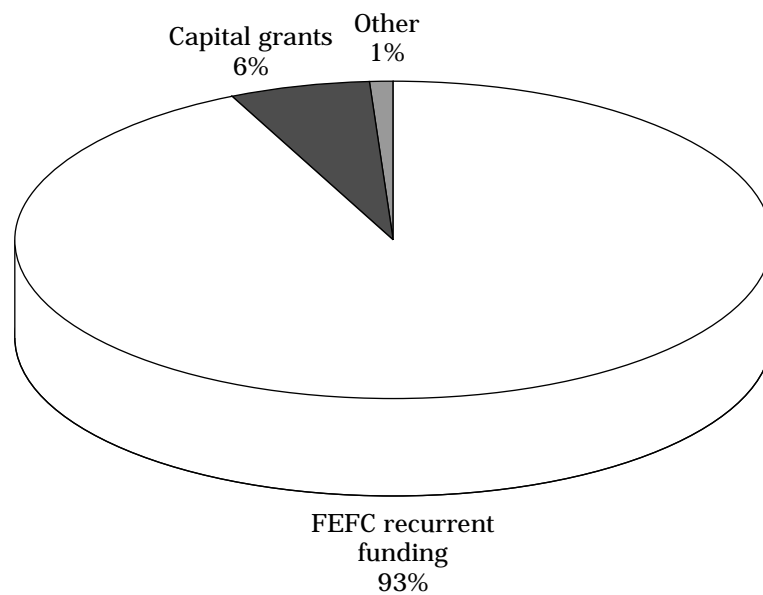
**Holy Cross College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1995-96)**



Full-time equivalent staff: 91

**Figure 4**

**Holy Cross College: estimated income (for 12 months to July 1996)**



Estimated income: £2,643,020

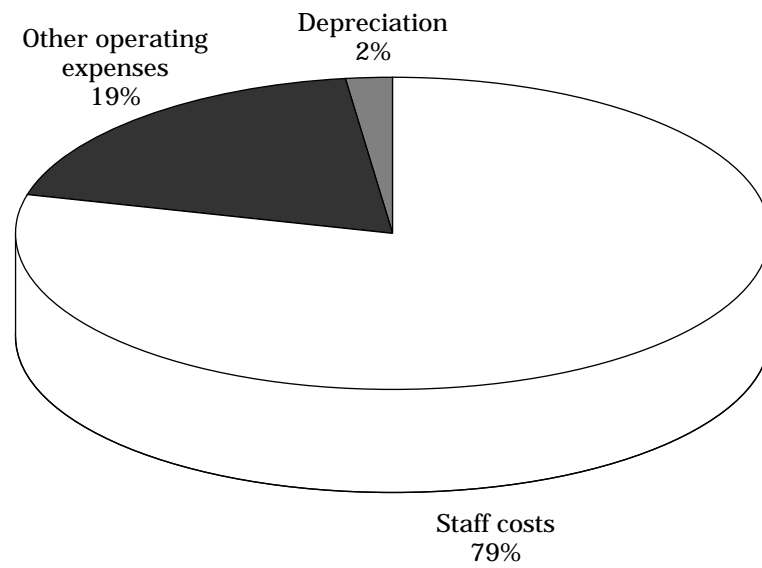
*Note: other includes other operating income and other income-generating activities.*

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**Figure 5**

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**Holy Cross College: estimated expenditure (for 12 months to July 1996)**



Estimated expenditure: £2,640,055

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