

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

Shrewsbury Sixth Form College

May 1997

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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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

Activity	Inspection grades				
	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 63/97

SHREWSBURY SIXTH FORM COLLEGE

WEST MIDLANDS REGION

Inspected November 1995-February 1997

Summary

Shrewsbury Sixth Form College caters mainly for students aged 16 to 19. The college has expert and experienced governors and effective management. There is a strong team spirit among the staff and communications within the college are good. Strategic planning is thorough. The high level of demand for places at the college has resulted in an increase of 51 per cent in full-time enrolments since incorporation. The college has added GNVQs and some provision for adults to its broad range of GCE A level courses. It has an extensive curriculum enrichment programme. The college works collaboratively with other post-16 providers in the locality and has effective relations with local schools and the Shropshire Chamber of Commerce Training and Enterprise. It has a good reputation in the local community. Standards of teaching are high. Admissions, guidance and support procedures are good. Students receive excellent careers education and guidance. Students' achievements at GCE A level are good. Retention rates are high. Teaching staff are deployed efficiently. Most areas of the college are well equipped. The college should: improve its quality assurance; continue to improve its accommodation, particularly in respect of access for people with restricted mobility; review its provision at intermediate level; improve the support for adults; strengthen co-ordination of the new learning support service with other aspects of learning support; and improve the effectiveness of its management information system.

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		2
Students' recruitment, guidance and support		2
Quality assurance		3
Resources:	staffing	2
	equipment/learning resources	2
	accommodation	2

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Science	2	English	1
Mathematics	1	Geography	1
Business studies	2	Languages	2
Art and design	1	Politics/sociology and history	2

INTRODUCTION

1 Shrewsbury Sixth Form College was inspected between November 1995 and February 1997. The college's induction procedures were inspected in July 1996. Subject area inspections took place in November 1995 and in February, March and October 1996, followed by an inspection of aspects of cross-college provision in February 1997. Fourteen inspectors spent 59 days in the college. They visited 124 classes and examined students' work. They held meetings with members of the corporation, college managers and teachers, students, parents, local employers, and representatives from local schools. Discussions also took place with a representative of the Shropshire Chamber of Commerce Training and Enterprise. Inspectors examined college policy statements, the strategic plan, minutes of committees meetings, and other documents.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 Shrewsbury Sixth Form College was established in 1981 as part of a reorganisation of secondary education in Shrewsbury. The original estate included a former boys' school built in 1911 and two early nineteenth-century grade II listed buildings. An additional teaching block was added in 1988 and a design and craft department was built in 1990. Since incorporation, the college has undertaken a programme of adaptation and remodelling of its buildings. In 1994, nearby premises were purchased in which a business and information centre and a new library have been developed.

3 Shrewsbury has a population of 70,000. It is the county town of Shropshire and serves as the administrative and market centre for the county and the surrounding rural area. The number of 16 year old school-leavers in the Shrewsbury area gaining five or more general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) passes at grades C or above is significantly above the national average. Eighty-five per cent of the entrants to the college transfer from nine partner secondary schools. Provision for further education is also made at Shrewsbury College of Arts and Technology. In November 1996, 1,166 students were enrolled at the college. Students numbers by age, by level of study and by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figures 1, 2 and 3.

4 Most employment in the town is in small to medium-sized enterprises which provide financial, legal, banking, administrative, retail, and tourism services. Agriculture is an important economic activity in the region. In recent years, the number of people employed in manufacturing industries has declined. The local level of unemployment is 3.5 per cent which is well below the national average.

5 The curriculum is delivered through 25 subject areas organised into five sections. Three senior tutors oversee the arrangements for tutorials and each has responsibility for leading teams of 16 group tutors. In November 1996, there were 67 teachers, 59 full time and eight part

time. Six of the seven members of the college management team also teach. There were 18 full-time and eight part-time staff dealing with finance and administration, personnel, information management, learner support and technical support. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4. The college also employs other specialist staff including nine music teachers, two modern language assistants and four sports coaches. It has recently introduced a programme of adult education in the evenings and has developed a collaborative arrangement for the provision of first aid courses with the neighbouring county headquarters of St John Ambulance.

6 In its mission statement, the college makes a commitment to 'the intellectual, personal and social development of all its students through the provision of a high-quality general education'. It seeks to value all students equally and to provide a balanced education. The college aims to achieve a smooth transition for pupils moving from schools to its further education courses and to add value to their students' achievements.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

7 The college's strategic plan includes a commitment to contribute to the achievement of the national targets for education and training by extending and diversifying its curriculum. College staff are aware of the national targets and of current educational trends and initiatives. In line with its commitment, the college has introduced a small range of evening classes for adults supported by the Shropshire Chamber of Commerce Training and Enterprise development fund. The programme includes short courses in information technology and general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) courses in business studies and history. Target enrolments have been achieved and there are plans to expand the programme.

8 The college offers a broad range of GCE A level courses. Students can choose from 28 subjects within humanities, sciences, business studies and creative arts. Nineteen GCE advanced supplementary (AS) subjects are available. New subject areas such as psychology, information technology and media studies have been introduced recently in response to student demand. The proportion of modular GCE A level courses is being increased. An advanced general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) is offered in business. Provision at intermediate level is limited to seven GCSE subjects and an intermediate GNVQ in business.

9 The college is committed to providing a balanced education programme which includes personal and social development. It achieves this through its extensive curriculum enrichment programme which provides students with a wide and imaginative choice of options. The provision includes recreational, sporting, academic and community activities. Almost all GCE A level students take the GCE A level course in general studies and many of the options on the enrichment programme

provide support for this subject. The college has exchange programmes for staff and students with France, Germany and the United States of America. Students of biology, geography and history undertake field studies in the United Kingdom and in some European countries.

10 There is a heavy demand for places at the college. The number of full-time students has increased by 51 per cent since incorporation. Less than 1 per cent of students are from minority ethnic groups, reflecting a proportion similar to that within the local population. Over 90 per cent of full-time students aged 16 to 19 are following GCE A level courses; 6 per cent are enrolled on the advanced GNVQ course in business; less than 4 per cent are following intermediate level GNVQ or GCSE courses.

11 College managers have taken a cautious approach to the introduction of new areas of provision. They wish to preserve and build upon the college's reputation as a provider of good-quality GCE A level courses and to work collaboratively with other post-16 providers in the locality. The college is an active member of the Shrewsbury Partnership in Education and Training, a consortium of schools and colleges in and around Shrewsbury. College representatives are working closely with other colleges to ensure sufficiency of provision for the Shrewsbury area. The college is developing good relationships with institutions of higher education. There are collaborative links with two universities which enable staff to meet and exchange information. The college also participates in the 'Higher Education in Shropshire Group' which is led by the county council.

12 The college has close and effective relations with local schools. Staff from the college hold regular meetings with staff from partner schools. They visit the schools to give presentations and to attend consultation meetings for pupils and their parents. There are effective curricular links in some subject areas, notably modern languages, mathematics, technology and science. The college has organised a range of activities for school pupils which includes opportunities to participate in college lessons. School teachers speak highly of the responsive approach of the college. They particularly appreciate the feedback they receive on their pupils' subsequent performance at the college. A link has been established with Derwen College, a residential college for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Students from the sixth form college work with Derwen College students as part of the enrichment programme.

13 Liaison between the college and the Shropshire Chamber of Commerce Training and Enterprise is good. The principal is a member of its area board and of its education and training group. The Shropshire Chamber of Commerce Training and Enterprise has provided support for industrial placements for teachers in textiles, business studies, and health and social care and has helped in the development of GNVQs. Its representatives act as advisers to students taking part in the Young Enterprise scheme. The college is involved in the Shropshire Education Business Partnership.

14 The college has a good reputation in the local community. Students give public performances of music, dance and drama and are regularly involved in fund-raising for local and national charities. The college makes insufficient use of the opportunities for planned work experience as an aspect of curriculum provision. It has recognised the need to build on its existing links with local employers and to extend these into new subject areas. Local business people are involved with the Young Enterprise scheme and with the college's careers convention and annual business conference. Representatives from local firms are key speakers at college events. They also act as advisers for students' case studies. A local firm supports an annual GNVQ scholarship.

15 Marketing is effective; care is taken to match marketing material to the needs and expectations of prospective students and their parents. The prospectus is an attractive, professionally-produced document. There are informative supplements and subject leaflets of variable quality. The college is developing its approach to market research. An adult education and marketing manager has been appointed to undertake a co-ordinating role and a marketing and responsiveness group meets regularly to plan and review the marketing process. The college makes good use of survey information obtained from surveys of applicants, students and their parents. It has also increased its use of other sources of data such as those provided by the careers service and the Shropshire Chamber of Commerce Training and Enterprise's labour market survey. There are no formal arrangements for obtaining the views of local employers.

16 Effective application of the college's equal opportunities policy within the curriculum is variable. In some subjects, teachers promote positive attitudes towards equality, cultural diversity and special needs. In other subjects, awareness of equal opportunities issues is less well emphasised. The implementation of the policy would be strengthened with a more effective review process.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

17 Members of the corporation and of the college management team have worked enthusiastically to promote the development of the college. The expertise and experience of corporation members reflect the interests of the community, industry and commerce. The chairman is the chief executive of the Shropshire Health Authority and also the Shropshire Chamber of Commerce Training and Enterprise nominee. There are 12 members of the board including the principal, two parents, two members of the college staff and five independent members. Three members are women.

18 The corporation recently reviewed its composition and agreed a procedure for continuity and staged renewal of membership. It has an up-to-date register of its members' interests. The corporation has five committees. There are committees for finance; audit; remuneration;

appeals; and a search committee. The corporation makes effective use of governors' individual expertise in determining the membership of these committees. Meetings are held regularly and the level of attendance is high. The corporation makes productive use of advisory groups set up to provide them with information or to enable consultation to take place on particular issues. The status of the joint consultative negotiating committee, one of these groups which includes governors, has not been formally resolved.

19 The clerk to the corporation is the senior legal adviser to the county council. There are two assistant clerks, also employed by the county council, one a solicitor, the other a senior administrative officer. The corporation has used its links with the local authority constructively. There has been some specialist training, particularly for members of the audit and finance committees, but little general training for governors and clerks as a whole. Governors have recognised a need to review the college's mission and charter in relation to the broadening of its educational objectives.

20 The corporation produces an informative annual report which is distributed to parents and to others with an interest in the college. The advisory groups and the college management team provide governors with well-written reports on issues such as staffing, accommodation, and the development of the management information system. The corporation has recently approved a disability statement but has not documented its review of the equal opportunities policy. There is no monitoring group for equal opportunities issues. Governors pay close attention to the implementation of the health and safety policy. A working group monitors and provides information on health and safety issues. However, the college has not yet completed a full risk and hazard assessment for all aspects of its work. The college does not fulfil its statutory obligations under sections 44 and 45 of the *Further and Higher Education Act 1992* to provide opportunities for religious education and worship.

21 There is a clear management structure. The college management team comprises the principal and the deputy principal, four assistant principals and the finance manager. Communication between members of the management team and the corporation is good. The four assistant principals have management responsibility for the curriculum, students, staffing, and information systems, respectively. Resource issues are a shared responsibility of the premises management team; a group comprising the principal, the deputy principal, the finance manager and the assistant principal for information systems. Clear procedures are used for the recruitment and appointment of new staff. There is an annual review of job descriptions and of the responsibilities assigned to all posts. Proposals for the introduction of a new staff review system are still at a consultative stage. Changes in the procedure for staff appraisal have resulted in a temporary halt to the process. Some management policies,

for example, those relating to quality assurance and to the availability of management information, have yet to be fully effective in the day-to-day running of the college.

22 The strategic plan and the annual review of the plan are well written and have clear objectives. They include strategies for cost reduction and income generation, operational objectives for the current year, and issues related to strategic planning to the end of the century. Priority has been given to developing an accommodation strategy which would allow for a planned increase in student numbers. Appropriate improvements have been made over the last two years despite difficulties associated with the listed buildings and planning restrictions.

23 Managers are careful to ensure that the reasons for growth and change are understood by the staff, and that teachers are fully involved in the planning process. Daily and weekly bulletins help to ensure effective communication. The college management team meets every month. The principal meets with a subgroup of senior managers every week. The membership of committees is structured to optimise communications and promote a whole-college approach to academic development and the delivery of the curriculum.

24 Governors are aware of their responsibilities to ensure the financial health of the college. They are involved in planning and monitoring the college's budget. Financial advice is provided by the Shropshire education department's financial services group. A financial adviser, who is a senior qualified accountant, is contracted to produce a three-year financial forecast and an associated review. Some training has been provided through this consultancy for the corporation, the management team and for section leaders. The college's financial position is regularly scrutinised by the management team and the finance committee. The committee reviews income and funding allocations, expenditure and cash-flow projections. There is an equitable budgeting system based on clear and simple formulae. Staff understand the procedures for allocating resources and consider them to be fair.

25 At incorporation, the college's management information system was suited to the administration of a secondary school. It has since been developed and adapted to the needs of a college in the further education sector. A member of staff has been appointed with responsibility for information systems. The first stage of an improved system has been achieved with the installation of an electronic communications link between the college sites. Managers can readily access information to help them provide reports for the corporation and for management team meetings. Reliable statistics on enrolment, retention, success, and progression are used for monitoring purposes. For several years the college has prepared comprehensive reports on students' destinations after completing their courses. Targets set for the development and use of the management information system and for the deployment and training

of operating staff have not all been met. So far, the management information system has only partially fulfilled its potential as a management tool.

26 The college receives 97 per cent of its income from the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). The college's average level of funding for 1996-97 is £19.47 per unit. The median for all sixth form colleges in the same year is £19.36 per unit. The college's average level of funding has declined by 3.5 per cent per year since 1993. The college's income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1996 are shown in figures 5 and 6. Some reductions have been made in staffing costs but, at about 72 per cent of expenditure, they remain high.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

27 There are effective policies and procedures for the admission, guidance and support of students. In September 1996, the college established a central student services unit which has responsibility for careers guidance, learning support, and the counselling and advice service. The assistant principal responsible for students, the three senior tutors, and the college careers adviser are located in the unit. There is only a partial system for monitoring the use of the service.

28 The college provides informative and impartial advice in its literature, in presentations at partner schools, at school parents' evenings, at open evenings and in interviews. Prospective students would have appreciated more information about some courses, for example, the cost of calculators in mathematics and physics and the amount of independent study and essay writing required in art. A joint application form is used by Shrewsbury Sixth Form College and Shrewsbury College of Arts and Technology. There is a clear admissions policy. All applicants who make the college their first choice are interviewed. Students applying to the college for advanced level courses are normally expected to achieve at least five GCSE passes at grade C or above. In some subjects there are additional requirements; for example, a grade B in mathematics is required to study the subject at GCE A level. Students on intermediate courses are expected to have GCSE passes at grade E or above. In practice, most pupils come to the college with GCSE grades above the required minimum. Initial interviews are held in late February and March. Pupils in partner schools are interviewed in school by a member of the college admissions team. There are review procedures for those whose applications have been rejected or who have applied after the official closing date.

29 The college holds a well-organised, three-day induction event in July, when students can sample lessons before making their final choice of subjects. Students meet their group tutors and are given a comprehensive handbook, which includes information on their rights and responsibilities. Students find the induction a valuable and reassuring experience. Admissions staff can be consulted in late August when GCSE results are

published. When they join the college in September, students confirm their subject choices and select additional elements of their programme, including the core studies and recreation options which form part of the curriculum enrichment programme. Students are expected to seek advice from their group tutors on core studies courses that will support their preparation for the GCE A level general studies examination. This arrangement does not always work effectively and students do not always take appropriate courses. There is a useful introduction to college facilities, including the library, information technology and student services. Subject teachers provide an induction which covers the specific content and demands of particular courses.

30 Although there is no formal system for the accreditation of students' prior learning, the college attaches great importance to the previous experiences of its students. The extent to which such experiences are subsequently taken into account varies between subjects. Efforts are being made to determine the levels of students' information technology skills on entry, in order to place them on a course at an appropriate level.

31 The college has a carefully-structured tutorial programme aimed at developing students' self-reliance. Each tutor group comprises students from a range of courses. Students meet three times each week with their tutors who provide advice on personal and academic matters. Tutors and their groups also take part in social activities. Most students value the friendly atmosphere and the support and advice they receive, although surveys of students' perceptions show that not all students are fully satisfied with the tutorial programme. Weekly meetings of tutor teams with senior tutors, and of senior tutors with the assistant principal ensure that there is a good level of communication between staff and a rapid response to any issues relating to students. The services of a qualified counsellor are provided in the college for one half-day per week. This is insufficient time to meet all the demands for personal counselling. The college also refers students to external agencies for specialist counselling. There are no arrangements to meet adult students' particular support needs and guidance, other than during enrolment.

32 Students' attendance is carefully monitored and unexplained absences are followed up. There are sometimes delays in identifying problems because the system for monitoring attendance is not integrated with students' records in the management information system. Arrangements for transfer between courses are clear and involve appropriate consultation. At the time of the inspection there had been an increase in the number of students changing courses but no clear reason for this had been identified.

33 Close attention is paid to reviewing students' progress. Students build upon the records of achievement they bring with them from school. Teachers hold termly progress reviews when detailed and productive discussions take place with students about their achievements and action

plans. There are regular consultation evenings at which parents and students discuss progress with teachers. Parents appreciate the contacts they have with staff and the prompt and effective response they receive to enquiries. They value the college's commitment to combining good tutorial care with the development of students' independence and capacity for honest and realistic self-assessment.

34 There is an excellent careers education and guidance service. A senior tutor leads a team which includes a full-time professional careers adviser and six teachers with careers responsibilities. Two careers advisers contracted from Shropshire Careers Services Limited provide additional assistance. The careers library and resource area in the student services unit is well stocked with up-to-date materials, including a range of careers guidance software. Careers resources are also available in the library and in tutor bases. Careers staff arrange talks from visiting speakers and information sessions on a wide range of topics. Further guidance takes place in tutorials, based on materials supplied by careers staff. Comprehensive advice is available for students intending to enter higher education or seek employment. The number of students requesting appointments for careers guidance is steadily increasing. Students expressed satisfaction with the service.

35 Teachers give students extensive individual support. Many provide additional tuition to help with particular aspects of the course. Teachers take careful note of any special needs indicated by individual students during interviews but there is no formal cross-college diagnostic assessment of students' needs for additional learning support. The college has a contract with the local authority's psychological service to provide assessment and support for students with specific learning difficulties, including dyslexia. There is support in the library and the information technology centre for students who need help with research or information technology skills. The central learning support service is not fully co-ordinated with other aspects of learning support and its accommodation is not entirely suitable. There is some evidence that learning support has been of benefit to individual students but the take-up has been limited.

36 Each year students elect representatives to the college council. The council is lively and well run. It is largely self-organising but receives some support from senior staff, including the senior tutor responsible for student activities. The council organises a range of social events, raises money for charity and disburses grants to students for various projects, including 'year-out' activities abroad. It contributes half the cost of employing the college counsellor. Members of the council are consulted on issues such as the equal opportunities policy and accommodation changes. There is no student representative on the corporation board but the matter is under discussion.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

37 There is a high standard of teaching in most subjects. Strengths outweighed weaknesses in 74 per cent of the teaching sessions observed which is better than the average of 63 per cent for all lessons observed during the 1995-96 inspection programme, according to the *Chief Inspector's Annual Report 1995-96*. The average attendance in the lessons observed was 89 per cent and the average class size was 13. The following table summarises the grades given to the sessions inspected.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programmes of study

Programmes	Grade 1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE AS/A level	38	35	24	2	0	99
GCSE	3	4	4	0	0	11
GNVQ	2	4	2	0	0	8
Other	2	4	0	0	0	6
Total	45	47	30	2	0	124

38 Information technology is used to good effect in some curriculum areas such as business, mathematics, chemistry, geography and design. Students also make good use of computers in the library and in other areas which are open to them. There are opportunities for students to take short courses in information technology. There are no planned periods of work placement. However, business courses include work-based projects and people from relevant industries provide advice on students' projects in design.

39 Teaching in mathematics was exciting, challenging and supportive. Teachers in all classes encouraged students to reach high standards. Lessons were presented with drive and energy. Teachers used well-chosen questions and learning resources to explore mathematical concepts. For example, in one lesson the teacher used a video of a theme park to illustrate the mathematical principles of motion and dynamics. Extra-curricular mathematical activities and the use of external speakers heightened students' interest in the subject. Students who found the lesson topics difficult were encouraged to attend mathematics workshops or to seek assistance from their tutors. Teachers set and marked work regularly and students' progress was fully documented.

40 Many lessons in science were intellectually stimulating and built on students' interests and prior knowledge. Courses were well structured to prepare students for examinations. Teachers produced some learning materials of high quality. Scientific concepts were clearly explained and well demonstrated. Projects in electronics were prepared carefully. Teaching in chemistry included the introduction of industrial applications and effective group work. In biology, there were varied learning activities including the use of games and discussion. Teachers in all the sciences set

and corrected work conscientiously and, in most instances, gave helpful written feedback. However, some did not pay enough attention to the checking and reinforcing of students' understanding during lessons. In a few instances, planning and presentation were poor or insufficient attention was paid to health and safety issues.

41 The teaching of business studies was generally good and some was outstanding, although a few lessons were boring for students. Students experienced different methods of working including class exercises, individual case studies and group visits. There were comprehensive schemes of work but lesson plans did not show how teachers were intending to meet students' differing abilities. Teachers frequently checked that learning had taken place. Assessments were of an appropriate standard, and they were marked fairly and consistently. Students' progress was reviewed and carefully recorded. Teaching programmes included an appropriate emphasis on information technology.

42 English lessons were well prepared and effectively taught. Learning objectives were clear. Students worked purposefully. They were generally confident in expressing their own ideas and were able to disagree with each other without undermining the co-operative atmosphere in the class. Group work was well organised; there were clear objectives and effective reporting-back procedures. Teachers were skilled at probing students' responses to questions in order to strengthen their understanding. They made good use of handouts and audio-visual material and provided effective support and guidance within coursework and projects. Students' work was imaginatively displayed in classrooms. Assessment was thorough and supportive and students were told what they needed to do to improve their performance. Some of the students' written work was below the required standard.

43 In geography, the teaching was always effective and, at best, inspiring. The teaching team has created well-organised schemes of work which enable students to acquire the necessary geographical skills. The schemes are continually revised and improved. Teaching was imaginative and lively. A town planning exercise enabled students to practise many skills, including decision making, group work and group presentation. Teachers provided good opportunities for students to learn and to develop their confidence through residential fieldwork and short study visits. They held regular performance reviews of students' progress and kept good records.

44 History teachers planned their lessons carefully to take account of students' differing levels of knowledge. Students took a leading role in class discussions and contributed their ideas confidently. In one lesson, for example, students mounted a lively and knowledgeable debate, based on the political positions taken by Gladstone and Parnell in Parliament in 1882. Teachers produced a range of useful study guides and encouraged students to assess their own work before handing it in for marking.

When assessing essays, teachers did not always take into account the extent to which students had addressed the questions and, sometimes, they failed to comment on spelling and grammatical errors.

45 Some lessons in politics and sociology were of a high standard. Teachers planned classwork thoroughly. Most question and answer sessions were effective in extending students' knowledge. Staff gave helpful guidance and support to students on an individual basis. In politics, a variety of teaching methods was employed. The use of diaries and short tests helped students to keep up to date with recent political events. Teachers in both subjects regularly set and marked students' work. In some lessons, methods of working lacked sufficient variety, and there was little use of teaching aids where these would have been useful. In a number of lessons, the introduction to new topics was inadequate, or teachers failed to summarise the key points which emerged from the lesson.

46 Modern languages teachers planned their lessons thoroughly and took care to ensure that students could understand and correctly use grammatical structures. Most conducted as much of the lesson as possible in the language being studied, some did not. Students were set appropriate tasks, on a regular basis, and their work was usually marked thoroughly. However, there was some variability in assessment and the criteria for awarding grades. The linguistic achievement expected of students was not always specified. Teachers relied on a narrow range of teaching aids; most lessons were based on handouts and texts. They provided few opportunities for students to work on their own or in groups.

47 The standard of teaching was high in design technology and art. Students were helped to develop skills and understand concepts. Programmes of work were clear. Teachers used a variety of teaching methods and were sensitive to the different levels of attainment and ability of students. They worked hard to broaden students' views and understanding of their work. Teachers made good use of supporting materials such as handouts and audio-visual aids. Students were familiar with, and understood, the assessment schemes used for grading their work.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

48 Students' achievements at GCE A level are good. Examination pass rates are high and have improved steadily over the last three years as the following table shows.

College pass rates, 1994-96, for students aged 16 to 18 entered for GCE A level examinations.

	1994	1995	1996
Number of entries	1,189	1,128	1,393
Pass rate grades A to E	84.7%	85.6%	86.4%

49 Comparisons of GCE A level and vocational results at the college with national results show that:

- the students, aged 16 to 18, entered for two or more GCE AS/A level examinations in 1996 scored, on average, 5.4 points per entry (where grade A=10 points, E=2). This places the college in the top 10 per cent of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure based on the performance tables published by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE)
- 61 per cent of the 23 students in their final year of study on advanced vocational courses included in the DfEE's 1996 performance tables were successful. This places the college among the bottom third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure. A further five students subsequently gained their awards.

50 Pass rates at GCE A level for individual subjects studied at the college compare favourably with the equivalent national average pass rates for sixth form colleges:

- there are 14 subjects in which college pass rates are significantly above the national average
- there are six subjects in which college pass rates are close to the national average
- there are five subjects in which college pass rates are significantly below the national average.

51 The college subscribes to an external service which enables it to compare students' achievements on GCE A level courses with those predicted on the basis of their GCSE grades. This comparison shows that over the last three years students' achievements were:

- above the predicted level in six subjects
- in line with predictions in 19 subjects
- below the predicted level in five subjects.

52 Students' achievements on their courses are generally good. For example:

- students in mathematics and science are confident users of graphical calculators and computers
- students in English achieve high standards in spoken and written work
- students' fieldwork skills in geography are outstanding
- history students have good debating skills
- some language students speak and write the foreign language accurately and fluently
- art and design students are skilful at evaluating their own work.

53 Students' achievements could be improved in some areas. For example:

- some science students showed poor skills in experimental design and execution
- some history, political studies and sociology students did not apply themselves as effectively as they might have done to work in class
- in foreign language lessons, some students were reluctant to use the language being studied.

54 Retention rates have been good for several years, at over 97 per cent. The median rate for sixth form colleges in 1994-95 was 91 per cent. Interim figures indicate that the retention rate for the current year will be marginally lower.

55 The college gathers comprehensive and detailed information about students' destinations. The information is used by students, teachers, parents and partner schools. The data on students' destinations for the last three years are set out in the following table.

Students' destinations, 1994-96

	1994	1995	1996
Number of students completing their courses	325	209	373
Progressing to higher education	80%	80%	80%
Progressing to other courses in further education	12%	11%	9%
In employment	5%	6%	10%
Other	2%	3%	1%
Unknown	1%	0%	0%

QUALITY ASSURANCE

56 The college's quality assurance group is led by the deputy principal. It has only recently started to draw together a coherent framework of policies and initiatives, many of which have existed at various levels in the college for some years. It has done this by developing a single policy document, setting out how the commitment to quality will be fulfilled. The document was issued to staff in January 1997 after a period of consultation. Staff are still largely unfamiliar with it. It has not been formally approved by governors, but has been drawn to their attention.

57 The policy document explains the vocabulary of quality assurance, lists existing policies, introduces college-wide and area-level performance indicators, shows how planning and review are linked, and provides a calendar of activities. It is backed by an operational plan for quality assurance for 1996-97. The plan is ambitious. It shows the considerable amount of work the college still has to do in order to develop appropriate documentation, and to set standards and targets for many of its services,

functions and activities. There are some serious omissions from the policy document and the operational plan. The college's intention to work towards achieving the Investor in People standard by March 1997 is not included. The contributions of staff appraisal and staff development to quality assurance are not made clear.

58 The college's existing quality assurance arrangements have a number of positive features on which it can build. Managers at all levels down to subject heads produce annual plans for their area of activity. These form a basis for self-assessment and setting targets. Self-assessment reports are written to a common format based on Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. Plans and self-assessments are of variable quality. Some are detailed and would provide a valuable model for the others which are less effective. The college has established standard subject area performance indicators for the first time this year. Staff at subject area and section level are experienced in monitoring and reporting on enrolments, and on students' progress and achievements. They make good use of data from an independent external service which provide 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. Staff teaching on the GNVQ programme are attempting to develop a similar system of their own.

59 GNVQs have been included in the curriculum for three years. The provision is small, accounting for 5 per cent of students. The GNVQ steering group has set up an internal verification system. The system has worked reasonably well and is being refined with the help of the external verifier. The GNVQ quality system has not been drawn into the general college system for quality assurance though staff who teach on GNVQ and on GCE A level courses are finding that GNVQ approaches can benefit their other teaching.

60 The college systematically gathers the views of students and their parents using a variety of questionnaires which are issued after induction, at the end of each year, and at consultation evenings. The results are quickly analysed and circulated to relevant managers, staff and students, but not to parents. The outcomes of surveys inform planning. Surveys of students' opinions are less consistently carried out at subject area level. Students contribute formally to course reviews in only a few areas. Where they do, their opinions are clearly valued.

61 All of the college's staff have an entitlement to five days training and development each year. The college has a modest training budget of £13,000, amounting to 0.6 per cent of the payroll for 1996-97. Some of the training budget is allocated to area heads to support the needs of their curriculum areas. The remainder is allocated to college-wide training in line with priorities identified for the year. In 1995-96, 89 per cent of teaching staff and 13 per cent of non-teaching staff attended one or more external courses. The college provided some form of training for all

teachers and for 79 per cent of non-teaching staff. Staff development is well managed. An assistant principal maintains detailed records of all training and development, and staff are required to provide an evaluation of every activity in which they take part. Few staff have undertaken training aimed at increasing their knowledge of the world of work, despite the launch of the GNVQ programme. New staff follow an induction programme and are assigned a mentor. Those consulted were generally satisfied with the support they had received.

62 Teaching and non-teaching staff have separate appraisal schemes. The scheme for non-teaching staff has been in place since summer 1996 but its implementation is proceeding slowly. The appraisal system for teachers is being reviewed. A new system has not been agreed. Classroom observation was a feature of the old system and will be included in the new one. No explicit criteria exist against which performance in the classroom can be judged.

63 The college has a concise and clearly-written student charter. It contains few measurable standards and is at present under review. As yet, students have not been asked to contribute to the review. Students know of the charter, but do not feel it to be important. The charter makes mention of a grievance procedure: this is not well publicised and students were not aware of its content.

64 The college's first self-assessment report was published in December 1996. The report closely follows the format of Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. The subject area self-assessment reports were a source of information. The report details the evidence on which judgements are based. It includes a section on teaching and learning although this is not informed by lesson observations. The report identifies strengths, areas for development, actions and grades. Some key weaknesses are missing from the report and some strengths are overstated.

RESOURCES

Staffing

65 Teaching staff are highly qualified. Over 98 per cent have a first degree and a teaching qualification. Fifteen per cent have a higher degree. It is college policy to employ staff on permanent contracts whenever possible. Eight of the 67 teachers are on fractional full-time contracts, equivalent to 3.2 full-time staff. This figure does not include the college's foreign language assistants, peripatetic music teachers and sports coaches. The college's self-assessment report acknowledges that few staff have recent relevant commercial or industrial experience. The college has invested in preparing staff for training and development lead body awards in anticipation of an expansion of vocational programmes. Thirteen per cent now possess awards and a further 12 per cent are working towards them.

66 Technical and clerical staff are experienced and suitably qualified for the work they do. Many of the clerical staff work only during term time. There is good technical support in science and design and technology. Other areas are not as well supported. In particular, there are too few technicians to adequately maintain the college's computers.

67 Staff are deployed efficiently. Between 1993 and 1996, 28 staff left the college and there were 32 new appointments. Staffing is reviewed annually in the light of an analysis of curriculum needs and operational changes. A comprehensive audit of staff skills and qualifications has been completed to assist the review. Teaching loads are carefully monitored. Over the past three years they have progressively increased.

Equipment/learning resources

68 Most areas of the college are well equipped. The computers in business studies are of industrial standard. Mathematics students use graphical calculators and have access to sufficient computers for individual study. Design and technology and art have a particularly good range of equipment which includes video editing, digital imaging, and garment making facilities. Science has an appropriate range of equipment and adequate storage for hazardous chemicals. Geography has a good range of basic equipment for field work. The provision of text books in most subjects is generally good, particularly in English and geography. There are insufficient text books for business studies in the library. Few facilities were available within the modern languages area for students to work on their own.

69 The library is bright and clean. It has a generous provision of computer workstations and is equipped with a security system and computerised book management. It opens before the start of the teaching day for students who arrive at college early but the closing time makes it difficult for evening class students to gain access and the library does not open during holidays. Students expressed satisfaction with the help and support they receive from the library staff. Library staff liaise effectively with teachers over the purchase of books but the librarian is not a member of any cross-college planning or co-ordinating body. The library budget is enabling a rapid increase of the bookstock, starting from a low base. There is a wide range of compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) databases. There is no systematic monitoring of the use of books.

70 The provision of computers is generally satisfactory. The ratio of students to computers is about 9:1. The availability of a significant number of computers in the library and other open areas improves the access which students have to information technology. Most computers are linked by a college-wide network across the two sites and a standard range of software packages is available. Additional packages for several curriculum areas, including chemistry, mathematics, music and design, are accessible across this network. A few computers are only able to run basic packages.

This restricts the effectiveness of the service in some areas. There is limited access to CD-ROMs over the network and the use of the Internet is also limited. The college is addressing these limitations and an upgrade of computers has been ordered.

Accommodation

71 The college is located close to the centre of Shrewsbury. An accommodation strategy commissioned in 1994 was implemented vigorously during 1995-96. This has led to additional teaching space for existing and additional students and to significantly improved library and information technology areas. The building programme also included the conversion of the two listed buildings on the main site to provide improved teaching space, administrative offices and good-quality student support and staff resource areas. The town centre location has transport and other advantages for students. Students like the site and its riverside frontage.

72 The library is on the ground floor of a two-storey building, 100 metres from the main site across a busy road. Information technology and business studies classrooms are on the first floor. The college owns a large area of former warehouse space which is attached to the library building and is available for development. It also owns a sports ground and changing pavilion three miles from the main campus. College-funded transport enables students to make good use of the sports field.

73 Students' work is celebrated through extensive displays in rooms and corridors. The main student social area, adjacent to the refectory, is attractively decorated and furnished. Access to much of the college, except the library, presents severe difficulties for people with restricted mobility.

74 Buildings are generally clean, well decorated and well maintained. External areas are reasonably well lit. The college has planned its teaching accommodation effectively. Classrooms have generally been grouped into departmental areas and matched to teaching needs. Mathematics, geography, history, design technology and art are located in good-quality teaching accommodation. The physics and biology laboratories provide good working environments. Some teaching spaces are too small, lack storage space or have no natural light. There is no adequate space for performing arts and no large lecture theatre. The main hall is currently used for these and other activities. Students have the use of nearby public recreational facilities.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

75 The main strengths of the college are:

- effective and committed governors who have valuable expertise and experience
- a clear management structure and effective management
- strategic planning which is thorough and based on sound analysis

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- a broadening curriculum which includes courses for adults
 - a comprehensive curriculum enrichment programme
 - high standards of teaching
 - close and effective relations with local schools and colleges and a productive relationship with the Shropshire Chamber of Commerce Training and Enterprise
 - the high regard with which the college is held within the community
 - comprehensive and effective procedures for the support of students
 - existing quality assurance procedures which the college can build upon
 - examination pass rates which are high and which have improved consistently over three years
 - high retention rates
 - well-qualified teaching staff who are deployed efficiently
 - improved accommodation.

76 To continue to build on its strengths the college should:

- develop its quality assurance systems, including standards, targets and measures needed for many of its services, functions and activities
- review its course provision at intermediate level
- improve the effectiveness of some of its new management policies and systems
- extend the availability of work experience as an aspect of curriculum provision
- co-ordinate the learning support service with other aspects of learning
- deal with the lack of specialist staff able to undertake diagnostic assessment
- improve arrangements to support adult students
- continue with its accommodation strategy, particularly in respect of access for people with restricted mobility.

FIGURES

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- 1 Percentage student numbers by age (as at November 1996)

 - 2 Percentage student numbers by level of study (as at November 1996)

 - 3 Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at November 1996)

 - 4 Staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (as at November 1996)

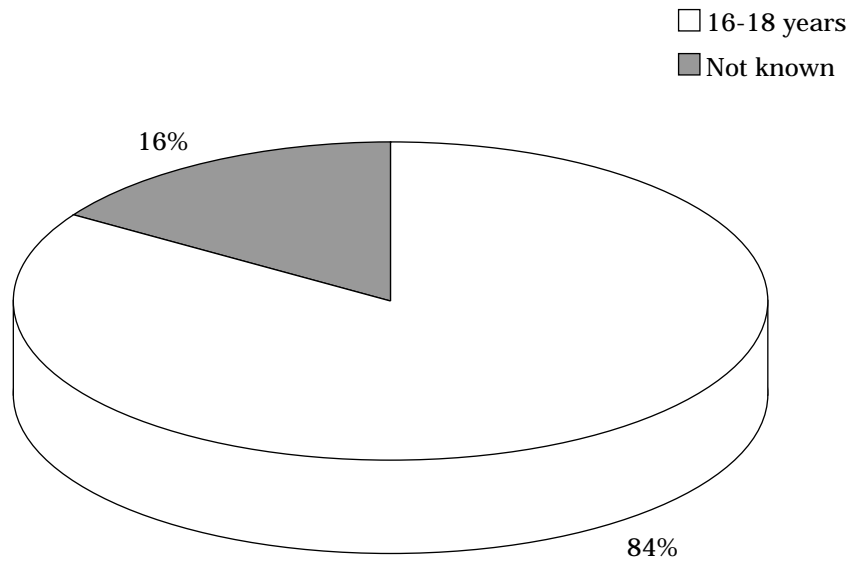
 - 5 Income (for 12 months to July 1996)

 - 6 Expenditure (for 12 months to July 1996)

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

Figure 1

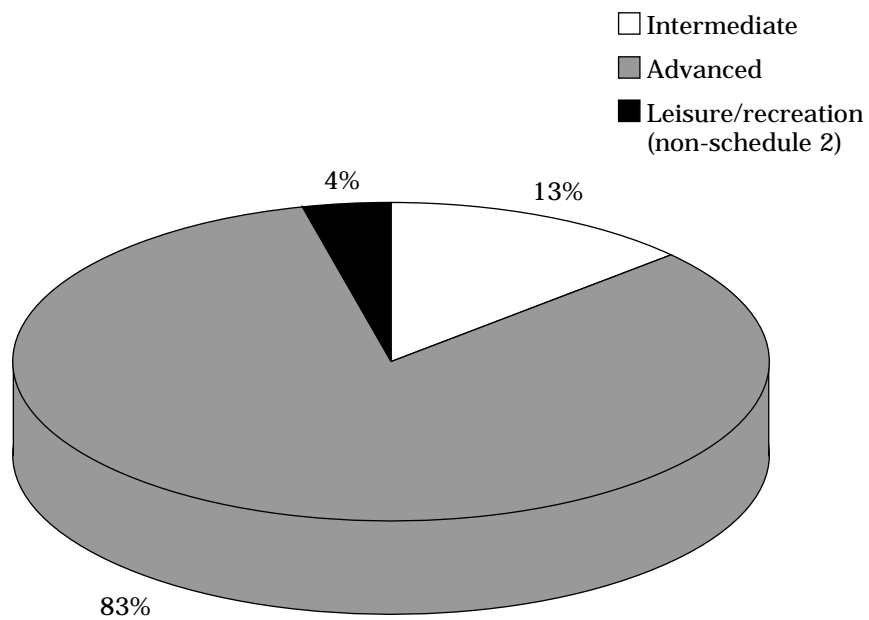
Shrewsbury Sixth Form College: percentage student numbers by age (as at November 1996)



Student numbers: 1,166

Figure 2

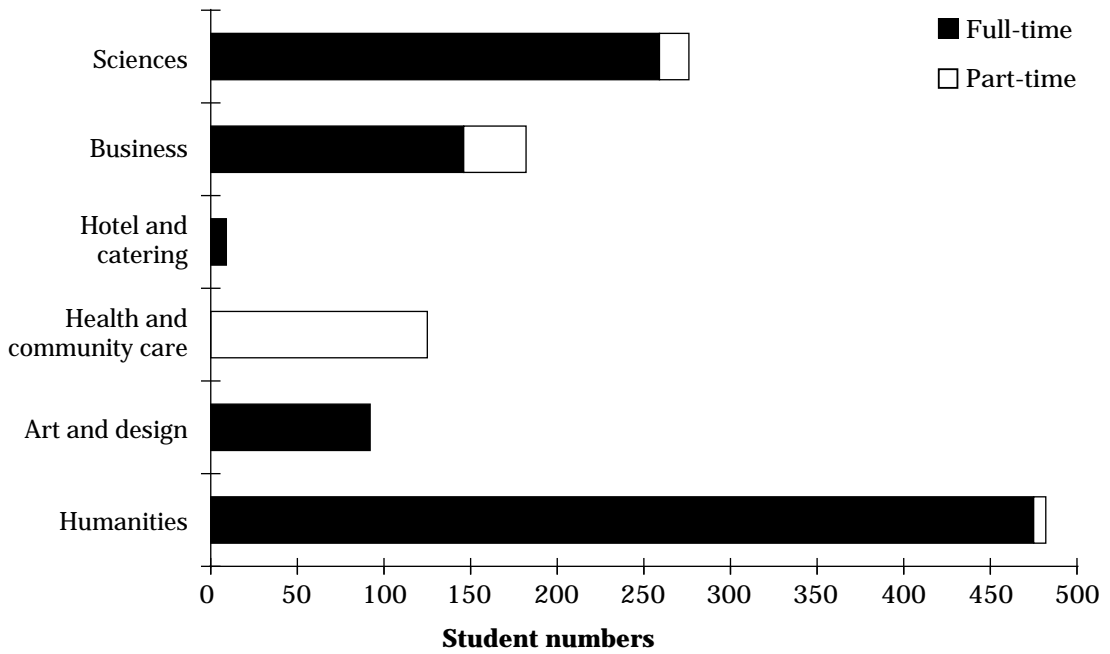
Shrewsbury Sixth Form College: percentage student numbers by level of study (as at November 1996)



Student numbers: 1,166

Figure 3

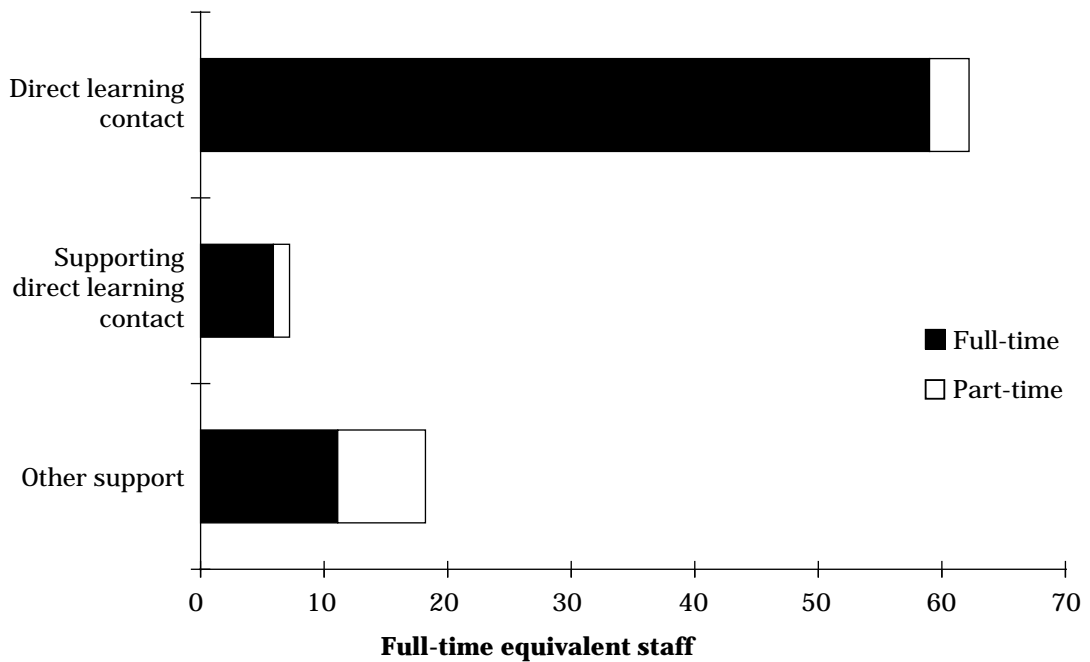
Shrewsbury Sixth Form College: student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at November 1996)



Student numbers: 1,166

Figure 4

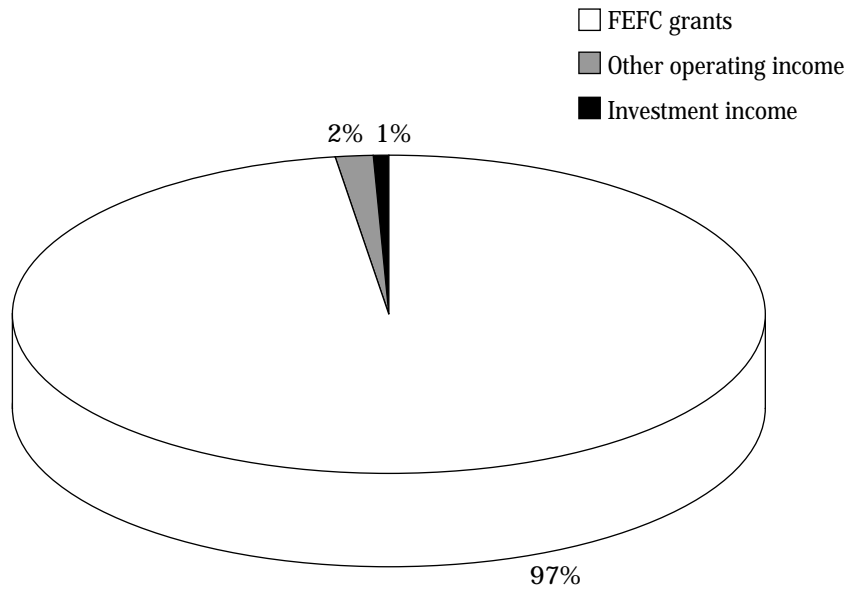
Shrewsbury Sixth Form College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (as at November 1996)



Full-time equivalent staff: 88

Figure 5

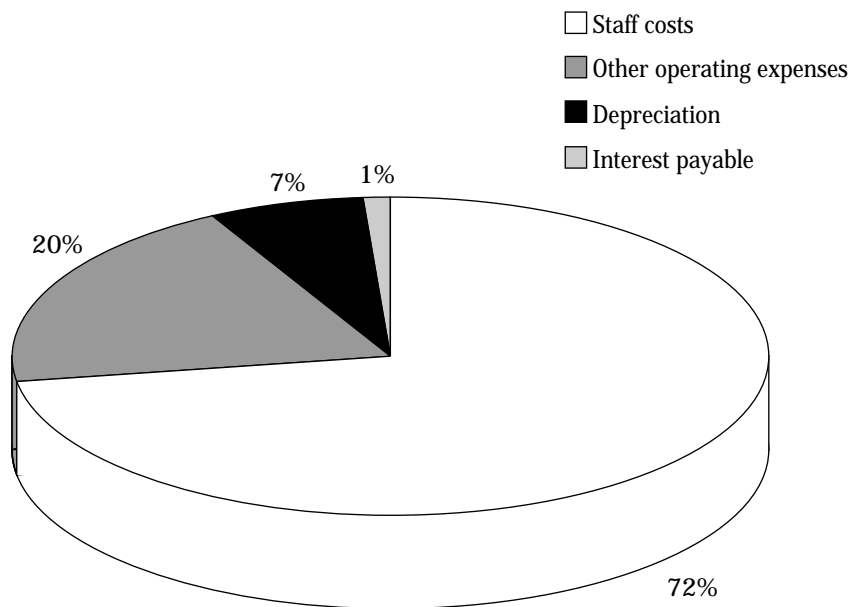
Shrewsbury Sixth Form College: income (for 12 months to July 1996)



Income: £2,720,000

Figure 6

Shrewsbury Sixth Form College: expenditure (for 12 months to July 1996)



Expenditure: £2,770,000

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