

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

St Brendan's Sixth Form College

April 1996

**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 1995, some 208 college inspections had been completed. The grade profiles for aspects of cross-college provision and programme areas for the 208 colleges are shown in the following table.

College grade profiles 1993-95

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

FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 49/96

ST BRENDAN'S SIXTH FORM COLLEGE

SOUTH WEST REGION

Inspected May 1995-January 1996

Summary

St Brendan's Sixth Form College is a Roman Catholic college in Bristol, one of only two sixth form colleges in the south-west region. It offers a wide range of GCE A level and GCSE subjects and some GNVQ courses. Its strengths include: close links with partner schools, and with the Diocese of Clifton and the Roman Catholic community; a varied and well-designed programme of enrichment studies; and a concern for the welfare and support of all its students. Since incorporation, the senior management team has achieved much, including a growth in student numbers, the introduction of a thorough and well-documented strategic planning process and the establishment of an effective management information system to support that process. Staff are well qualified, adaptable and highly motivated. Most teaching is well planned and effective, although there is scope for standards to be raised in some curriculum areas. Attendance and retention rates are high. Overall, students' performance in external examinations is satisfactory. If the college is to make still further progress it should: address the range and levels of the courses it offers, which do not fully match the college's mission statement; improve management development opportunities for middle managers; ensure greater consistency in quality assurance procedures and the tutorial process; complete the introduction of staff appraisal; improve the use of accommodation; and ensure that all college policies are adequately monitored.

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	3

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Science	3	Art, design and the performing arts	2
Mathematics and computing	2	English and languages	2
Business studies	2	Theology and social science	2
Leisure, tourism and sports studies	2	History, geography and economics	2
Health and community care	3		

INTRODUCTION

1 St Brendan's Sixth Form College was inspected between May 1995 and January 1996. Thirteen inspectors spent 55 days in the college. They observed 138 teaching sessions, involving 1,448 students, examined students' work, inspected the college's enrolment procedures and attended a parents' evening, two assemblies and two governors' meetings. Inspectors also held meetings with governors, staff and students, parents and employers, staff from partner schools, a representative of the Diocese of Clifton and a representative of the local training and enterprise council (TEC).

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 St Brendan's Sixth Form College is a designated institution under the terms of *The Further and Higher Education Act 1992*, and the majority of governors are appointees of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Clifton. It was established in 1979 as a result of the reorganisation of Roman Catholic secondary education in Bristol and Bath and occupies the premises of a former boys' grammar school. The college has four partner Catholic schools for pupils aged 11 to 16, three in Bristol and one in Bath. It also draws Catholic students from Avon and parts of Gloucestershire, Somerset and Wiltshire. Other students who support the college's ethos and aims are admitted if places are available. Students apply from over 70 schools within a radius of 30 miles from the college.

3 Most state schools in Bristol and Bath are for pupils aged 11 to 18. There are nine other further education colleges in St Brendan's Sixth Form College's large catchment area. The college is in competition with these institutions for post-16 students but it cannot admit all applicants if it is to maintain a high proportion of Roman Catholic students. At present, approximately 45 per cent of its students are Roman Catholic.

4 Five per cent of the population of Avon, including Bristol, are 16 to 19 year olds. In 1995, 67 per cent of Bristol's 16 year olds stayed on in full-time education; the figure for Avon as a whole was 72 per cent. The unemployment rate in the city and the county is about 7 per cent, which is just below the national average.

5 The relative prosperity of the Avon area reflects the success of a diverse range of industries and commercial enterprises. At present, the financial service sector is buoyant, the services sector is expanding, and a number of London-based firms have relocated to the area. Bristol and Bath have large student populations. There are three universities and a college of higher education.

6 St Brendan's Sixth Form College occupies a single site and has its own playing fields. The main buildings date from 1960. The art and home economics block was built in 1982. There is some temporary hatted accommodation.

7 The college has met its enrolment targets. At the time of the inspection, there were 1,043 full-time and 46 part-time students enrolled in six of the Further Education Funding Council's (FEFC's) 10 programme areas, of whom 1,033 (95 per cent) were between 16 and 18 years of age. Enrolments by age, by level of study and by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figures 1, 2 and 3, respectively. The college has 66 full-time equivalent teachers and 27 full-time equivalent support staff. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4.

8 The college is organised into five faculties: humanities and business studies, creative arts and technology, languages and communication, science and mathematics, and theology and social science. The senior management team comprises the principal, the vice-principal for curriculum, the vice-principal for resources, the vice-principal for personnel and the principal tutor.

9 The college's stated mission is to be the Catholic Christian presence in post-16 education in the area. The college seeks to promote high standards of teaching and learning in an environment in which worship and religious reflection play a central role.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

10 The college offers a broad range of General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level) and General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) courses. In 1995, students sat for 32 GCE A level, 15 GCE advanced supplementary (AS) and 19 GCSE subjects. Less commonly encountered subjects include Italian, food and nutrition, textiles and fashion, classical civilisation and design and technology. The vocational programme comprises advanced General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) in health and social care, leisure and tourism, and business. There are intermediate GNVQs in these subjects and in art and design. At the time of inspection, six students requiring foundation level programmes were integrated with GNVQ intermediate groups. The arrangement has not proved successful and the college is considering the introduction of foundation level GNVQ programmes next September.

11 The college's mission to welcome all Catholic students over 16 years of age includes addressing issues of 'justice, equal opportunities, educational disadvantage and underprivilege'. At present, this statement does not fully match the college's range of provision. In addition to the lack of foundation level courses, there is little provision for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. A member of staff has responsibility for the co-ordination of support for students with learning difficulties. Students with dyslexia are supported by an educational psychologist and those with hearing impairments by a full-time specialist tutor. Access for students with restricted mobility is poor. A GCE A level evening class in theology and a computer literacy class are part of the small programme of provision for adults.

12 Students with above average academic abilities attend extension classes which offer them additional subject support. There is opportunity to study for more than three GCE AS/A levels and to attend tutorials aimed to prepare students for entry to Oxford or Cambridge Universities.

13 All students are required to follow a minimum number of enrichment studies which are intended to serve the education of the whole person in accordance with the college's mission. The programme is large and varied. It allows for consideration of moral, religious, political and social questions while respecting students' independence of thought. The certificate of theology calls on all students to be involved in a 'journey of theology' in which their beliefs and values are enriched, extended, challenged and supported. The course is well designed and well delivered and is an example of good religious education for 16 to 19 year olds. Students' agreement to participate in the certificate course is sought before they are offered a place at the college. The wide choice of liberal studies includes sports, drama, art and community service. Students can gain further nationally-recognised qualifications, for example in first aid and computer literacy. The personal, social and careers education provision is carefully planned.

14 Christian beliefs are encouraged and informed by a variety of activities in addition to the enrichment programme. Each student attends an assembly once a week. These are often taken by the principal and include prayers. A Catholic chaplain works in the college for three days and an assistant chaplain for four days a week. Two members of the college staff support the work of the chaplaincy in organising visits and residential weekends. The chaplaincy is outward looking and its role is central to the college's supportive ethos. There is a celebration of Mass in the college chapel three times a week and on Holy Days, which is open to all members of the college community. The chaplaincy encourages the students to be involved with interest groups and charities, including the Catholic Fund for Overseas Development and Amnesty International.

15 Relationships with the diocese are excellent. The Bishop of Clifton, the college's trustee, lends his support and encouragement and has increased the time allowance for the chaplain. The diocesan religious education adviser is supportive of the way in which the theology courses are designed and delivered. He uses college staff to teach the Catholic Certificate in Religious Studies, which is a requirement for all teachers and catechists working in Catholic schools and parishes.

16 Close and regular links are maintained with the college's four partner schools. These are co-ordinated by the college's senior management team in close consultation with school staff. The links are greatly valued by the schools involved. The principal chairs the local Catholic headteachers' meetings. School pupils visit the college for enrichment days, open evenings and study days. The college holds a sports day for year 7 pupils.

17 There are two compact arrangements with higher education institutions, La Sainte Union College, Southampton, and the University of the West of England, Bristol, under which college students achieving agreed results will receive particular consideration when making applications.

18 Links with employers are mainly through the work experience arranged for GNVQ students and some of the students on GCE A level design and technology and computer studies courses. Some work experience placements have resulted in jobs. Employers spoken to during the inspection value their contact with the college. The college has investigated ways of working in conjunction with the Brislington Industrial Estate Employers Association. It has carried out a survey of local training needs, the results of which are still under discussion. There is limited contact with the local TEC.

19 The college has appointed a marketing co-ordinator who reports to the vice-principal for curriculum. It defines its core market as the 16 to 19 age group and its main publication is the prospectus for full-time students. The prospectus includes the college's mission and profiles of former students. It offers detailed, clear information and is attractively produced. Questionnaires are used effectively to obtain information from students and from pupils in the partner schools. Some students spoken to during the inspection were unclear about the college's policy of offering an unconditional place, and were much more aware of the college's GCE AS/A level and GCSE provision than its vocational courses.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

20 The governing body has 18 members. Ten are foundation governors appointed by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Clifton. There are two staff governors, two parent governors and a student governor, all of whom are elected, a representative of the TEC, the principal and a senior member of the college staff. Members bring to the board a wide range of skills, experience and expertise, for example in personnel management, accountancy, general management and knowledge of the community.

21 Members receive carefully-prepared committee papers which help them contribute to the regular cycle of meetings. Meetings are well attended and purposeful. There are three standing committees: personnel (staff and students), of which employment policy and remuneration are subcommittees; planning, curriculum and student provision, of which audit is a subcommittee; and resources (finance, equipment and premises). Each of the governors sits on at least one of the standing committees. The committees operate in a business-like manner and carry out much of the governing body's work. One of the vice-principals facilitates the work of each of the committees. Governors speak well of the collaboration between themselves and the college's senior managers.

22 The governing body's standing committee concerned with curriculum receives presentations from members of the college's extended senior management team about particular areas of work. However, some of the governors would welcome further training and briefing sessions to inform them about the college and its work. Governors attend many college events, including open evenings and end-of-term lunches with staff. Some staff would nevertheless like more contact with governors. The governors have been provided with a statement of their duties and have adopted a code of conduct, agreed a job description for the clerk to the governors, and approved the introduction of a register of members' interests. The governing body has not yet considered ways in which it might review its own performance.

23 Members of the senior management team work together effectively. The college is well managed. There is a strong sense of corporate identity and a common direction and purpose. The vice-principals manage the senior tutors (curriculum) who head the faculties, senior tutors (pastoral) and the senior administrative staff. The principal tutor has curricular responsibility for liberal studies and oversight of spiritual life and Christian action. Senior managers' responsibilities are clearly described in the staff handbook. Each faculty head manages approximately six department heads and each senior tutor (pastoral) manages 10 personal tutors. Within the faculties, heads of department are responsible for their subject teams.

24 Some departments are better managed than others. In the best run departments communication is regular and effective, subject teachers meet regularly to discuss operational and curriculum issues and resolve any problems. There is scope for more liaison between subject areas, for example over good practice in teaching and learning.

25 There are 10 task groups charged with the development of areas such as the chaplaincy, the library, information technology, staff development, health and safety and the college's centenary celebrations. Through these, many staff have the opportunity to become involved in college issues outside their normal duties. The vice-principals oversee the task groups, receive their minutes and meet their chairmen to discuss progress and future action. Some of the groups have made good progress; one, for example, has produced an information technology strategy for the college. The groups are the main college instrument for the development of significant cross-college work. However, attendance is voluntary, minutes are not circulated widely and some groups have clearer objectives than others.

26 There are good lines of communication, including regular formal senior management team meetings. The twice-termly staff meetings and the principal's weekly briefings keep staff informed. Senior managers take advantage of the small scale of the organisation to keep in close contact with staff. Some support staff have difficulty in attending meetings because of work patterns or difficulties with cover arrangements.

27 The strategic plan is a comprehensive and useful operational document which is frequently referred to and regularly reviewed. It is accompanied by a financial plan which forecasts costs and assigns responsibilities for action. Progress against operational objectives is monitored during the year and reviewed by senior managers at an all-day meeting in December. Senior and middle managers meet in February to reflect on progress and plan the next year's work. Teachers are consulted on development plans.

28 Elements of the management information system are networked to faculty areas and the staff workroom. Senior managers are beginning to use the wide range of management data available for the analysis of, for example, group size, teaching load, space utilisation and enrolments by postcode and partner school. All managers have the basic information necessary to carry out their responsibilities, including information on student retention, attendance, enrolments and destinations. Some make more effective use of it than others. An electronic system for registering attendance has not been wholly successful, mainly because the reports generated are over complex. Although used by the senior tutors (pastoral) to support discussions with students and parents, its main function is to produce reports for external purposes.

29 Enrolment targets are set and monitored. Examination results and destinations data are collated, analysed and published. The college also calculates annual retention rates and records the reasons why students leave their courses.

30 Over 98 per cent of the college's income is derived from the FEFC. Resources are effectively deployed. Financial allocations are controlled by senior managers. The vice-principal for curriculum manages the teaching staff budget and the budget for consumables and materials is devolved to faculty heads. Budget allocations are made in response to a bidding process which takes into account the cost differences between courses. The principles underlying the allocation of finance are widely understood and accepted. Funding for capital equipment and new course developments is bid for against priorities. Most bids for consumable have been met in the year in which they were sought, and most capital bids have been met. Financial reports are produced about every half-term. Middle managers do not find them particularly easy to use, but can monitor spending directly through the management information system. A useful report for all managers compares costs per student with funding per student for each course. It has been presented to governors, but the college has yet to exploit its findings.

31 Policy on health and safety is set out clearly in a manual which identifies the objectives to be met, the structure within which they will be met, and those responsible for implementation of particular aspects of the policy. The governors have approved the policy, but have not monitored or reviewed its progress, nor included responsibility for health and safety

in the terms of reference of any of the subcommittees. There is a college task group for health and safety, chaired by the premises manager, which investigates issues brought to its attention.

32 The vice-principal for personnel is responsible for the college's equal opportunities policy, which covers fully the recruitment of staff and students, admissions and the curriculum. There is a separate policy to cover students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities; recent actions include the installation of some wheelchair ramps and the introduction of an appointments policy for staff. The equal opportunities task group has not met since December 1994. The responsibility for the monitoring and review of equal opportunities lies with the governors' personnel subcommittee but no review of the policy was presented to governors last year.

33 The college fulfils the requirements of sections 44 and 45 of *The Further and Higher Education Act 1992* by providing a weekly opportunity for students to participate in an act of worship and by providing religious education for all students.

34 The college's income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1995 are shown in figures 5 and 6. The college's average level of funding for 1995-96 is £19.84 per unit. The median for sixth form colleges is £19.37 per unit.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

35 The prospectus clearly states the college's admissions policy; it gives first priority to students from the four partner schools, then to Roman Catholic pupils from the wider catchment area. It is made clear to all students that they must be prepared to commit themselves to the Christian ethos of the college.

36 Pupils in the four partner schools in Bristol and Bath are kept well informed. They receive information about the college from year 9 onwards, and in year 10 they visit the college in connection with their project or assignment work. All partner school leavers who are thinking of coming to St Brendan's Sixth Form College are interviewed by college staff at their school and are invited, with their parents, to one of the three college open evenings. Students not attending one of the partner schools are interviewed at the college. Each applicant has two interviews. At the first of these they are provided with information on the college's courses and its ethos and requirements.

37 The first interview provides the opportunity for the student to review the full range of courses on offer; the second, during enrolment, to decide a specific course of study. Care is taken to help students choose a programme which meets their needs, interests and abilities. Subsequently, careers officers and staff from the partner schools are present at enrolment to offer advice. The college has established a compact with its partner schools to take into account non-GCSE qualifications such as the Duke of

Edinburgh's Award Scheme. Students are asked to record any learning difficulties on their enrolment form and all are given a test for basic literacy and numeracy.

38 At enrolment, students meet their personal tutor and receive a student handbook which details the services provided by the college. Induction to the college is undertaken by personal tutors. There is also a specific induction programme for each course.

39 Transfer between programmes can be undertaken during the first half-term of study and exceptionally up to Christmas. Transfers require discussions with the personal tutor, the senior pastoral tutor and the careers service. Late transfers also involve parents. The number of transfers is low (approximately 5 per cent) and has declined in recent years.

40 An ethos of care and support for students underpins the college's work, and all staff are aware of their responsibility for students' welfare and progress. Pastoral support is managed by the five senior pastoral tutors, each of whom leads a team of personal tutors responsible for around 200 students. On four days a week, personal tutors meet their tutor groups for 10 minutes for registration and briefings. On the fifth day there is a 15-minute assembly. Tutors meet each student at least once a term to review their progress. Records of achievement are maintained and these include contributions from subject and personal tutors. Students spoken to during the inspection reported differences in the thoroughness of the review process. Some spoke positively about their relationship with their tutors; others were more critical.

41 Attendance is monitored carefully both in tutor groups, where a central register is completed, and at each class. There are well-defined reporting procedures; after more than three absences parents are notified.

42 The college attempts to balance students' independence with reasonable monitoring and control. The learning agreement between the student and the college makes clear the college's expectations on behaviour, attendance and the production of work. For students who fail to meet their obligations there is an effective process of referral, advice and support, culminating in a written contract with the student, copied to staff concerned and to parents. Failure to meet the conditions of this written contract results in temporary exclusion. There are currently 13 students with such contracts. Students who decide not to complete their course are counselled by tutors and interviewed by the vice-principal for personnel.

43 A professional counsellor is in college for two days each week, which is a sufficient level of provision for the present demand. The counsellor is working to make personal tutors more aware of the service. However, arrangements for booking appointments lack confidentiality and the service does not provide adequately for emergencies.

44 Well-organised, comprehensive advice on careers and opportunities in higher education is available to all students. There is also an effective careers library. Advice and education about careers is provided within the personal, social and careers education programme. Attendance is compulsory. Officers from Careers Service West provide additional advice to students intending to enter employment directly they leave college. Relationships between the careers service and personal tutors are good. The attention given to writing and checking students' references is an indication of the high quality of support provided for students planning to enter higher education.

45 The college involves parents in its work. There are regular college newsletters and the parent teacher association raises funds and organises social events. Children of most of the governors have attended the college. Parents speak highly of the way the college keeps them informed of the progress of their children.

46 Students are encouraged to become involved in the running of the college. Each tutor group elects one of its number as the representative for regular meetings with the senior pastoral tutor. An active student council meets every fortnight with the principal and senior managers of the college. Some students grumble about the level of monitoring and control and the involvement of their parents but most are appreciative of the security provided by the college.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

47 Of the 138 sessions inspected, 58 per cent had strengths which outweighed weaknesses. Only 4 per cent had weaknesses which outweighed strengths. The grades awarded as a result of the inspection are shown in the following table.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE AS/A level		13	43	28	1	1	86
GCSE		4	5	9	0	0	18
GNVQ		2	8	9	4	0	23
Other		0	5	6	0	0	11
Total		19	61	52	5	1	138

48 In computing and mathematics classes, a good balance is struck between theoretical and practical work. A lecture on the theoretical treatment of graphical forms was followed by a practical session in the next door computer room where students were able to explore a range of more complex examples. Students experienced varied activities and teaching methods. The work was well planned and supported by effective notes, handouts and up-to-date textbooks. Computing students respond

well to the friendly but disciplined environment. The objectives of the lesson are clearly established and reviewed at the end of the class. There are instruction manuals of high quality to support students working on their own. Some mathematics and computing classes are handicapped by the cramped accommodation.

49 Science teachers used appropriately varied teaching methods, which included work with individual students. Work schemes are well presented and shared with students. In some sessions students spent too much time copying diagrams or text from overhead transparencies and, in others, the quality of the work was affected by substandard equipment. Practical work was sometimes restricted by the size or shape of the room. In a number of sessions the work was not sufficiently challenging for the students. At GCE A level, much of the marking is detailed, helpful and encouraging. At GCSE it is less thorough and less useful in furthering students' learning. In extra sessions to help them achieve higher grades at GCE A level, students engaged in a great deal of effective discussion.

50 In business studies, individual sessions and programmes of work are well planned. Theoretical and practical aspects of the work are effectively related. Teachers use their subject knowledge well in lectures and in helping students individually. Most sessions feature a variety of activities which maintain students' interest. In a few classes, the development of the more able is held back because teachers do not distinguish between students of differing ability. Information technology skills are not taught as effectively as they might be; students are not allowed to develop their skills at a pace suitable for their levels of competence. Adult students taking an evening information technology course are well supported by the tutor, who deals effectively with their inhibitions in handling the technology. Students with hearing impairments are well supported by a specialist tutor.

51 Health and community care students are given many opportunities to work individually and in groups. This helps them to practise and extend their oral skills. However, in a number of lessons, some of the students were left with too little to do, while others were distracted by activities in which they were not involved. Teachers present subject matter with sensitivity. Links are made with work experience and students' potential careers in care, although some of the references to practice in the care sector lack sufficient detail and depth. The aims and objectives of lessons are sometimes unclear and teachers are not always alert to what students have covered and what they are learning. Foundation level students on the GNVQ intermediate programme are not able to gain as much as they might from lessons because the work is not pitched at an appropriate level for them.

52 Teachers of leisure, tourism and sport studies are knowledgeable and well prepared for their sessions. Students participate in a range of activities, including group discussion. Course handbooks, programmes of work and induction packs are of high quality. Work is marked helpfully,

accurately and in detail. GCE A level sport studies sessions are suitably challenging and analytical and students are encouraged to make good use of information technology. Lower level groups are in general less well managed. The checking and consolidation of learning is sometimes inadequate.

53 The quality of teaching and learning across the art and design disciplines is high. Students are enthusiastic about their work. Practising artists and designers are widely used to provide vocational relevance. Students are kept informed on their progress and are set short-term and long-term learning goals. Teachers set tasks which cater effectively for students of differing ability. Pressure on accommodation restricts students' opportunities to work on their own and the one-hour sessions constrict some specialist activities. In some areas of the performing arts, sessions involving students of different ability levels are particularly well managed. In one music class, students were absorbed in the assessment of each others' work, with the teacher on hand to provide clear guidance. Some performing arts sessions, however, were much less successfully planned and managed.

54 In humanities, theology and social science, the work is well planned. Each subject has a useful handbook and students are kept well informed about the structure and progress of the course. Some teachers have developed clear criteria for marking assignments and most work is helpfully and thoroughly marked. The certificate in theology programme is imaginatively designed. Law students develop appropriate study skills through the use of effective induction materials and enquiry and dialogue is encouraged. Humanities and social science teachers question students effectively and lead productive discussions. However, some of the discussions which take place in small groups are less well managed and represent wasted opportunities for learning. A few sessions were unnecessarily dull; students were engaged in too much routine note taking and there were not enough demands on them to think for themselves. In some areas, teachers do not make enough use of audio-visual aids where these would be helpful

55 Communication, English and foreign language sessions are well planned. Language teachers are fluent in their specialist language. They make good use of videos and, in most sessions, they and their students speak the language being learned. English classes involve a wide variety of activities. However, in some sessions students were reluctant to contribute when invited to do so. Teachers are encouraging students to take more responsibility for their own learning. For example, GCE A level English language students present projects to other members of the class. Overcrowded classrooms inhibit the development of some lessons. Students are equipped with guides and other useful materials to help them revise for examinations. The GCSE English course is well structured and flexible. It encourages students to be purposeful in their work. Procedures for referring students who need additional learning support to the GNVQ

core skills and English workshop are not yet effective. The room currently used for the workshop is unsuitable.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

56 Relationships between staff and students are excellent. Almost all students are fully involved in, and committed to, their work. A few students make less contribution in class and show less initiative than would be expected, given their levels of achievement.

57 Standards of achievement in coursework vary across the college. Project work in GCE A level sport studies shows high standards of analysis, presentation and research methodology. Many of these students use information technology well. Coursework in the leisure and tourism intermediate GNVQ is of an appropriate standard and the core skills of communication and information technology are being developed effectively. Computing students produce written work of high quality. Pure mathematics students are capable of imaginative approaches to problem solving. The quality of work in art and design is often high. Foreign language students are articulate in class and are developing confidence in speaking and writing the language they are learning. Most GCE A level science students are competent in their practical work, and some use information technology well. Lower levels of achievement are seen in coursework for GCSE science subjects. Many students' assignments in health and social care were predominantly descriptive, and case studies were often underdeveloped and too brief.

58 By far the largest number of examination entries is for GCE A levels. In 1995, 377 students aged 16 to 18 sat for 814 GCE A level entries across 32 subjects.

59 The average points score per GCE A level subject entry was 4.7 (where A=10, E=2), which placed St Brendan's Sixth Form College in the top third of colleges in the sector on the basis of data provided in the tables published by the Department for Education and Employment in 1995. The average points score for sixth form colleges nationally was 4.8 points per entry. Pass rates at grades A to C and grades A to E, are in line with the national averages for sixth form colleges of 50 and 84 per cent, respectively.

60 In 1995, the GCE A level subjects in which more than 10 students entered and all passed were textiles and fashion, sport studies, classical civilisation, and economics. Subjects in which less than 10 students entered and all passed included further mathematics, Italian and music. Subjects in which more than 15 students entered and which achieved pass rates substantially above the national average were design technology, computer studies, communication studies and theology. Subjects with good pass rates at grades A to C included economics, design technology, textiles and fashion, communication studies, English language, sports studies and law. GCE A level subjects, entered by more than 10 students, which had pass rates substantially lower than the national average for the

sector included chemistry (70 per cent), politics (70 per cent), theatre studies (58 per cent) and geography (67 per cent).

61 In 1995, there were 92 entries for GCE AS subjects and all but one of the students were below the age of 19. Candidates were less successful than at GCE A level. The proportion of candidates achieving the higher level grades A to C was 35 per cent compared with the national average for all sixth form colleges of 37 per cent; the proportion achieving a pass grade was 70 per cent, compared with a national figure of 73 per cent. The proportion of entrants awarded the higher grades A to C in law was substantially below the national average for sixth form colleges. In mathematics, it was close to the average; in theology it was above.

62 In 1995, GCSE students at St Brendan's Sixth Form College gained results well above the national average. There were 449 entries for nineteen subjects, 10 per cent fewer than in 1994. Fifty-seven per cent of these entries were awarded grades A to C, 9 per cent above the average for sixth form colleges. A commendable 71 per cent of students taking English, an important resit subject, achieved these higher grades compared with the national average of 50 per cent. Other subjects with results well above average included business studies, design, geography, history, human biology, information systems, Italian, Spanish and travel and tourism. Of the 50 students who took a one-year course of four or five GCSEs, 26 (58 per cent) were awarded the higher grades in all subjects.

63 Approximately 10 per cent of the college's students are following vocational courses, almost all of which are GVNQ programmes. In 1995, 25 of the 34 students aged 16 to 18 in their final year of GNVQ advanced programmes achieved a pass, placing the college in the middle third of colleges on the basis of the data provided in the tables published by the Department for Education and Employment in 1995. Forty-five 16 to 18 year old students taking GNVQ intermediate programmes achieved a pass. Particularly successful areas included advanced level business (85 per cent), intermediate level business (92 per cent), and intermediate level leisure and tourism (89 per cent). Of the 18 students who sat for RSA Examinations Board (RSA) keyboarding and computer literacy and information technology awards, 89 per cent passed.

64 Levels of absence are low and retention rates are generally high. Between November 1994 and May 1995, the college recorded an overall retention rate of 94 per cent. However, during the last academic year, 19 per cent of students in some social science areas failed to complete the course, and retention on the advanced GNVQ in leisure and tourism has also been a problem.

65 Eighty-six per cent of GCE A level and 64 per cent of GNVQ advanced students who gained their awards went on to higher education in 1995. Ninety-six per cent of GCSE students continued in further education and 4 per cent entered employment. Eighty-eight per cent of GNVQ intermediate students stayed on in further education, most of them at the college.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

66 Staff are aware of the requirements of the national charter for further education. They are also familiar with the college charter which was produced recently after a consultation exercise. The charter clearly outlines the service and support which students can expect to receive including the procedure to be adopted in registering complaints. However, it contains few targets against which performance can be measured. The charter is posted on student noticeboards and referred to in the learning agreement between the college and student but most students remain unaware of its contents.

67 Most staff are committed to improving quality and recognise their individual responsibility for quality assurance. Many have a specific responsibility for quality which is assigned to them in their job description. A consequence of management restructuring is that responsibility for the implementation of quality assurance procedures is now devolved to middle managers.

68 The strategic plan includes a definition of quality. The college's strategy has been built upon elements of good practice. A college quality assurance statement has been presented to the governors and distributed to staff with the object of ensuring a systematic and comprehensive approach to quality improvement.

69 Despite the rapid development of the quality assurance policy, the present procedures for maintaining and improving quality vary considerably in their effectiveness. In the summer of 1995, all curriculum teams undertook a review of their provision using a standard format. The review process involved regular minuted meetings of the teaching teams and consideration of comments from external awarding bodies. Results of the review processes at departmental and faculty level were collated to inform the strategic planning process. Despite some positive outcomes, such as improved access to information technology equipment, some of the reviews were superficial and unproductive.

70 Quality improvement issues are monitored by the vice-principals during regular meetings with managers. Although these managers receive support and guidance from the vice-principals, they vary in their commitment to quality improvement and their ability to identify and put in hand the necessary steps to bring it about.

71 The extended management team, which includes the 11 senior tutors, helps to set targets for enrolment and retention. The performance indicators used to support quality management include enrolments, destinations, retention rates, levels of attendance, group size, examination results and students' achievements. Value-added analysis is used to relate students' achievements to their qualifications on entry and, with the help of the Advanced Level Information System, to compare the college's performance with national norms. Such analysis has led to changes in syllabuses and teaching methods and to the provision of additional learning

support for some students. Quantitative data are collected for some cross-college services, but little attempt is made to review the services provided. For example, there has been no systematic evaluation of students' degree of satisfaction with the tutorial system. Some of the college's task groups have monitored and reviewed their own work; in the light of such a review, the library group has added a student to its membership.

72 There is no college-wide system for collecting and analysing students' perceptions, although individual teams have developed their own procedures. Parents' views are gathered through parents' evenings and from questionnaires. Many parents are also employers: in that capacity, some of them are able to provide information on students' work experience placements. The college also gains information from employees who were students of the college. Employers provide valuable feedback when work placements are evaluated.

73 Staff development is centrally managed by the vice-principal for personnel and by a recently appointed staff-development co-ordinator. The planning of staff development is not yet part of the strategic planning process. In 1995-96, approximately 45 per cent of the staff-development budget is earmarked for assessor and verifier training for staff teaching GNVQs. The rest is being spent in response to requests as they arise. The most common form of staff development is attendance at external events. Evaluation of training is expected rather than required, and in practice there is little feedback to influence future planning or expenditure. Teachers attend five in-college training days annually and also have an opportunity to improve their information technology skills. Support staff have fewer opportunities for staff development.

74 The college has adapted the local education authority's appraisal scheme but, so far, only members of the senior management team have been appraised. The college has received advice from the TEC on preparing for the Investors in People award.

75 The college's self-assessment report uses the headings in Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*, as its analytical framework. Strengths are described clearly and priorities for development identified. The final section describes current action and progress to date. The report is clear and concise. It provided an accurate, helpful and informative position statement for the inspection. The college's assessments were generally consistent with those of inspectors, but not all the issues raised by inspectors were considered. The evidence for the judgements which were reached were not always made clear.

RESOURCES

Staffing

76 Teaching staff are well qualified and highly motivated. Most have appropriate experience. Almost all have teaching qualifications, 95 per

cent are graduates and 36 per cent have other relevant qualifications or experience, for example as examiners or moderators. The growth of vocational courses highlights a shortage of commercial or industrial experience and the lack of vocational qualifications in areas such as leisure and tourism, health and social care. In business, teachers' commercial experience is being put to good effect. Progress is being made towards the achievement of internal verification awards for staff teaching on vocational courses.

77 A policy of appointing full-time teaching staff wherever possible means that there are relatively few part-time teachers. However, good use is made of part-time teachers to bring specialist experience or skills to some areas: for example the use of a professional session guitarist on a vocational music course. Foreign language assistants are used effectively to enhance the quality of learning.

78 Teaching staff are efficiently deployed. The turnover of both teaching and support staff is low. The college's policy is to retrain and redeploy staff from areas of work which have contracted. Many staff have shown considerable flexibility in coping with new subjects, courses and methods of working. Most senior tutors have a substantial teaching commitment, a line management responsibility and a cross-college function to manage. Despite their willingness to take on the full range of duties listed in their job descriptions, some are more successful than others in doing so. Many of them are also in the early stages of developing their own managerial skills. Vice-principals provide support but little formal training has been provided for middle managers, for example in human resource development.

79 The college has 27 administrative, clerical and technician support staff and 17 part-time cleaners. Technicians are suitably qualified and experienced and the technical support provided to teachers and students is of a high quality. The designation of technician posts with a training role has improved students' opportunities for learning in information technology, photography, science and design. However, the demands on information technology support staff, who provide staff development as well as technical support, are beginning to outgrow their capacity to respond. The level of technician support in the performing arts is inadequate.

80 Levels of clerical and secretarial support are adequate. Staff in the library and information centre are suitably qualified, and the level of staffing is appropriate for the current opening hours. Staff in the reprographics section provide an effective wordprocessing and desktop publishing service for teachers.

Equipment/learning resources

81 There are good specialist facilities in some areas; for example, computer-aided design in manufacturing and textiles, and video and

satellite equipment for foreign languages. In other areas, for example in physics and chemistry, equipment is ageing and in need of replacement. Most general classrooms are equipped with overhead projectors, screens and whiteboards, and some with video-playback facilities.

82 New programmes are given sufficient resources to operate. Priorities are established according to the college's strategic plan and operational objectives. A policy for the replacement of information technology equipment is based on a normal lifespan of five years. The college has recently made substantial investments in information technology and will need to plan for the review and replacement of hardware and software. Textbooks are lent to students without charge. Good learning materials are in use in many areas, including business studies, geography, history, economics and sports and leisure. Consumable supplies are sufficient in all departments.

83 There is good information technology equipment for teachers, managers and support staff. Over 30 stations are connected to the administration network. There are 122 workstations for students to use, providing a ratio of one workstation to nine students. The aim is to bring the ratio to 1:7. There is a good range of software. Existing information technology systems are reliable, efficiently used, well managed and supported with appropriate documentation. User guides and problem-solving leaflets are available. The college has installed a network with a capacity for further expansion. Most workstations are connected to the network. Students' access to information technology is under some pressure because of the demands on support staff.

84 The library and information centre provides a good facility for staff and students. All students receive an effective induction to the library and its services. There is a wide range of 40 compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) database titles in addition to a good stock of books, periodicals, daily newspapers, video and audio tapes. Video playback and editing facilities are available. The librarian works closely with heads of departments to ensure that the budget is used effectively. Funds are earmarked for special developments. There are 100 workspaces in the library and information centre and some easy chairs for browsing through newspapers and periodicals. There are also bookable project and seminar areas. Despite recent improvements, the library is fast approaching maximum capacity. There is little space left for additional shelving or more study space. Opening times are 08.00 to 16.30 hours with the exception of Thursday when the library stays open in the evenings.

Accommodation

85 The college's single site has extensive playing fields to the front, giving it an attractive and spacious appearance. The site is generally free of litter and graffiti. Much attention has been given to security arrangements. There is a security officer during normal opening hours who provides a friendly welcome to visitors. General accommodation includes a large sports hall, a large assembly hall, a chapel and a first aid room.

86 To ensure that its Catholic mission is met, the college spends 2 per cent of its budget on transport, a pressing issue for senior managers. A survey has shown that the average travel to college time is 50 minutes, and many journeys are much longer. Consequently, the working day is restricted. The timetable has been restructured to make better use of accommodation. Nevertheless, the occupancy rate for the premises remains low. Little happens after 16.00 hours. The new timetable, with staggered lunch breaks, has eased the daytime pressure on some of the college's teaching accommodation and student social areas.

87 Timetabling and room allocation is managed centrally by the vice-principal for curriculum. The accommodation for most departments or linked curriculum areas is grouped and this facilitates the sharing of resources and flexible use of teaching rooms. Business studies has the disadvantage of occupying temporary classrooms which suffer from poor ventilation in hot weather.

88 Some teaching accommodation fails to provide an environment which is conducive to learning. Some of the computing rooms are hot and cramped and some science laboratories are too small for the size of groups. The music suite is very cramped. The room allocated to a core skills workshop has an unwelcoming appearance. During the specialist visits, inspectors observed that many general classrooms were too small and that overcrowding sometimes made it difficult for students and teachers to work effectively. Most of the general classrooms are clean and reasonably well furnished. Few have displays of students' work.

89 Access to most of the college's accommodation is difficult for people with restricted mobility. It is particularly difficult in the case of the library and information centre on the second and third floor. The design of the main building does not lend itself to modification. There are no lifts and many steps. Two ramps to the main building provide access to part of the ground floor.

90 The college has done much to improve the quality of its accommodation through a programme of adaptations: for example a rifle range has successfully been converted into classrooms and an office. The staff common room has been refurbished recently to provide an attractive and welcoming environment.

91 The college has also improved its social accommodation for students by extending the common room. The common room is an attractive and popular facility but it remains inadequate in size for the numbers wishing to use it. It includes a snack bar which provides a breakfast service and it is open until early afternoon. The adjacent cafeteria is drab, and standards of cleaning are not as high as for other parts of the college. It provides a lunchtime service only, for staff and students, with low prices but little choice. Students make some use of it at other times as an extra common room or for private study.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

92 The strengths of the college are:

- its close links with partner schools, the Diocese of Clifton and the Roman Catholic community
- a varied and well-designed programme of curriculum enrichment
- an ethos of care and support for all students
- an effective senior management team
- a thorough and well-documented strategic planning process
- a wide range of management information data
- teaching which is generally well planned and delivered
- high rates of attendance and retention
- well-qualified, flexible and highly-motivated staff who have a strong sense of corporate identity.

93 In order to improve the quality of provision the college should:

- broaden the range of provision in line with its mission statement
- develop the expertise of middle managers
- clarify the role of cross-college task groups
- improve the consistency of quality assurance procedures
- monitor and review its policies for equal opportunities and health and safety
- complete the introduction of the appraisal system
- improve the use of teaching accommodation
- improve the consistency of the tutorial process
- improve the quality of teaching and management of learning in some areas to ensure that all students achieve their potential.

FIGURES

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- 1 Percentage student numbers by age (as at September 1995)

 - 2 Percentage student numbers by level of study (as at September 1995)

 - 3 Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at September 1995)

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

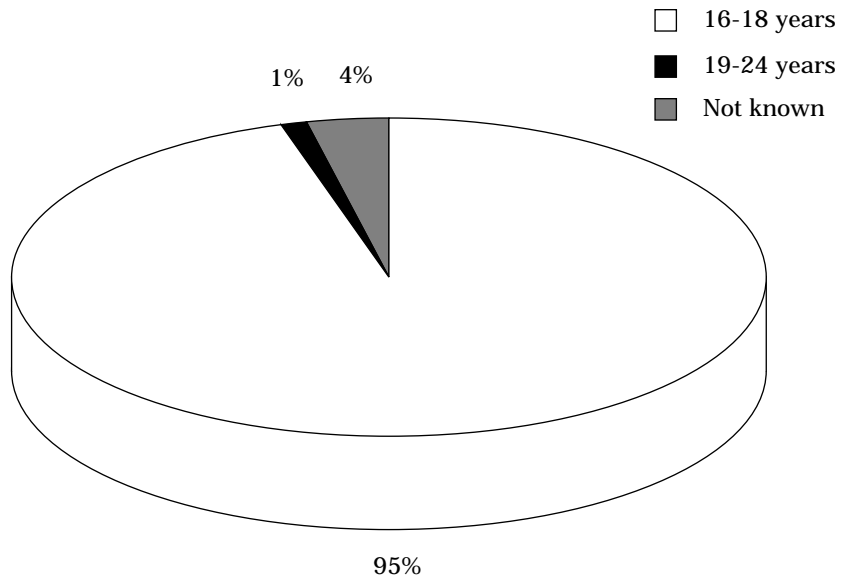
 - 5 Income (for 12 months to July 1995)

 - 6 Expenditure (for 12 months to July 1995)

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

Figure 1

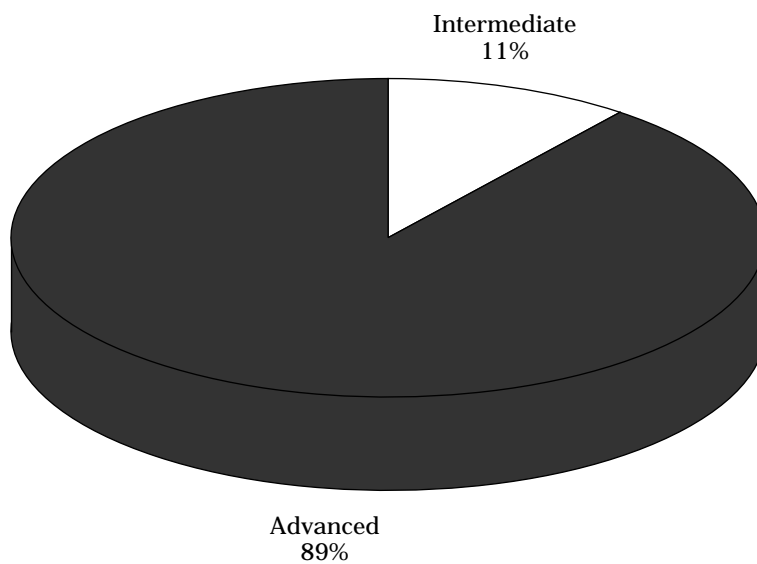
St Brendan's Sixth Form College: student numbers by age (as at September 1995)



Student numbers: 1,089

Figure 2

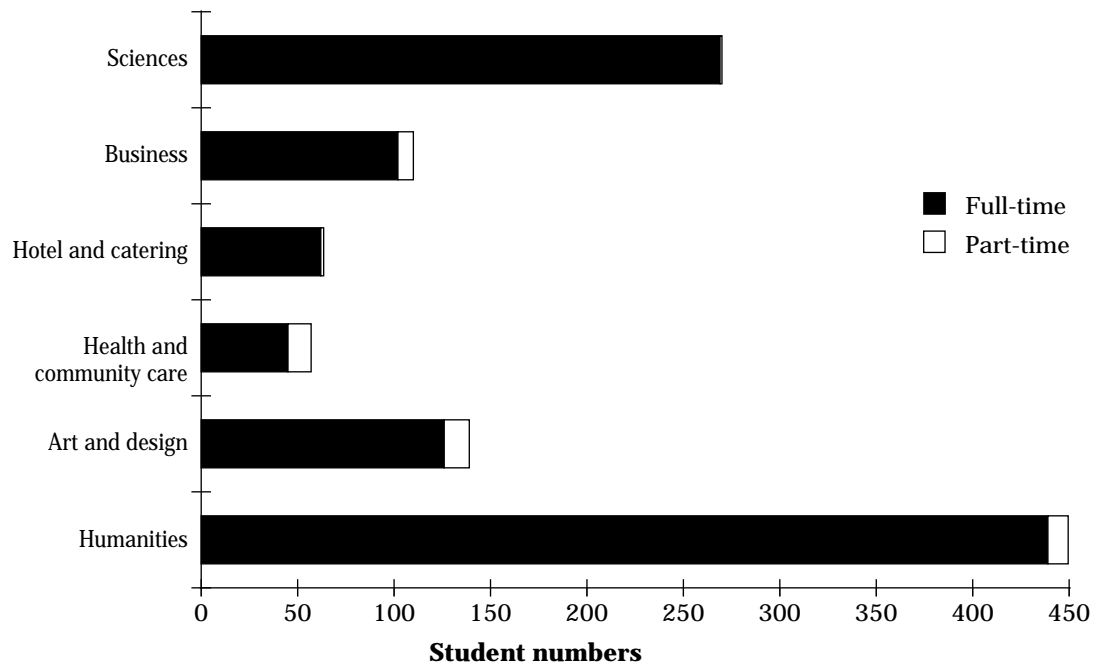
St Brendan's Sixth Form College: student numbers by level of study (as at September 1995)



Student numbers: 1,089

Figure 3

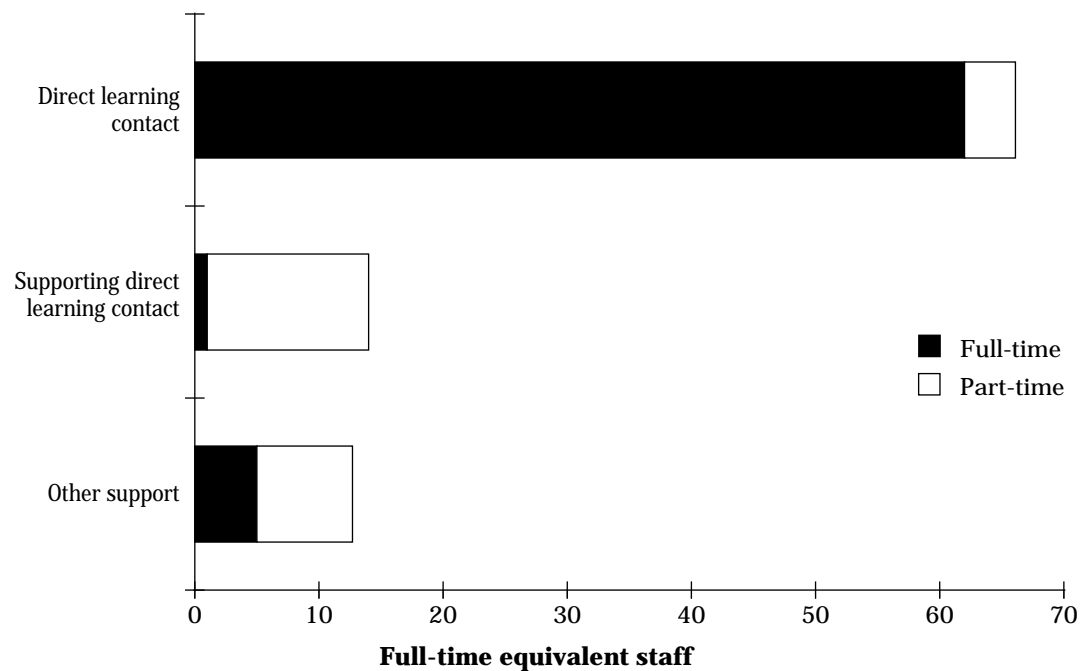
St Brendan's Sixth Form College: student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at September 1995)



Student numbers: 1,089

Figure 4

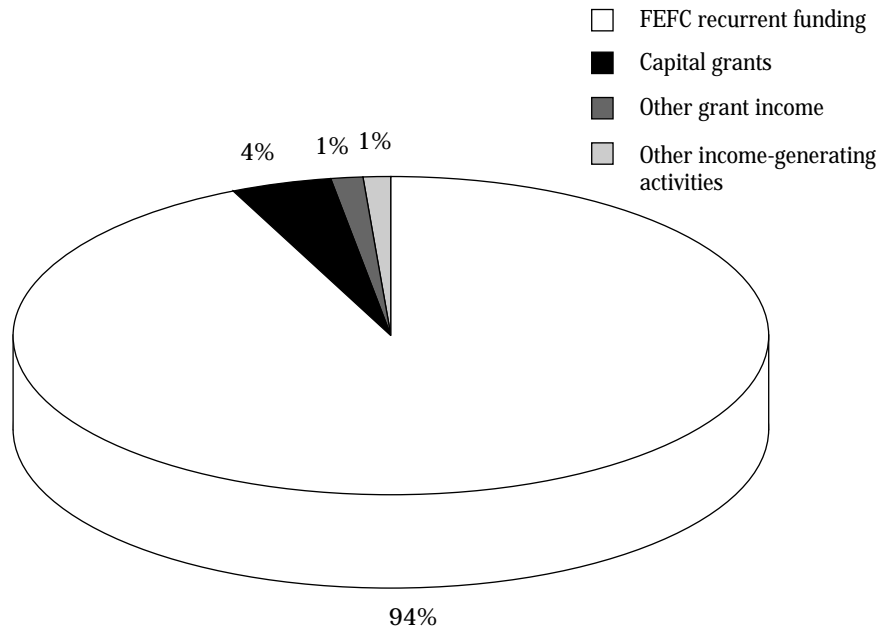
St Brendan's Sixth Form College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1995-96)



Full-time equivalent staff: 93

Figure 5

St Brendan's Sixth Form College: income (for 12 months to July 1995)

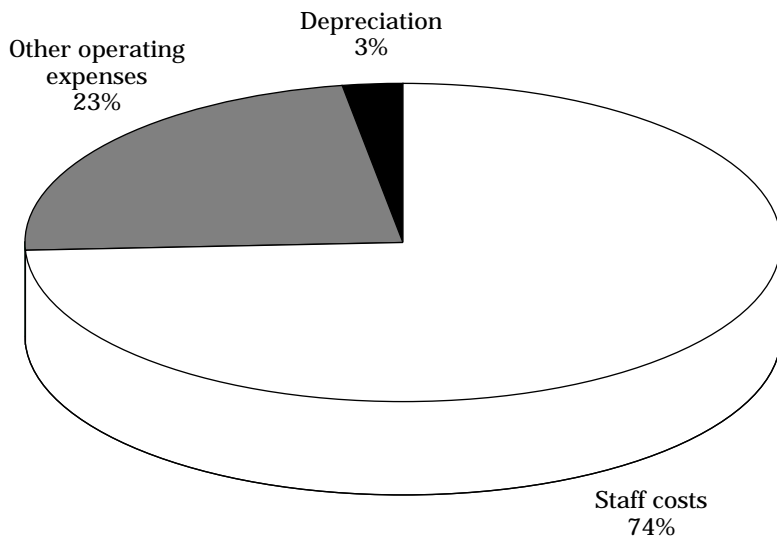


Income: £3,146,000

Note: this chart excludes £7,000 other operating income, £1,000 education contracts and £1,000 tuition fees.

Figure 6

St Brendan's Sixth Form College: expenditure (for 12 months to July 1995)



Expenditure: £2,956,000

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