

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

St Dominic's Sixth Form College

April 1997

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL**

The Further Education Funding Council has a legal duty to make sure further education in England is properly assessed. The FEFC's inspectorate inspects and reports on each college of further education every four years. The inspectorate also assesses and reports nationally on the curriculum and gives advice to 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 44/97

ST DOMINIC'S SIXTH FORM COLLEGE

GREATER LONDON REGION

Inspected September 1996-January 1997

Summary

St Dominic's Sixth Form College in the London Borough of Harrow is a Roman Catholic college in the Diocese of Westminster. The college provides full-time courses for 16 to 19 year olds. The governors are committed to the college and its Catholic mission which is understood by staff and students and implemented through all the college's activities. The college has forged effective links with its partner schools, parents and the Catholic community. Arrangements for the recruitment, guidance and support of students are highly effective. Teachers are well qualified and some teaching is good. The college has effective policies and procedures for staff development. Management information is usually reliable. To consolidate its achievements, the college should: continue to delegate more responsibility to its senior managers; develop pre-foundation and foundation level courses; improve the overall quality of teaching and ensure that it meets the different needs and abilities of all students; ensure that all departments apply quality assurance procedures rigorously; and resolve the problems associated with the college's accommodation.

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

Aspects of cross-college provision		Grade
Responsiveness and range of provision		3
Governance and management		3
Students' recruitment, guidance and support		1
Quality assurance		3
Resources:	staffing	2
	equipment/learning resources	2
	accommodation	3

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Mathematics and computing	3	English and modern languages	2
Science	2	Politics and religious studies	1
Business and economics	3	History, geography psychology and classical civilisation	3
Art, art history and performing arts	2		

INTRODUCTION

1 St Dominic's Sixth Form College was inspected between September 1996 and January 1997 by 12 inspectors who spent 60 days in the college. The team included an inspector from the Roman Catholic Diocese of Westminster. Inspectors observed 107 classes and examined students' work and documentation relating to the college and its courses. Meetings were held with students, the chaplain, teachers, support staff, senior managers, parents, governors, and representatives of partner schools and the North West Training and Enterprise Council (TEC).

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 St Dominic's Sixth Form College is a Roman Catholic college situated in the London Borough of Harrow. The college's mission is 'to provide a programme of education and spiritual development for life in a diverse society for post-16 students from the Catholic community in North West London and other students who wish to be supported in their faith'. The Diocese of Westminster is the trustee of the college.

3 The college is situated on a single site in a residential conservation area and has two buildings, one constructed in 1939 and the other in 1979, when the college opened. Three tertiary colleges and St Dominic's Sixth Form College provide all further education in Harrow. Since their establishment, all of the colleges have collaborated in providing a range of courses for students from Harrow and the surrounding boroughs of Brent, Hillingdon, Ealing, Barnet, Hertfordshire and beyond.

4 The college has grown steadily from 289 students in 1979 to 612 students in 1996. FEFC-funded student numbers by age, by level of study and by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figures 1, 2 and 3, respectively. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4. The college is the only Catholic sector institution in the area and concentrates on providing general certificate of secondary education (GCSE), and general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) courses. Students from Harrow's schools make up 58 per cent of college enrolments and the two partner Catholic schools provided about 42 per cent of the 1996-97 enrolments. The staying-on rate for 16 year olds in Harrow is about 85 per cent which is well above the national average.

5 Approximately 200,000 people live in Harrow; most work outside the borough, mainly in central London. Service industries dominate the local economy and most businesses in the area have fewer than 25 employees. Harrow has one of the lowest unemployment rates in London; 6.5 per cent in 1995 compared with 9.6 per cent for Greater London as a whole.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

6 In 1995-96, approximately 60 per cent of students enrolled on humanities courses, 28 per cent on science and mathematics courses and

13 per cent on business, art and design courses. About 88 per cent of students followed a GCE A level programme and approximately 9 per cent were on courses leading to general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs). Three per cent of students were following a one-year course to improve their GCSE qualifications.

7 In line with the college's mission, all students follow a religious studies course. A notable aspect of this course is that students have an opportunity to discuss their faith with other young people in local parishes and work with teachers in Catholic schools. They also attend residential retreats, and accompany children with physical disabilities to Lourdes through the Handicapped Children's Pilgrimage Trust. There is a weekly mass which is celebrated by the chaplain.

8 The college has a good reputation amongst local parents and young people. Priority is given to applicants from the two Roman Catholic partner schools. The proportion of Harrow school-leavers applying to the college is steadily increasing and demand for places for non-Catholics exceeds the quota prescribed by the governors.

9 Students are required to have five GCSE passes to begin a GCE A level programme, and at least four GCSE passes at grade D or higher for the one-year GCSE course. The entry qualifications to a GCE A level course are higher for students who have followed a one-year GCSE course than those for pupils coming straight from school.

10 There is a wide range of GCE A level courses. Of the 30 subjects offered, four offer a choice of syllabus and 23 can also be taken as GCE advanced supplementary (AS) subjects, although there has been little demand for these. Psychology is a particularly popular GCE A level subject. Four European languages are taught, including Italian for which the teaching is provided free by the Italian Embassy. The college responds flexibly to students' needs. It provides German teaching for students from another college in the borough. College students attend a nearby school of music for GCE A level music. GCE A level general studies provides many students with the opportunity to develop their ability to study independently. The college is keen to develop modular courses, and 85 per cent of GCE A level students are studying at least one modular course.

11 The college takes the view that students should undertake as broad an education as possible. To this end, students on GCE A level programmes follow an unusually full programme in their first year. They choose between programmes of four GCE A levels, three GCE A levels and two GCSEs, or two GCE A levels and three GCSEs. They are not permitted to drop a subject until after their first-year examinations when most students do reduce their timetables. Students are divided in their views about the number of courses they have to take in their first year. Many recognise the benefits, while others question the element of compulsion and a number feel that they cannot do justice to their main three subjects. Few students who drop a GCE A level have their year's work accredited. Students who

have not yet gained GCSE English and mathematics at grades A to C are required to take these subjects as part of their programme. The college offers the international baccalaureate, although the demand is very low.

12 The college offers few opportunities for students to acquire a vocational qualification. The only GNVQ courses on offer lead to intermediate and advanced level qualifications in business. Students who enrol on the advanced programme are expected to have either an intermediate GNVQ or four GCSE passes at grades A to C.

13 All first-year students take part in enrichment activities which include sports, creative and practical subjects, and service in the community. Most of these activities take place on Wednesday afternoons when there are no other lessons. Together with the religious studies course and the tutorial programme, the activities have been accredited recently by the Open College Network. Few students choose to continue with enrichment activities in their second year, when they become optional.

14 The college has been successful in fostering international links which broaden the students' experience. Modern language and physics students collaborate with colleges in Berlin and Viterbo, in Italy, supported by a grant from the European Union's Socrates fund. Students on art and design courses make visits each year to museums and art galleries in continental Europe. A 'Europe Day' is held annually at the college, to which speakers from other European countries are invited. Students at the college contribute to a pan-European students' magazine and have also participated in international youth camps.

15 Links between St Dominic's Sixth Form College and the three Harrow tertiary colleges have been maintained since incorporation, notably through regular meetings at principal and vice-principal level. There is a healthy balance of co-operation and competition between the colleges. There are meetings involving teachers of the four colleges at which curriculum matters are discussed. Increasingly, the college is represented at careers events held by non-Catholic schools. The college promotes itself within the Catholic community, through parishes, churches and the Catholic press. Information packs are sent to careers offices and secondary and primary schools in Harrow and neighbouring boroughs. Overall, the college promotes itself satisfactorily, benefiting from its reputation and from the recommendation of former students.

16 The college has little contact with employers. Students are able to do work experience if they wish but are required to make their own arrangements. The college is a member of the North West London Colleges Consortium, a collaboration between the four Harrow colleges and a neighbouring further education college. Its activities are financed by competitiveness and development funds and supported by the North West London TEC. The consortium has set up communication links between colleges which enable curriculum materials to be exchanged. This facility has been used productively by the college.

17 There are some links with higher education, which constitute the progression route of about 75 per cent of second-year students. An arrangement with a teacher training college in Southampton guarantees a place for St Dominic's Sixth Form College students who qualify.

18 The college's equal opportunities policy has little effect on recruitment or the planning of course provision. The college does not cater for students who need to study at a lower level. There are no pre-foundation or foundation courses. The college does not promote itself, other than in Roman Catholic schools. The nature of the accommodation makes much of the college inaccessible to students who use wheelchairs. There is no part-time or evening provision. Over 80 per cent of the students at St Dominic's Sixth Form College are Catholic. The rest are from committed families of Christian or other faiths. The policy of the college is to employ teachers who are Roman Catholics or committed Christians of other denominations and who support the aims and ethos of St Dominic's Sixth Form College.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

19 The governing body is committed to the work of the college and its Catholic mission. There are 14 governors of whom eight are foundation members, appointed by the Diocese of Westminster. There is also one business representative, two members of staff, one parent, and the principal. The place for the TEC representative remains vacant despite two attempts to fill it. The chairman, who has substantial experience in education, is also the local parish priest. He has a productive working relationship with the principal. Governors have a good knowledge of the local Catholic community and provide expertise in business, law, accountancy and education. Governors understand their roles and responsibilities. They have been involved in formulating the mission, strategic direction and structure of the college, guided by the principal. Attendance at board meetings during 1995-96 was approximately 85 per cent.

20 Much of the detailed business of the governing body is carried out by its four committees: finance and general purposes; remuneration; Catholicity and curriculum; and audit. The Catholicity and curriculum committee plays a prominent role in developing the college's provision in line with its Catholic ethos. It has considered the charter, the introduction and monitoring of college policies and aspects of the curriculum including the international baccalaureate and the introduction of GNVQs. Governors have a register of interests and a code of conduct. Most governors have attended training sessions run by the college. Recent events included a presentation on students' achievements and the analysis of students' performance in relation to their entry qualifications. Despite this, the main preoccupation recently of governors has been with accommodation issues and they have given insufficient attention to curriculum and quality assurance matters. As yet, governors have not formally evaluated their effectiveness.

21 Information available to governors has not always been received in time to enable them to make informed decisions, monitor developments at the appropriate time, or plan strategically. Governors have agreed that they need a schedule of meetings which enables them to co-ordinate their activities more efficiently. The college's personnel officer has only recently been appointed as clerk to the governing body and all its committees. Some important decisions on reorganisation and future planning have been delayed pending the appointment of a new principal for September 1997.

22 The senior management team is effective and conscientious. It comprises the principal, who has been in post since the college was established, and two vice-principals. One vice-principal is responsible for the organisation and monitoring of courses and the other is responsible mainly for the support of students. There is some overlap between the responsibility of the vice-principals and a few staff are unclear about their respective roles. The senior management team meets weekly to discuss operational and strategic matters. Meetings are minuted and action points are recorded. The principal is involved in much of the day-to-day running of the college, but there has been a move lately towards delegating more responsibility to other senior managers.

23 The college management team includes two academic directors and a pastoral director in addition to the senior management team. The team meets at least once each month to consider matters related to the implementation of the strategic plan. Where necessary, other college staff are invited to contribute to the team's deliberations.

24 Academic directors are each responsible for operational planning, curriculum delivery and quality assurance in three teaching divisions. The divisions, under the control of divisional managers, comprise clusters of subject departments, each managed by a head of department. The heads of department are responsible for developing their subject, monitoring the quality of provision and controlling their departmental budget. Course management is very effective in some departments. Teams meet regularly and minutes are useful working documents. However, some heads of department are not clear about their responsibilities or the relationship between themselves and their divisional manager.

25 The strategic planning process is clear. Departments produce plans based on a review of the previous year's work. Plans are discussed with the relevant academic director and the curriculum vice-principal, who may revise targets if necessary. Some plans are detailed and realistic, but others do not reflect identified weaknesses or set measurable targets. Departmental plans feed into the college strategic plan which is agreed by the college management team and approved by governors. Staff feel involved in this process. However, a few felt that not all issues are fully debated.

26 Staff are kept well informed about day-to-day operational matters in the college. There is a staff briefing each week, the notes of which are

published. A college forum has been established recently to formalise links between senior managers and other staff. A newsletter, published twice a term for parents and friends of the college, is distributed to all staff. This includes a report from the principal, information about college events and news of staff and students.

27 The college's bursar, who is not a member of the senior management team, prepares all the financial estimates for senior managers and governors and monitors day-to-day expenditure. The principal controls the staffing and capital equipment budget. The budget for consumable items and photocopying is delegated directly to heads of department on the basis of student numbers. Staff understand the basis on which funds are allocated and feel that it is fair. Spending is monitored by the academic directors, who receive clear and regular reports from the bursar. Departments bid for larger capital items and additional funds as part of the planning process. There is limited financial expertise in the senior management team. They have carried out some costing of courses but this has not been used to influence provision. The college is facing many challenges regarding its size and range of provision and there is a need to make decisions regarding the accommodation. Future planning and development should be more closely linked to financial forecasting.

28 Management information is good, but limited use is made of it for planning. A range of reports on students' enrolment, attendance and progress is sent to tutors regularly. Only senior managers have direct access to the computerised system, but staff can obtain reports quickly. Students' destinations on leaving college and their performance in higher education after leaving are carefully monitored. Information on students' reasons for leaving is collected, but there is little formal analysis of which subjects students drop at the end of the first year. The college has achieved or exceeded its overall targets for enrolment. Individual targets are not set for divisions or departments. The college's average level of funding in 1996-97 is £19.74 per unit. The median for sixth form colleges is £19.36 per unit. The college's income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1996 are shown in figures 5 and 6.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

29 The college has clear policies and procedures for recruiting students. Comprehensive information about the college and its courses is made available to prospective students through open evenings, visits to local schools, posters to nearly 100 parishes, local advertising of events and activities at the college, as well as through distributing leaflets to selected schools. There is close liaison with the partner schools where the pupils receive thorough and helpful advice on the college's courses. Pupils have opportunities to visit the college. The staff of the college and the partner schools meet on a regular basis. The college holds two open evenings in November, as well as a consultation evening in January for late applicants or for those seeking additional information. All applicants are interviewed

by the principal or a senior member of staff. Students spoke favourably about their experiences when they applied to the college.

30 Enrolment is well organised and effective. Staff are fully briefed and understand the procedures. On enrolment day in August, all students visit the relevant subject departments where staff provide advice and information. The college gives a high priority to ensuring that students receive impartial advice about which course to take. Every student has the opportunity of a further interview, if they want one. All staff involved in the enrolment process are welcoming and helpful and are particularly sensitive to students' individual needs and problems.

31 The induction programme is thoughtfully planned. Students receive a detailed induction handbook which explains the Christian ethos and daily life of the college as well as providing useful guidance on such matters as study skills and self-assessment. A series of well-organised, effectively co-ordinated activities, enable students to familiarise themselves with the college. Inspectors observed effective induction sessions which introduced students to the library service and the college's charter. All students have an initial meeting with their tutors using their records of achievement as a basis for individual action planning. Induction by subject departments helps the students to understand their programme of studies, although the materials used to support the induction varied in quality.

32 Initial diagnostic assessments identify the needs students have for additional language support and their competence in information technology. Students who do not have GCSE mathematics at grades A to C undertake a numeracy test and are required to take an appropriate mathematics course. Once learning support needs have been assessed, additional support is arranged either on an individual or small group basis. Although some 30 students needed support in 1996-97, not all were having their needs fully met at the time of the inspection. There are close links with the Harrow support services to provide for the specialised needs of the small number of students who have hearing or visual impairments.

33 A clear pastoral policy is effectively implemented. A tutors' handbook includes details of tutorial procedures. There are two tutorial periods each week, one mainly for day-to-day issues, the other for matters such as personal health and social education, careers and the development of records of achievement. Every half-term, teaching is suspended and each student has an individual meeting with their tutor to review progress and plan future action. The development of records of achievement is an integral part of the tutorial programme. Almost all of the tutorials inspected successfully achieved their objectives. Students interviewed during the inspection said that their tutors and subject teachers were accessible and approachable. In addition, the full-time chaplain provides a valuable counselling service for students and staff. He assists in the weekly tutor group mass, assemblies and in the liturgies for particular occasions. The college refers students to specialist counselling services when the need arises.

34 Arrangements for keeping parents informed are good. They receive regular reports on the progress of their sons and daughters. Three parents' evenings are held over the two years, at which, on average, 80 per cent of parents attend. Additional arrangements are made to contact parents when a student's progress is unsatisfactory or there is a matter for concern.

35 There are clearly-stated rules governing the behaviour, attendance and punctuality of students. Students are issued with a copy of the college regulations which they and their parents or guardians sign. There are effective procedures for monitoring students' attendance and investigating absences. At each half-term review, tutors receive a computer printout recording each student's attendance record, as well as their achievement and effort grades for each subject. Teachers assiduously record marks, attendance and progress. Students are made aware of the precise guidelines and procedures for disciplinary matters in their induction handbook.

36 The college provides an effective programme of careers advice and guidance. Additional specialist advice is provided by an external agency. This is well co-ordinated by the college's careers assistant. All students are encouraged to keep a personal file of information relevant to future interviews and they take part in a careers development programme. Information and guidance on higher education opportunities is thorough and well organised and the majority of students take up offers of practice interviews. Students spoke highly of the good advice and support they had received in selecting universities and preparing their applications.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

37 The strengths outweighed the weaknesses in 59 per cent of the teaching sessions inspected. This is lower than the national figure 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 weaknesses outweighed the strengths in 6 per cent of the lessons. The average attendance in the lessons inspected was good, at 87 per cent. The following table summarises the grades awarded to the sessions inspected.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programmes of study

Programmes	Grade 1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE AS/A level	14	32	30	4	0	80
GCSE	1	4	4	4	0	9
GNVQ	0	2	2	0	0	4
Other*	2	8	2	2	0	14
Total	17	46	38	6	0	107

* includes a range of tutorials observed.

38 Teachers had good relations with their students which were conducive to successful learning. Schemes of work were coherent and ensured that examination syllabuses were covered. The better schemes were comprehensive and included course aims and content, methods of teaching and learning, study skills to be developed and assessment criteria. Other schemes of work were little more than outlines of topics to be covered. On some courses students received thorough and helpful handbooks. In courses across the curriculum areas, teachers made little use of visual aids to promote learning, and made insufficient allowance for the diverse learning needs and abilities of students. Coursework was set regularly, carefully marked and returned promptly, but the quality of written guidance given to students on how to improve their coursework varied widely. Clear records were kept of students' progress. Students on science and GNVQ business courses had good opportunities to develop their information technology skills, but there were insufficient opportunities for students to develop these skills on some other courses.

39 Teaching and the promotion of learning were of a high standard in politics and religious studies. Teachers worked well together. Courses were carefully planned. Teachers had high expectations of their students and their approach to their subjects was scholarly, challenging and enthusiastic. They used a wide variety of teaching methods to involve all the students in the work and to ensure that they achieved a high level of understanding. A range of high-quality course notes, supplemented by audio tapes, helped politics students of different abilities to work on their own. Lessons were well managed to stimulate critical analysis, well informed and lively discussion, and the balanced treatment of contentious issues. Teachers took care that links with work carried out previously were clearly established, and they checked regularly how much students had learned. Teachers' written comments on students' coursework were, usually, pointed and helpful. Politics students benefited from an excellent programme of additional activities which included regular trips to Parliament, visits to the college by members of Parliament and magistrates, attendance at conferences, debates, mock elections, and visits abroad, the most recent being to St Petersburg.

40 In English, schemes of work for GCE A level courses were well planned and documented but those for GCSE courses lacked detail. A helpful students' handbook gave advice on note-taking, essay writing and critical appreciation and there were good anthologies of prose and poetry for students' use. Teachers set challenging work which gave students opportunities to extend their knowledge and critical awareness of literature. Careful attention was paid to spelling, punctuation and grammar. Students' written work was marked promptly and thoroughly, and students received positive and detailed advice on how to improve their work. In a GCE A level session, students had rewritten *King Lear* as a fairy story to sharpen their understanding of literary genres as well as to give them an opportunity for a creative response to the play. In a separate

activity, stories by two students had been taped for the rest of the class to hear and critically evaluate. The stories provoked a thoughtful discussion in which students made good use of literary and linguistic terms. Students' contributions were well used by the teacher. In contrast to this excellent session, a few lessons were poorly planned and lacked clear aims and the work was unimaginative.

41 The quality of the teaching varied widely across the four modern languages, French, German, Italian, and Spanish. All teachers had good language skills, used the foreign language as the principal medium of communication, and had high expectations of students. In the better planned and managed sessions teachers created a purposeful learning environment and provided well-chosen material to interest and motivate students. In a GCE A level class in German, an exercise to develop dictionary skills involved students working in three groups on a comprehension text, underlining unknown words, writing them on an overhead projector sheet, then looking them up in a dictionary. The transparencies were then displayed to the rest of the class and compared, so that learning was reinforced. The weaker lessons were poorly planned and monotonous, gave students little opportunity to develop communication skills, and placed excessive demands on their powers of concentration.

42 In art and art history sessions, students worked on a wide range of challenging assignments and tasks, including life drawing. Contributions from teachers were complemented by visiting tutors from higher education institutes. Thorough schemes of work for courses in art, art history and the performing arts ensured a balance between theory and practice. Effective provision was made for students of differing abilities. Courses in the performing arts gave students opportunities to participate in live productions, but teachers did not always allow sufficient opportunity for students to work independently of the teacher. The design course has inadequate facilities, and although the teacher made the most of available resources, the range and quality of teaching was impaired. There was no teaching of specialist skills and techniques in manufacturing with the result that students were unable to make component parts or prototypes of their designs.

43 The quality of teaching in mathematics and computing was variable. In the better lessons observed, teaching was stimulating and varied and students were making good progress in a range of activities. In a GCE A level mathematics class, the teacher gave a lucid and lively exposition of a complex mathematical topic, indicating its practical applications in a way which helped to sustain students' interest. The students clearly enjoyed the approach, and made substantial contributions to the investigation and clarification of the topic. In some other lessons, teachers paid insufficient attention to the wide range of students' abilities and experience, and provided too little variation of activity to maintain students' concentration. The late arrival of students disrupted teaching and learning in some

sessions, and there was high absenteeism in some lessons, particularly in computing.

44 In science lessons, there were examples of well-managed activities such as practical work by students, demonstrations, discussions in small groups and the use of video tapes and information technology. In a challenging GCE A level physics class, students were engaged in preparatory work for an externally-sponsored competition. Working in small groups, students displayed a keen interest in the wider applications of science, showed a good knowledge of modern physics, and enthusiastically explored the practical applications of theoretical concepts. Overall, however, the range of teaching methods used in science was narrow. In many science lessons, teachers did not cater for the full range of students' abilities, and in some, the pace and challenge of the work were insufficient to engage the capabilities of more able students to the full. Students' written work was marked accurately but there was little comment to help students improve their performance.

45 Courses in business studies and economics had comprehensive schemes of work. In the better lessons, teachers provided information and instructions clearly, made regular checks on students' progress and understanding, and used a variety of teaching methods which maintained students' interest. In a well-prepared advanced GNVQ class on business planning and developing communication skills, students had to prepare business plans for presentation to a local bank manager. This provided students with a valuable opportunity to expose their understanding of business planning techniques to the scrutiny of an experienced financial practitioner. In other sessions, the teaching lacked variety, relied too much on the students taking notes, and made little use of visual aids. In a number of lessons, teachers paid insufficient attention to the varying abilities and learning needs of the students. Some teachers provided helpful written feedback on student assignments; others gave little or no feedback.

46 Schemes of work for courses in geography, history, classical civilisation and psychology varied in quality. Those for classical civilisation were the most thorough; those for history lacked detail. There was an effective programme of fieldwork in geography which was closely linked to course objectives. Classical civilisation lessons were effectively supported by visits to theatres and museums. Teaching was generally well informed, issues were presented in a balanced way, and effective use was made of audio-visual aids. Overall, however, the range of methods of teaching and learning used by teachers in these subjects was too narrow, and too few classes involved students in actively researching material, working together, debating ideas and preparing materials. Teachers tended to do too much for students, and did not provide work which challenged them enough. The quality of the guidance written on coursework was variable, and comments were often too brief to provide effective advice on how students might improve their work.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

47 Most students were well motivated and positive about their work. They spoke enthusiastically about their course and the college. Students were generally achieving appropriate levels of knowledge and understanding of their subjects, and satisfactory standards of skill in their practical work. Science students carried out their practical work competently, and with due regard for safety. In geography, students showed a wide range of practical skills in data collection and recording. Art students demonstrated high standards in drawing and painting.

48 Overall, students were acquiring a sufficient grasp of written English, and of the organisational and note-taking skills they needed to meet the requirements of their courses. Skills in spoken English were less well developed. Students of modern languages were good listeners, but often lacked confidence and fluency in speaking the foreign languages they were learning. Some students, particularly on GCE A level science and GNVQ business studies courses, showed a good appreciation of the role of computers in storing, presenting and analysing data, but many other students had limited skills in the use of information technology, except for wordprocessing.

49 Completion rates on the two-year GCE AS/A level programme as a whole are high. Since 1994, completion rates for students have exceeded 90 per cent. Because the college requires two-year GCE AS/A level students to take at least four subjects in their first year, and allows them to reduce their commitment in the second year, completion rates for individual subjects are usually lower than the figure for the programme as a whole. The rates for individual subjects differed widely in 1994-96. They exceeded 90 per cent in human biology and art history and were above 80 per cent in many other subjects. Completion rates in theatre studies, Italian, French, economics and geography were below 70 per cent and in computer science the rate was only 56 per cent. Completion rates for GCSE courses are high, with 11 subjects exceeding 90 per cent in 1995-96. The completion rate on the intermediate GNVQ in business rose from 46 per cent in 1995 to 76 per cent in 1996.

50 In 1996, the 321 students aged 16 to 18 who entered for one or more GCE AS/A level examination scored, on average, 4.8 points per entry (where grade A=10 points, E=2). This is the same figure as in 1995 and places the college in the top third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure, based on the data in the performance tables published by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE).

51 In 1996, there were 758 entries for GCE AS/A level examinations in 35 subjects. The average GCE A level pass rate was 83 per cent, approximately the same as in 1995. The average GCE AS pass rate (grades A to E) fell from 81 per cent in 1995 to 66 per cent in 1996.

52 The college has used an independent external service in order to calculate the value which is added to a student's qualifications whilst at

the college. This value-added factor is calculated by comparing students' GCSE grades upon entering the college with their GCE A levels on leaving. The progress made by students at the college is then compared with the performance of students elsewhere who have similar GCSE grades. The 1996 analysis showed that students in English, politics and the history of art performed significantly better at the college than similar students elsewhere, and that students of business studies, history, computing, and design performed worse.

53 In 1996, there was a 100 per cent pass rate in GCE A level art, history of art, Christian theology, classical civilisation, and early modern history, as well as in six subjects with only one or two candidates. Students in a further three subjects, English literature, politics and theatre studies, achieved pass rates of over 90 per cent. Results were close to national figures in some mathematics programmes, but below in others. Pass rates in physics, chemistry, biology, French, business studies, geography and later modern history were below national figures, and results in German, computing science and design were well below. In 1995 and 1996, the overall GCE A level pass rates at grades A to C were 48 and 51 per cent, respectively, figures which were close to the national average for 16 to 18 year olds in sixth form colleges in 1995 of 50 per cent.

54 In 1996, there were 398 GCSE entries in 18 subjects with an average pass rate at grades A to C of 44 per cent, approximately the same as that achieved in 1995. The pass rates achieved in individual subjects varied widely. Pass rates at grades A to C in art, general studies and English were well above national figures, and in biology, business studies, chemistry, geography and religious studies they were close to the national figure. Pass rates in French, psychology, science, Italian, history, Spanish, mathematics and German were well below national figures, often substantially so.

55 Approximately 9 per cent of the college's students are following vocational courses. Pass rates on the intermediate GNVQ in business rose from 58 per cent in 1995 to 83 per cent in 1996, well above the national figure of 60 per cent. Ninety per cent of students on the intermediate vocational courses included in the DfEE's 1996 performance tables were successful. This places the college among the top 10 per cent of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure. Eight of the 21 candidates achieved a merit award. Pass rates on vocational courses taken in addition to GCE A level and GCSE subjects have varied widely. In a foreign language at work course in French, the pass rate fell from 93 per cent in 1995 to 58 per cent in 1996. In 1995, of the 56 students who enrolled for the RSA Examinations Board (RSA) computer literacy course, only six gained a full pass and 29 a partial certificate.

56 In recent years the college's football team has been successful in winning the London Catholic Schools Cup and the Harrow Championship. Several students have represented their county at football. Students completing the performing arts course have been particularly successful.

One student is a world champion in Irish dancing and another was accepted as a member of the National Youth Choir. In politics, students took part in United Nations commemorative activities at Westminster and addressed an environmental conference in Berlin.

57 In 1996, the college tracked the destinations of 93 per cent of the students who completed two-year programmes, and 70 per cent of those who completed a one-year programme. Seventy-six per cent of the 234 two-year students whose destinations were known, progressed to higher education. Most of the 61 one-year course students went onto other full-time further education courses. Only 5 per cent of the two-year course students and 10 per cent of the one-year course students went straight into employment.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

58 The college's policy on quality assurance aims to develop high standards in religious education, teaching, and pastoral care; establish charter standards; develop quality assurance systems; provide staff development; and secure a wider reputation for excellence. The senior management team encourages each head of department to take responsibility for quality assurance but there is no senior manager with overall responsibility for this aspect of the college's work. There is a lack of co-ordination of quality assurance activities.

59 The college has a cycle of reviews in which academic directors and heads of department assess the quality of the provision. Departmental teams use a standardised questionnaire to elicit students' views on individual courses. In addition, there is a college-wide survey of the views of students when they complete their course. Heads of departments summarise the issues raised by students in a brief report which is discussed with their divisional manager. The information collected by questionnaires feeds into a college-wide report produced by the academic directors. Issues are considered by the senior management team and action agreed. At departmental level, the reviews vary in quality and some fail to address important issues such as teaching and learning, course management and poor examination results. Procedures to improve the quality of reports and subsequent action planning are being considered. Separate surveys on aspects of student support and guidance have resulted in improvements such as setting targets for tutor groups and the provision of better information on how to apply for university.

60 The college's commitment to staff development has been recognised by the attainment of the Investors in People award. All staff have formal interviews with their line managers to evaluate their performance, set targets for the future and determine what their development needs are. Staff value the opportunity the interviews offer to reflect on career options, improve their skills and consider ways in which they can contribute more effectively to the college's progress. The scheme does not include observation of teaching, although in some departments this practice has begun.

61 The amount allocated for staff development is £18,000, which is about 1 per cent of the college's total budget. This figure does not include staff training carried out by the college itself. The college is flexible in rearranging teachers' timetables to provide opportunities for training. A staff-development committee, which includes teachers and support staff, establishes criteria for staff development and reviews and evaluates training. Priority is given to development activities which are linked to strategic planning, but requests for personal development, such as studying for higher degrees, are also often supported. Support is conditional on staff making a full evaluation of their training. New staff receive an induction to the college and experienced staff act as mentors.

62 The college charter sets out its obligations to students and parents, although some commitments lack precision. For example, parents are promised regular reports without any definition of regularity.

63 The college's self-assessment report addressed each of the inspection framework headings identified in Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. There was some correlation with the findings of the inspection but the report was not always clear or rigorous. There was no reference to supporting evidence. Some weaknesses, such as poor examination results in some subjects, were not identified.

RESOURCES

Staffing

64 The college employs 39 full-time and nine part-time teachers, the majority of whom are appropriately qualified and experienced. All full-time teachers are qualified to first degree level or equivalent, and 91 per cent have a formal teaching qualification. Forty per cent have higher degrees. All four members of staff who teach in the business programme area have relevant assessor or verifier qualifications. Twenty-eight of the college's 48 teaching staff, but only one member of the college management team, are women. Fourteen per cent of teaching hours are accounted for by part-time teachers, a number of whom have relevant vocational experience. The overall level and deployment of teaching staff is appropriate, and teachers demonstrate versatility and flexibility in their work.

65 Support staff and technicians are appropriately qualified and experienced, and are well integrated with the work of the college. In addition to the full-time chaplain, the college has a bursar, registrar, librarian and premises manager. In most respects, the level of support provided is adequate, although there is insufficient technician support in computing and the limited clerical support in some curriculum areas places undue pressure on teachers.

66 The college has recently appointed a personnel officer who has established effective policies and procedures. Staffing policies have been

updated, and a revised staff handbook has been issued to all staff, explaining college procedures on a range of issues such as grievance and disciplinary action. A recruitment and selection handbook is currently being developed, and the college is updating its staffing records. There are job descriptions for all members of staff with the exception of the two vice-principals.

Equipment/learning resources

67 The college has a range of modern information technology equipment and software. There are 60 workstations, one for every 10.2 students. Despite this, students' access to information technology facilities in some curriculum areas is limited. The computer science room and GNVQ information technology room contain an inadequate number of computers for the number of students in some lessons and there is a limited amount of software to support teaching and learning in mathematics and computer-aided design and manufacture. There are three information technology workshops, which are used extensively for group teaching and by students on a drop-in basis, and an additional 11 workstations in the college's library. An information technology strategy incorporates a planned programme of upgrading and replacing equipment.

68 Levels of equipment and materials in classrooms are generally good. Most rooms have an overhead projector, screen and whiteboard, and there is adequate access to audio-visual equipment. Students on performing arts courses benefit from well-equipped facilities although groups often have to share these. Science laboratories are well equipped. Specialist rooms in some other curriculum areas such as modern languages and design are inadequately equipped.

69 The library is well managed and organised, and provides a comfortable and welcoming learning environment. There is a bookstock of approximately 7,400 items and a range of journals, newspapers, compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) database titles, and audio and video tapes. There are 80 study spaces. The library's budget for 1995-96 was £6,355, an allocation of £10.59 per student. Bookstocks are inadequate in a number of curriculum areas, including science, languages and psychology. A wide range of careers information is held in the library, and the library seminar room is used for careers interviews and general guidance. A learning area with audio-visual facilities has been added recently, but it is small.

Accommodation

70 The college's accommodation is owned by the Diocese of Westminster, and is subject to severe local planning constraints. The college has long identified a need for additional accommodation to match its growth in student numbers and to enable new courses to be introduced. Decisions on the future development of the college's accommodation have been

delayed because of problems experienced with planning applications. The college wishes to make alterations to the existing buildings and has also been involved in protracted negotiations to acquire a neighbouring property.

71 The site itself is pleasant. Creative use has been made of the limited space provided by the accommodation. For example, some additional office accommodation has been created, and the library has been extended recently to provide additional computer equipment and study spaces. The majority of teaching rooms are well decorated and appropriately furnished, and imaginative and informative wall displays are used in many parts of the college. Buildings are clean and free of litter.

72 Many classrooms are too small for the size of groups using them and restrict the quality and scope of some teaching and learning activities. Science laboratories are too small and the lack of a specialist workshop for design students prevents them from covering the required range of practical subjects. Staff rooms and office accommodation are also small and social and recreational facilities for staff and students are poor. There is limited storage space.

73 The management of the college's premises is professional and effective. The college has a planned maintenance and minor works programme. Little car parking space is available, and much of the site is inaccessible to people who use wheelchairs.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

74 The main strengths of the college are:

- governors who are supportive of the college
- a clear Catholic ethos which is understood and supported by all staff and students
- the wide range of GCE A levels offered
- well-developed, effective links with partner schools
- high-quality guidance and support for students
- some high standards of teaching
- some good achievements by students in external examinations
- good management information
- well-qualified teachers
- good links with Europe which benefit students
- effective policies and procedures for staff development.

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

- strengthen the links governors have with the curriculum
- delegate further responsibilities to senior managers
- remedy the limited financial expertise within the senior management team

-
- develop foundation and pre-foundation courses
 - improve some teaching which fails to cater for the different needs and abilities of students
 - ensure that all departments apply quality assurance procedures rigorously
 - resolve the problems associated with the college's accommodation.

FIGURES

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

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

3 FEFC-funded 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)

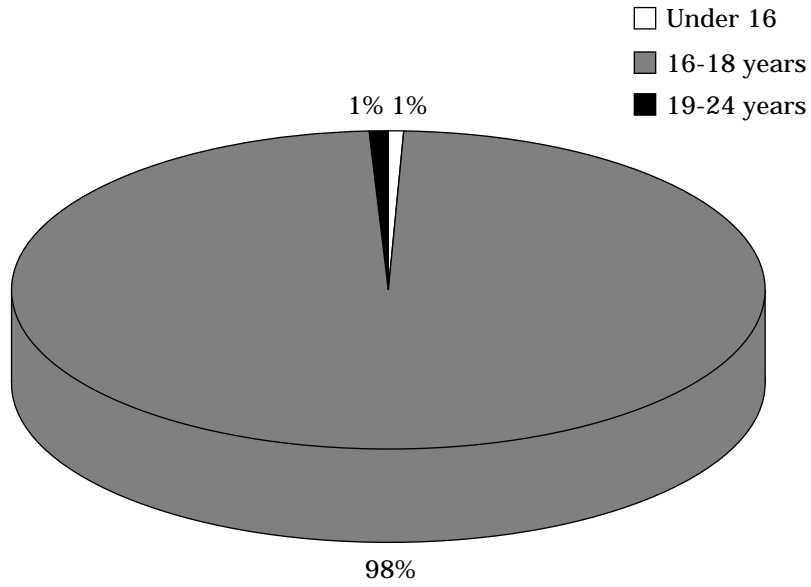
5 Income (for 12 months to July 1996)

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

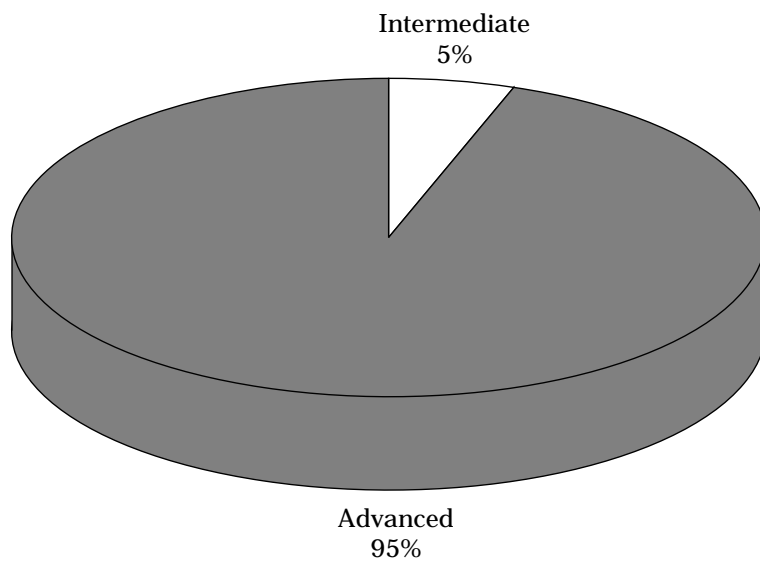
St Dominic's Sixth Form College: percentage FEFC-funded student numbers by age (as at November 1996)



FEFC-funded student numbers: 612

Figure 2

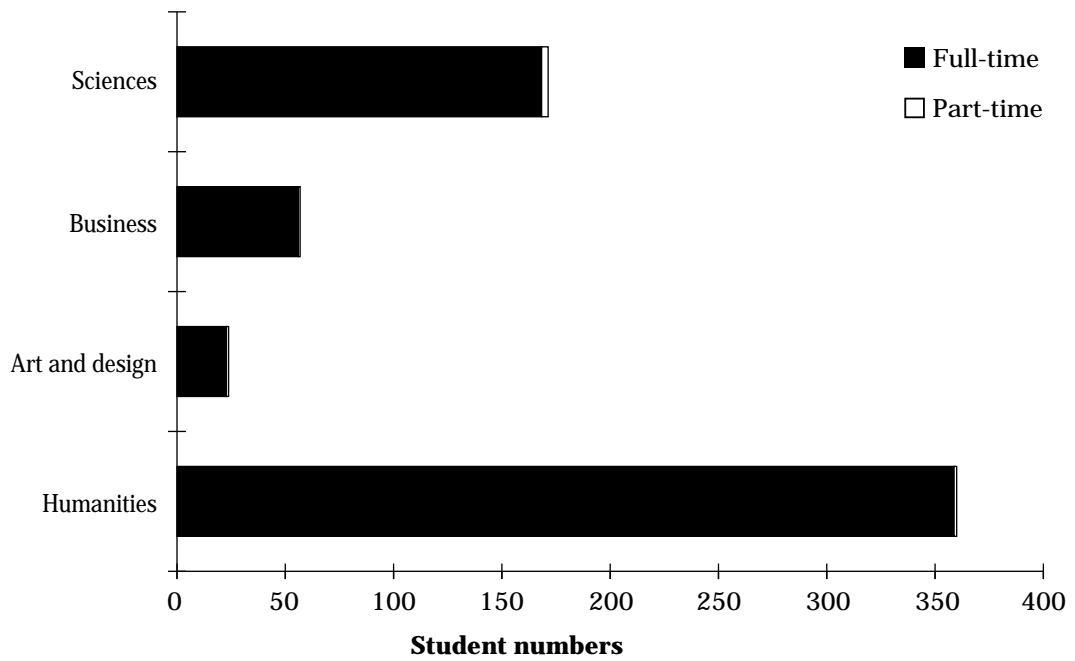
St Dominic's Sixth Form College: percentage FEFC-funded student numbers by level of study (as at November 1996)



FEFC-funded student numbers: 612

Figure 3

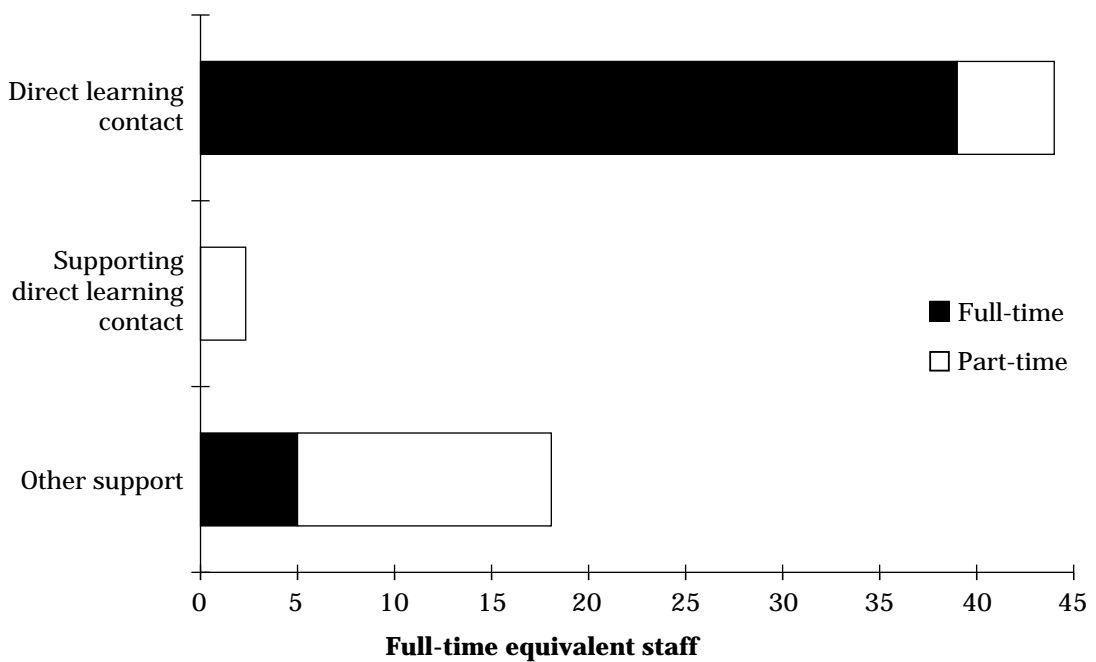
St Dominic's Sixth Form College: student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at November 1996)



FEFC-funded student numbers: 612

Figure 4

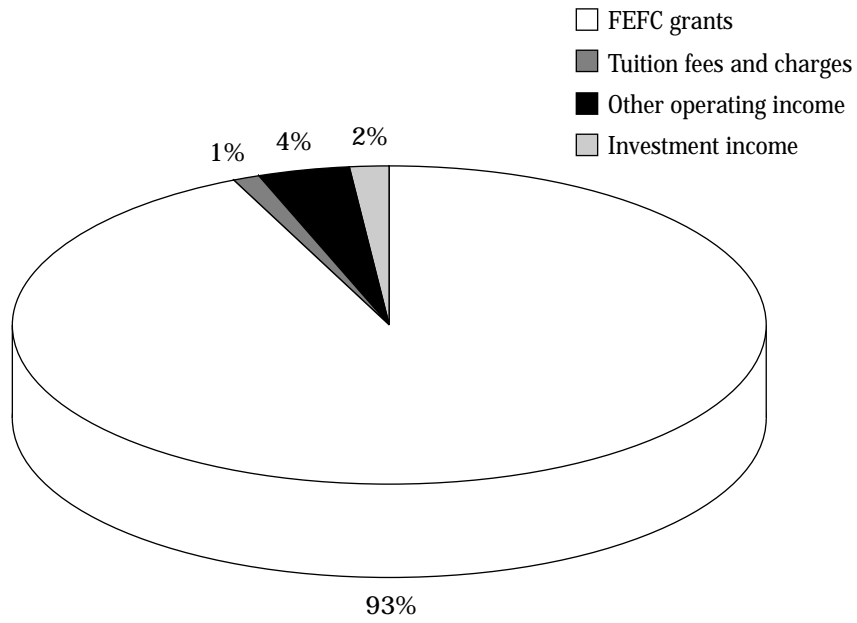
St Dominic's Sixth Form College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (as at November 1996)



Full-time equivalent staff: 64

Figure 5

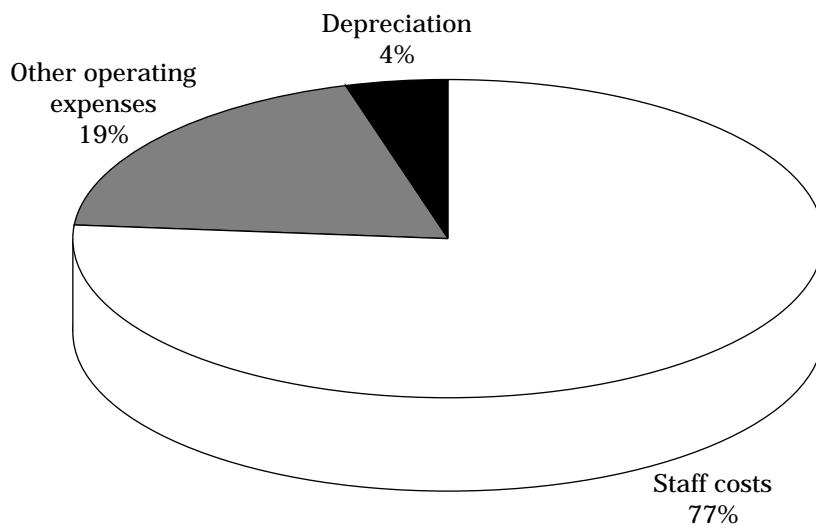
St Dominic's Sixth Form College: income (for 12 months to July 1996)



Income: £2,196,000

Figure 6

St Dominic's Sixth Form College: expenditure (for 12 months to July 1996)



Expenditure: £1,930,000

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