

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

St Vincent College

February 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 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 13/96

ST VINCENT COLLEGE

SOUTH EAST REGION

Inspected March-November 1995

Summary

St Vincent College is a sixth form college providing a wide range of further education courses for the town of Gosport and its surrounding districts. Enterprising management has encouraged staff to extend their skills by undertaking new initiatives and has achieved substantial growth in student numbers since 1990. There is a strong team spirit amongst staff. Members of the corporation are supportive of the college and bring a wide range of experience and expertise. They play their full part in the college's coherent cycle of development planning, quality review and strategic planning. Standards of teaching are high in many areas, particularly in English. Students achieve well in most external examinations and are supported by consistently good pastoral care throughout their association with the college. An effective college board allows staff to develop collective responsibility for standards and the direction of policy although there is a need to determine the board's terms of reference to accord with its function. The college recognises that it must continue implementation of its revised mission statement to take further account of the opportunities arising from adult education, its leisure centre, and links with industry. Membership of the corporation board should be brought into line with the instrument of government and more appropriate arrangements made for clerking. The college should address the poor resourcing of science. It should also develop a comprehensive estates strategy.

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	1
Quality assurance	2
Resources: staffing	1
equipment/learning resources	3
accommodation	3

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Mathematics	2	English	1
Science	3	History and languages	2
Business studies	2	Social studies and geography	2
Creative studies	2	Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities including adult basic education	2

INTRODUCTION

1 St Vincent College was inspected between March and November 1995. During the weeks beginning 27 March and 2 October, three full-time and eight part-time inspectors spent a total of 32 days on specialist subject inspections. A further specialist inspection was completed during the week beginning 27 November when a full-time inspector spent two days in the college. Inspectors visited 135 classes involving 1,452 students and examined a broad range of work. The inspectors also saw extensive documentation relating to the college and its courses. In the week beginning 16 October, and between June and September when enrolment and induction procedures were inspected, four full-time and two part-time inspectors spent a total of 20 days inspecting aspects of cross-college provision. During the period of the inspection there were meetings with members of the corporation, representatives of the Hampshire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) and of local industry and commerce, headteachers of local schools, students, parents, college managers and staff.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 St Vincent College was established as a sixth form college in 1987. It took over the buildings and three cohorts of pupils from a former 11-16 community school, as part of a reorganisation of secondary education in Gosport. The staying-on rate in Gosport was significantly below the Hampshire average at that time and reorganisation was intended to encourage more students to remain in education after the age of 16. The college has grown rapidly. It sponsors adult education programmes in five partner community schools and franchises their adult basic education courses. The staying-on rate in Gosport has risen to 70 per cent and is now much the same as the Hampshire average. Many students from further afield opt to travel to Gosport. From an initial intake of 250 and a target of 450 students, the college has now reached 1,172 full-time enrolments. Enrolments 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.

3 The original open-plan school was built in the 1970s in the centre of a former naval base. The buildings are a mixture of system-built modern constructions and listed Victorian buildings. The 12 hectare site has an interesting waterfront on a tidal creek which flows into Portsmouth Harbour. A leisure centre and adult education facilities on the campus have recently been taken over from the local authority. Some of the former naval buildings are used to restore historic yachts and small craft.

4 Gosport has a population of 75,000 people, clustered on a peninsula which has poor communications by road. It is linked to Portsmouth and the railway by a ferry. The few major employers include Polarcup, the yacht builder Camper and Nicholson's, and the Ministry of Defence. Most

jobs in the area are in defence, health care, retailing, catering and business administration. Work is more scarce for professionals and managers than for semi-skilled manual workers. The loss of major employers such as Ferguson's and Osmoroid, and the contraction of defence work, have caused hardship during recent years. However, Gosport's future now looks more secure. A new marina is increasing the demand for leisure services. Land is being released by the reorganisation of the Ministry of Defence, notably at Priddy's Hard adjacent to the college, and at HMS Daedalus. A light railway is proposed to ease access. Portsmouth and Gosport's successful joint bid to the Millennium's Lotteries Fund to redevelop its harbour includes a coastal path to the college and heritage developments nearby.

5 The college has eight academic departments: business, care, communications, creative studies, humanities, learning support, mathematics and science. There are also college co-ordinators for adult and continuing education and for vocational education. St Vincent College works with eleven 11-16 schools in Fareham and Gosport, including one for students with moderate learning difficulties and one for students with more severe problems. Three of these schools are grant maintained. One school has recently been given permission to establish a sixth form. The nearest of six further education colleges in the Portsmouth area is only four miles away.

6 The college mission is to provide a challenging educational environment in which all members of its community can realise their potential. St Vincent College aims for high quality in every aspect of its work, giving students an enjoyable and rewarding education from which they will emerge with a strong sense of personal direction and self-esteem.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

7 There is a wide range of full-time courses. These include: 34 General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level) subjects; 14 GCE advanced supplementary (AS) subjects; 10 General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) subjects; General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) in six programme areas; National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) in three programme areas; National Nursery Examinations Board (NNEB) diplomas and certificates; and specialist programmes for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The timetabling is arranged to enable the great majority of students to study the combination of courses and subjects they want. The college plans to extend its full-time vocational course range further by introducing GNVQs in engineering and performing arts in September 1996.

8 An extensive enrichment programme for full-time students adds to the breadth and variety of the curriculum. Over 90 per cent of students participate in the programme. This is a notable achievement. Sporting facilities are especially good, with a leisure centre which offers a swimming pool, sports hall, three squash courts, weight-conditioning suite, floodlit

netball and tennis courts, and an all-weather playing area. Students are given automatic membership of the centre. They are entitled to use its facilities for a nominal fee during the daytime and at members' rates during the evenings and at weekends. Many students work for sports awards such as the football association coaching certificate. Each year about 12 students win Hanson Awards in leadership.

9 The adult education part-time day and evening programme is offered in partnership with schools in Gosport and Fareham. There are over 3,000 students enrolled in the programmes, about 1,200 of whom are studying for recognised vocational awards. Mature students also take daytime courses. In 1996, the college plans to offer an access to higher education programme. It also plans to integrate more fully the leisure centre and the adult education programme with its mainstream activities. The lack of a creche may present a barrier to enrolment for some mature students.

10 The college has a marketing policy which is linked to its strategic plan. Prospectuses and information leaflets are distributed widely. The adult education prospectus is produced jointly with the college's partners, but its style does not match the St Vincent College full-time prospectus. It is visually poor and fails to establish the connection between St Vincent College's well-regarded full-time courses and the adult programme. A clearer link between these two publications, in terms of design and content, would be helpful to the college and prospective students.

11 The college has an effective schools liaison team. A nominated member of staff maintains links with each of the local secondary schools; head teachers are pleased with this system. Arrangements to involve parents are good. They are invited to attend recruitment interviews and parents' evenings provide opportunities to discuss progress with personal tutors and teachers. Written reports are sent to parents each session. The college hosts an annual conference to inform its students about opportunities in higher education. It has special arrangements for students' progression with the University of Portsmouth and La Sainte Union College. Students are encouraged to attend university open days; some 200 St Vincent College students went to the event at the University of Southampton last year.

12 A working party on education and business links has been active during the past year making contact with local companies. The college is a founder member of the Gosport Business Initiative. This was established to fill the need for a local chamber of commerce and to provide an industrial and commercial focus for the area. The college has recently joined the Hampshire TEC network steering committee. St Vincent College is increasingly involved with the TEC which has funded a number of small projects, including the development of an information technology workshop. The TEC is satisfied that the college strategic plan meets its priorities. There is a good relationship between the college and the Hampshire careers service.

13 The college has had an equal opportunities policy in place since June 1994. A working party, which includes student representatives, meets regularly to monitor progress in implementing the college policy and informs senior management of any concerns. The college has devoted considerable effort to make provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and for adult basic education. There is an outreach centre at a local hospital to provide education and training for secure patients. St Vincent College has tendered to operate the job club in Gosport and has joined with three local colleges to make a consortium bid for the European funding which is available for areas suffering from the rundown of defence industries. For some time the college has offered flexi-study courses and has developed materials for its open-learning centre with the help of funds from the TEC. Despite the college's efforts, take up of open-learning options is limited. The college does not offer separate classes for people who are unemployed but it makes no charge to those who enrol on part-time vocational courses.

14 During the last year, staff exchanges took place with Sweden, Spain and South Africa, and students have visited France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Spain and Sweden. The college plans to expand its overseas links, for example with Czechoslovakia where it has made initial contacts about collaborative ventures.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

15 The corporation board has an approved membership of six independent governors, one TEC nominee, two members of college staff, two parents and one student. There is provision for one co-option. At the time of the inspection, the board had a vacancy for one independent governor, and had two co-opted members. The board intends to seek approval to increase the number of members to bring current practice into line with an amended constitution. The board has six committees: finance, personnel, audit, community, remuneration, and assets and accommodation. All have formal terms of reference. Governors are enthusiastic and supportive and attend many college events. They have a thorough knowledge of the community served by the college and valuable experience of financial, personnel and managerial matters. The board is seeking additional members with experience of estate planning and development. Governors have confidence in the senior managers of the college, and committee chairmen keep in close touch with the staff who support their work. Governors are briefed by managers and are well informed about most issues.

16 The clerk does not have the seniority or independence to perform the full range of functions set out in the Further Education Funding Council's (FEFC's) *Guide to College Governors*. Documents presented to the board and its committees vary widely in style and content. Finance and personnel information is detailed and clear, but in other areas it is not obvious how business will be organised or which papers are presented for information

and which for resolution. Minutes provide a faithful record of proceedings, but do not show decisions plainly. There is no system of reference to supporting papers.

17 Strategic planning is integral to the work of the college. The process begins with a request to departments and service areas to prepare their development plans. These are discussed with managers, collated by the appropriate vice-principal and refined by the senior management team. The complete set is submitted to the summer meeting of the college board, which consists of the principal and vice-principals, senior staff, three governors, and elected representatives of the teaching and support staff and of the student body. The college board has the power to approve, reject or modify the development plan. Its contents are condensed into objectives in the college strategic plan, which governors consider at their July meeting. In February each year, the college board reviews the previous year's development plans against the results. This meeting is a key event in supporting both the quality assurance system and the beginning of another cycle of planning and review. The college achieved its target for growth in 1994-95. Final figures for 1995-96 are not yet available.

18 The college board enables staff to take collective responsibility for standards and the direction of policy. It operates very effectively but its terms of reference do not reflect its current function. They need revision and this will necessitate changes in the terms of reference of several other college committees and better definition of their relationships to the college board. Governors are invited to attend college board meetings, and its minutes are sent to all members. In the past, the same governors did not attend every meeting of the college board. The appointment of three governors to the college board will help the corporation to fulfil its duty of determining the character of the college.

19 The senior management team comprises the principal and three vice-principals. The latter are responsible for the curriculum, for strategic planning and resources, and for student and community services, respectively. The senior management team is a cohesive group which meets regularly and provides clear leadership. Communications with staff are full and effective. There is a college calendar of meetings. The senior management team holds a monthly meeting with the finance manager and the manager of the leisure centre to review the college's financial position. Other committees or working parties meet every five weeks. All committees have adequate agendas and minutes, but the proceedings of each meeting do not obviously build on decisions reached earlier. Greater formality of committee practice would assist the efficient working of the college.

20 Academic departments are well managed and there is a strong sense of teamwork. Departmental meetings are held regularly and involve full-time and part-time teaching staff and support staff. The organisational

structure of the college is clear, but use of the terms 'faculty' and 'department' interchangeably to describe the main academic areas is confusing. All essential policies are in place, including those for equal opportunities, health and safety, and the tutorial, pastoral care, and curriculum entitlement of students. Job descriptions exist for all staff and academic, administrative, and financial responsibilities are clear.

21 The college's unit of funding for 1995-96 is £17.69. The median for sixth form colleges is £19.37. The college's estimated income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1996 are shown in figures 5 and 6. The procedures for allocating resources are well planned. The budget for teaching staff is managed centrally and staff are deployed to match student enrolments. Very few classes have less than 10 students and managers avoid mixing year groups to make up viable numbers. Major expenditure is determined against bids from curriculum and service areas. Budgets for consumable materials are based on a mixture of past history and bidding to reflect current needs. A working party is re-examining this procedure to devise a means of allocation which more accurately reflects real costs. Unit costing is under development but, so far, only for the leisure centre and for adult education. The finance department provides accurate and timely reports to enable budget holders to manage their accounts. Staff costs as a percentage of college income, and student-to-staff ratios, are known and controlled. Careful management has succeeded in reducing staffing costs as a percentage of income from 79 per cent in 1993-94 to a projected 71 per cent in 1995-96.

22 The college's computerised database provides good student data, including information on students' applications, enrolments, courses, gender, race and previous schools. The planned extension of the administrative computer network will make this information directly accessible to tutor team leaders, heads of department and most service area managers. Experience of the pilot phase of the national individualised student record has prompted the college to appoint a data manager. There is accounting software which is suitable for the present size of the college. Some compromises have been made to achieve a commitment accounting system, but these are acceptable to the internal and external auditors. The adequacy of the present computer systems to provide good management information depends heavily on the energy and ingenuity of a few staff rather than the sophistication of the tools at their disposal.

23 The college makes provision for religious education and for a collective act of worship. This satisfies the requirements of sections 44 and 45 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

24 Policy statements outlining the framework for guidance and support are clear and comprehensive; the college invests substantial resources in

this area. There is an effective tutorial system which involves every full-time member of the teaching staff. St Vincent College's reputation for good pastoral support is often a key factor in students' choice of college. The prospectus and course guides provide information which is helpful to potential students and especially to school leavers. A large proportion of full-time students come from local 11-16 schools. Liaison tutors build strong links with these schools and are pupils' first point of contact with the college. Open evenings and taster lessons help applicants to choose their courses. At all stages of the pre-enrolment phase, college staff advise in a friendly and relaxed fashion.

25 New full-time students are given a thorough enrolment and induction. The process begins with an introductory day in June which offers a taste of college life, including tutorials, lessons, short courses, and a college meeting. At the end of the day, each student draws up an action plan. Guidance is available after the publication of GCSE results. At the beginning of the autumn term, a four-day enrolment period combines administrative tasks with activities designed to familiarise students with the college, and to help them to get to know their tutors. This approach provides a smooth and speedy start to work. Enrolment and induction procedures are evaluated each year and enrolment statistics are studied to determine future plans. There are systematic procedures to ensure that students receive guidance if they wish to change courses. In 1994, about 60 students changed their original programmes and, for most of them, this was a constructive move.

26 The tutorial system is carefully designed. Tutor groups meet daily to keep students informed of college events, to update individual action plans, to consider personal and social issues, and to monitor attendance. Adult students have their own tutor groups because it is recognised that they have different needs for guidance and support. All groups bring together students of different subjects at differing levels, including those for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The skills of personal tutors are developed mainly through pairing less-experienced staff with those who are familiar with the tutorial role. Both tutors share the management of tutorial sessions and the pastoral care of every student in the group. The service is strengthened by grouping tutors into teams which meet to share ideas about issues arising from tutorials. There is good communication between subject specialists and personal tutors. Written records of students' progress are kept.

27 Learning support in basic skills is timetabled so that it is accessible to everyone who might need it. Evening sessions are provided for part-time adult students. Students on GNVQ and GCSE programmes are screened on entry to assess their numeracy and literacy. There is general recognition by staff and students that people at all levels of study may need help with basic skills. A scheme involving mentors offers a variety of additional help for those students who, on the basis of data from the Advanced Level Information System, are identified as having the potential to achieve academic excellence.

28 A personal counselling service is provided by an external agency accommodated on the campus. There is good communication between the agency and college managers to ensure that information on the use of the service, and any emerging issues, are passed on. Matters of general concern identified by counsellors form the basis for some topics considered in tutorial groups. This practice provides an opportunity for students who have not chosen to seek help from a counsellor to air their concerns if they wish to. A significant number of personal tutors have undertaken basic counselling skills training.

29 The student council plays an important role in representing the views of students to senior managers and to the governors. Its members approach this duty in a responsible and constructive way and have been influential in shaping the college. They are good ambassadors for St Vincent College at open evenings and during induction.

30 Careers guidance in the college has been heavily dependent on county careers advisers. The recent appointment of a teacher to co-ordinate careers advice is intended to raise awareness of careers opportunities and to give greater coherence to what is already offered in the library, at careers events and during individual careers interviews. Greater emphasis should be placed on careers education for students who do not wish to go on to higher education. Students complete questionnaires on leaving and their destinations are logged. Many keep in touch with the college which offers a post-results clinic for those who need it. This was particularly helpful to some students when some universities were less than efficient in responding to them in 1995.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

31 Good teaching was observed in all curriculum areas; the standard in English was particularly high. Of the 135 sessions inspected, 67 per cent had strengths which clearly outweighed the weaknesses. Five per cent had weaknesses which clearly outweighed the strengths. The following table summarises the grades given to the sessions inspected. Attendance was highest in science, at 91 per cent, and the average across the college was 84 per cent.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade 1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE AS/A level	13	36	17	3	0	69
GCSE	4	5	6	0	0	15
GNVQ	2	5	6	0	0	13
NVQ	2	1	0	0	0	3
Other vocational	2	2	0	0	0	4
Basic education	1	5	2	0	0	8
Non-schedule 2	0	2	3	0	0	5
Other	3	7	4	4	0	18
Total	27	63	38	7	0	135

32 Syllabuses have been carefully selected and coherent programmes of study have been created to help students understand how each class fits into the overall scheme of work. The physics scheme of work is exemplary. Others, such as those in biology, chemistry and some of the social sciences, should be improved to give clearer statements of aims and objectives in relation to content, learning methods and assessment.

33 Relations between staff and students are friendly and supportive. Students talk with staff about their problems and seek help without any awkwardness. At the same time, teachers are concerned to challenge and extend their students' learning. In a GCE A level class, students were discussing a complex topic in moral theology. The teacher's interventions encouraged students to deepen their understanding of the subject and to match their vocabulary and tone to sensitive and sometimes contentious issues. A high standard of oral work was achieved.

34 Teachers show a sound knowledge of their subjects and, in many cases, an enthusiasm to which students respond eagerly. In one lesson on the Balkan crisis, students entered with gusto into their roles of representing the great powers negotiating alliances. At the end of the class they understood more clearly the basis of the calculations made by all the countries involved. In an English literature class, groups of four students were asked to adopt characters from the play 'A Winter's Tale', and to debate their nature and motivation. The exercise gave them a deeper understanding of the characters.

35 Staff are imaginative in engaging and sustaining the interest of their students. They use a variety of learning techniques such as group work, pair work, role-play, plenary discussion and individual research. In a GCE A level social biology class, students were preparing for a debate on the ethics of rearing animals as sources of material for organ transplant surgery. After a clear briefing from the teacher, they divided into two teams and cast lots to decide which would speak for, and which against, the practice. The groups discussed their task, some students went to the library to search for information and, within half an hour, each team had assembled its material. In some classes there was a determination to push students towards the acquisition of advanced skills in analysis, interpretation, and advocacy. In one history class, the teacher dealt with difficult concepts by playing the role of a dictator and requiring students to act as his economic advisers. Students worked in groups to prepare their presentations and demonstrated their ability to put a detailed and convincing argument to a critical audience made up of the remainder of the class, as well as to their none too easily satisfied dictator. Two students with learning difficulties took part in a GCSE dance class as part of their optional programme. In the session observed, the teacher was able to give clear instructions to them without oversimplifying matters or patronising the students. She demanded high standards, ensuring that movements were correct. At the end of the session, the students were encouraged to reflect on what they had learned.

36 To help students of GCSE mathematics, many of whom were resitting the subject, staff have devised their own open-learning materials which enable students to learn at their own pace. These learning packages are of a good professional standard. They include summaries of the material to be covered, directions to a variety of sources, and exercises. To encourage students to check their own progress and to seek help from the teacher when needed, answers are provided to only some of the questions. Students responded well to this way of working.

37 Adult students are well integrated with classes of 16-19 year olds. Teachers recognise their particular needs and respond both to the experience they bring to classes and to their frequent lack of confidence. Teachers used students' experience to illustrate the topics under discussion and provided individual projects to help them work at their own pace. Students were encouraged to work with the medium with which they felt most comfortable, including books, newspapers, videos, compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) database or the spoken word. The course in Japanese attracts students from a wide age range and with widely varying linguistic knowledge. The teacher succeeded in motivating adult and younger students alike, and all of them spoke enthusiastically about the progress they had made.

38 The college makes good provision for the development of core skills through its central drop-in workshop. Students decide to attend themselves, or teachers may encourage them to attend. There is a well-structured short course entitled 'maths for scientists' for those students who need extra help.

39 On all courses work of an appropriate standard is set. It is marked regularly and thoroughly. Assessments are consistent and fair. In the best practice, mark schemes are shared with students, work is returned promptly and written comments are sufficiently detailed to give students guidance on how to improve. In a few instances, comments are relatively thin. Most errors in grammar and spelling were corrected.

40 Work experience is offered to all full-time students of the college. Whilst students on vocational courses are most likely to take up work placements, some 150 GCE A level students took up the offer in 1994-95, many of them in areas of work related to their future career plans.

41 Not all classes were of the same high standard. Some were over structured and gave students little scope to think and act for themselves. These sessions did not challenge the students and the pace of work was so slow that they lost interest. In other classes, the teacher's questions were always addressed to the whole group of students and, in responding, a small number of students were allowed to dominate while others were left out entirely. In some classes students were given no guidance on study skills; they were expected to take notes but, despite their obvious difficulties, received no help in choosing points of significance. Visual aids were not always used effectively. In one class, students were given a handout which contained most of the information required for their topic

of study. At various times during the class, they were asked to copy sections of it into their notes. By the end of the class they had copied the entire handout.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

42 It is evident from their lively responses and obvious enthusiasm that the majority of students enjoy their work. Although the inspection was carried out early in the autumn term, new students were already settled into the college. They spoke with enthusiasm about the quality of the teaching and the support they receive from staff.

43 They develop appropriate levels of knowledge and understanding. In GCE A level classical civilisation, students showed particularly detailed knowledge, including good recall of previous lessons and a depth of knowledge clearly attributable to the breadth of their reading. In the best classes students' ability to analyse and evaluate, and to use specialised vocabulary accurately and with confidence, was of a high standard. Most students develop their core skills sufficiently well for them to carry out their studies successfully.

44 The majority of students carry out practical work competently and safely. However, in a significant minority of classes safety standards were lax. Staff did not always insist that protective clothing was worn or that students tied back their long hair when using bunsen burners. Bags littered the floor in crowded laboratories.

45 In 1993, there were 669 GCE A level entries in 28 different subjects, and the average pass rate was 85 per cent. In 1994, there were 794 GCE A level entries in 30 different subjects and the average pass rate increased to 87 per cent. In 1995, there were 625 GCE A level entries in 32 different subjects and the average pass rate was 89 per cent, a significant further improvement. Of the 32 GCE A level subjects offered in 1995, every student who entered the examination in the following 14 subjects gained a pass grade: archaeology, Christian theology, classical civilisation, communication studies, dance, English literature, further mathematics, German, graphical communication, Italian, law, mathematics, music and theatre studies. This is a considerable achievement, although student numbers were small in some of these subjects. There are few subjects in which pass rates give any cause for concern. There were 33 entries in 10 GCE AS subjects with an average pass rate of 67 per cent. Eight of the 10 subjects at this level had entries of four or fewer.

46 Students aged 16-18 who were entered for GCE AS/A level examinations in 1994-95 scored, on average, 5.1 points per entry. This places the college among 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.

47 For GCSE, there were 466 entries in 1993, and the average pass rate was 43 per cent. In 1994 there were 323 entries, and the average pass

rate was 59 per cent; above the national average. In 1995, there were 281 entries and the average pass rate was 53 per cent. Eight of the 17 subjects had pass rates at or above the national average, but some subjects give cause for concern. The 40 per cent fall in entries for GCSE examinations between 1993 and 1995 is the result of action by the college to guide students towards courses more suited to them, such as GNVQ.

48 Retention rates at GCSE level have in the three years 1993, 1994 and 1995 stood at 84 per cent, 86 per cent and 78 per cent respectively. In the same years, GCE A level retention rates were 92 per cent, 83 per cent and 78 per cent. The college should examine retention rates in some individual GCE A level subjects.

49 Fifty-three per cent of the students aged 16-18 in their final year of study on the vocational courses included in the Department for Education and Employment's 1995 performance tables were successful. This places the college among the bottom 10 per cent of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure. The number of students at the college who pursued vocational courses was relatively small in 1994-95, but it is growing and is now in excess of 400. The NNEB certificate course ran for the first time in 1994-95, recruited 16 students, and had a 100 per cent retention rate and 94 per cent pass rate. The certificate in media techniques: journalism and radio, has had pass rates of 58, 100 and 77 per cent, respectively in the last three years. The certificate in media techniques: television and video, has run for two years and has had pass rates of 100 and 91 per cent. Other courses have been less successful. The GNVQs in business studies at foundation and intermediate levels had pass rates of 50 and 53 per cent in 1995. NVQ level 2 in business administration had a pass rate of 56 per cent. GNVQ care and GNVQ leisure and tourism, both at intermediate level, had pass rates of 60 and 63 per cent. The college needs to continue to improve the consistency of its pass rates on vocational courses as it introduces new programmes of study.

50 The achievements of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are accredited through City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) wordpower and numberpower awards, as well as through the English Speaking Board and the Hampshire Open College Network. There is effective recording of students' learning during their courses, but there is a need for better records of students' progress in personal development. The students are enthusiastic about their work. They are confident and participate in college life. They progress appropriately on to other courses and into employment.

51 The college analyses the destinations of full-time students who leave the college. Of those who left in 1994, 52 per cent went into higher education, 17 per cent into employment, 4 per cent continued in further education, 1 per cent went onto training courses and 1 per cent undertook other activities. The destinations of 25 per cent of students were unknown. Of the students who left in 1995, 49 per cent went into higher education,

21 per cent went into employment, 6 per cent continued in further education, 2 per cent went onto training courses and 18 per cent undertook other activities such as temporary employment or voluntary work during a year out before entering higher education. The destinations of only 4 per cent of students are unknown. The college is making good progress in tracking the destinations of its students.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

52 The college has amended its charter for the 1995-96 session. The student council made a substantial contribution to the amendments improving the charter's directness of language, its applicability to all students and the range of its contents. Student representatives consider that the charter is an accurate reflection of the college's values. Among its strengths is concentration on the obligations of the college to students, rather than dwelling at length on its expectations of them. A weakness is the lack of named staff contacts in each section to ensure that those students who might need help receive it without delay. The charter was introduced to new students by members of the student council, and by tutors.

53 The college has conducted a variety of quality assurance activities since it opened. These have included analysis of students' progression by the principal and, in some departments, bold initiatives such as the evaluation of individual teachers by students. The result is that staff recognise the distinction between sole reliance upon students' pass rates in examinations as indicators of performance and formal procedures to assure consistency and steady improvement.

54 The college's main procedures for quality assurance have been brought together in a policy which is being implemented in its entirety for the first time this year. It sets out related quality assurance programmes for public liaison and marketing, student services, and the curriculum. The college board first sets standards and then appraises results in its annual cycle of two meetings. The scheme is an elegant one, which has potential for the further development of collective responsibility for both the direction and the effectiveness of the college. At this relatively early stage, the scheme has yet to prove its effectiveness fully.

55 A key to this development will be the clarity in the relationship between the college's development plan and its strategic plan. Presentation of the development plan improved substantially between the 1994 and 1995 versions, but at the same time the number of targets it set doubled to more than 350. A smaller number of the more critical targets would help to clarify links to the 21 objectives of the strategic plan. Few of the existing targets are readily measurable; greater quantification will be necessary if progress is to be assessed.

56 Several methods of gathering quality assurance data are used. St Vincent College has subscribed to the Advanced Level Information System since 1991. This system provides statistics showing the extent to which students taking GCE A level in this college fare better or worse than was

predicted on the basis of their GCSE results. Staff benefit from lucid, relevant explanation of Advanced Level Information System results by the quality assurance manager, and guidance on whether or not they are significant. The use of the system has led to a review of students in four of the larger departments to identify why some students perform less well than anticipated. This work has confirmed that the students whose performance at GCSE is in the mid range have lower value added scores than those whose performance is better or worse. Tutorial support will, in future, be more accurately directed to those who need it most. An annual review of every department by a vice-principal has matured in the last year to include formal identification of issues for consideration. Reviews also include observation of teaching by all members of the senior management team and by the head of each department. Lessons of general application will be reported to the college board as part of an annual curriculum update. St Vincent College is a member of the Hampshire sixth form colleges' quality consortium and, so far, two of its departments have been reviewed by teachers from other colleges. The commitment of staff to quality assurance has been demonstrated by the fact that the findings of these first reviews have been discussed with the senior management team and with heads of department meeting in the academic board, although the scheme does not demand that such open debate should take place.

57 Questionnaires are used to collect information from students. These include their early contacts, their experience of the college as a whole and of subject areas during their courses, and their views on leaving. Most questionnaires are designed in the college and are brief and pertinent. The more comprehensive Advanced Level Information System survey of views is also used. There is little obvious feedback on the results of questionnaires but there is evidence that criticisms are tackled and that students trust senior managers to ensure that this happens. For example, the growth in student numbers left the refectory inadequate in size. Questionnaire returns helped managers to gauge the level of priority that had to be given to this problem and to resolve it by meeting the student body, by extending the refectory and by adjusting the lunch hours in the timetable.

58 The various elements of the quality assurance scheme are described in many documents. The consolidation which began with the recent publication of the policy should continue, so that the college's quality assurance measures can be understood more readily in their entirety. This is all the more necessary since procedures are still being extended to encompass work newly brought under the college's control, such as adult education and the operation of the leisure centre.

59 An appraisal scheme has been introduced at the behest of the teaching staff. Its development began in 1990 but was completed only in 1994. This slow progress is attributable to the thoroughness of consultation and justified by the general support that now exists for a rigorous scheme which includes observation of staff at work. At the time of the inspection only the 26 more senior staff had begun appraisal. The scheme is already

being reviewed to consider improvements and to take account of the inclusion of support staff, and staff from the leisure centre and adult education. The results of appraisal will include targets for staff development. The principal will see all appraisal summaries and will be informed by them when considering staff for promotion. However, there is no direct link between appraisal and pay at present.

60 A staff-development panel was introduced at the time of the inspection to establish more clearly the criteria for selecting activities that accord with the development plan and strategic plan. The annual staff-development budget is declining and at about £37,000 from all sources, less than 1 per cent of income it is modest. A policy document for staff development was adopted earlier in 1995. Records of staff development are carefully maintained. For staff joining the college there is a good induction programme which includes introductory talks on college procedures and careful guidance by managers. Formal guidance and assessment are provided for newly-qualified teachers. The programme includes the opportunity to observe more experienced teachers in class, to work alongside them as tutors and to be observed while teaching.

61 A self-assessment report was produced by the staff responsible for each area, following the outline of the Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. It is a comprehensive description of the college's activities and intentions, and shows awareness of national priorities. Commentary is frequently amplified by statistical data although the report lacks strict analysis and crisply-expressed targets to be achieved in the future. The self-assessment report has yet to develop as a tool of management and, in the context of the college's strengths in quality assurance, it is disappointing. There is scope for self-assessment to link naturally with the college board cycle of planning and review.

RESOURCES

Staffing

62 The college's teaching staff are well qualified. All full-time teachers have teacher-training qualifications and assistance is given to enable new unqualified teaching staff to gain one. Twenty-six staff have Training and Development Lead Body awards, and a further 16 are working towards this accreditation. A significant proportion of the full-time staff have experience of work outside education, although a few who teach on vocational courses would benefit from more industrial experience. Part-time staff contribute current commercial knowledge to some courses.

63 There are 76 full-time equivalent teaching staff. Seventeen (12.85 full-time equivalent) of these teachers have part-time contracts. Daytime teaching staff are employed full time wherever possible, so that they can be personal tutors for a group of full-time students. There are 54 full-time equivalent support staff who work effectively to further the work of the college. Ten have begun work to gain NVQ accreditation. Fifty-five per

cent of teaching staff and 50 per cent of the senior management team are female. With its future in mind, the college has appointed a number of younger members of staff in recent years. The result is that approximately 40 per cent of staff are below the age of 40, and a further 47 per cent are under 50.

64 Staff are committed to helping their students and are enthusiastic about their jobs. They participate regularly in working parties on specific topics, and respond conscientiously to requests from working parties and from senior managers for information and views. They are supportive of each other in both academic and personal matters. Informal contact in the staff room, and daily meetings of the whole staff, provide a focus for animated discussion and planning. The college demands flexibility from its staff so that it can provide choice for students. Staff are encouraged to choose areas in which they can make a contribution and to seek out tasks in which they have particular interest or expertise. The variety and stimulation afforded by this practice give staff job satisfaction and increase their awareness of matters which are of concern to the whole college.

65 The personnel office has been influential in providing expert advice to the personnel committee of the governing body. This group has adopted staff-disciplinary and grievance procedures, and policies for redundancy, professional support, equal opportunities and harassment at work. Staff turnover is low. Usually, staff have moved only for promotion or retirement. Absence through illness is thoroughly monitored and is also low. The college has only recently become the employer of adult education and leisure centre staff. It now has 70 adult education tutors, 12 of whom teach adult basic education classes, and 20 sports coaches. The college is carefully integrating these staff through regular meetings with senior managers, involvement elsewhere in the college, and by attaching adult education tutors to subject departments.

Equipment/learning resources

66 The college has an appropriate range of general purpose teaching aids. Most classrooms have an adequate selection of visual aids, including overhead projectors, screens and boards. General purpose classrooms are suitably furnished and most corridors and classrooms are carpeted.

67 The level, quality and condition of equipment vary from subject to subject. Equipment is good in design technology and graphical communications, music, theatre studies, dance, and drama. Videos and CD-ROM material augment the books in English. Students are also encouraged to see performances of plays and to attend poetry readings. Consumable materials in science are only just adequate for the courses. Many microscopes have inadequate lighting arrangements and are not ideal for GCE A level biology. There are not enough items of basic equipment such as calorimeters or digital balances for larger group sizes. Shortage of equipment in some of the business studies department's rooms

reduces the effectiveness of the teaching. Better equipment is needed for photography, television and video, radio journalism, and media courses.

68 The college has developed a comprehensive plan for information technology and has improved the number and standard of computers in recent years. With one computer for every six full-time students, the college is well resourced, and most students say that they find access easy. Computers are available for students with learning difficulties and they are used routinely for their presentation of work. There are approximately 170 computer workstations of various kinds which are being linked by networked connections. Approximately one-third are of high quality. New machines in mathematics and business studies have improved the resources for teaching these subjects. About a further 50 machines are adequate for non-specialist purposes but a number of these are unreliable and are reaching the end of their useful lives. The remainder are outdated and should be replaced as soon as possible. Information technology in science is inadequate for data capture, analysis and modelling, and will remain so even when a current equipment order is fulfilled.

69 The library is well equipped with CD-ROM and other databases. Administration, circulation and catalogues are computerised. The current library stock comprises 15,300 catalogued items including 10,500 books. There is space for an extra 3,000 books. The library is currently compiling a catalogue of books held in departmental collections. Once this is completed, it will be possible to assess the standard of library provision as a whole and to decide the most appropriate location for holding library resources. There is limited library stock for language studies in English, for mathematics and for social studies, and there is an ageing collection of literature in foreign languages. A particular strength is the stock of periodicals and journals, and the accessibility of press cuttings. This is of considerable value to students in social studies, geography and environmental science. The library is open for 12 hours a day, Monday to Thursday, and for a slightly shorter time on Friday. Usage is increasing, although in the evening it remains low. There are criteria for the allocation of the library budget. All heads of department are asked in June to make their choices for the next academic year, but not all respond. The head librarian is not a member of any college committee, although a librarian's report is submitted twice a year to the college board.

70 The leisure centre houses a swimming pool which meets competitive requirements, a large sports hall, squash courts, a room for weight training and an indoor bowling floor. Equipment is not the most modern, but it is used extensively by clubs, local groups and young people. Outside, the floodlit all-weather pitch is in regular use and a new netball centre has been a great success.

Accommodation

71 The college occupies a 12-hectare site which has great potential, but many difficulties. The north and south ends betray the site's origins as a Royal Navy barracks. At the northern end are the leisure centre facilities. The main college building is centrally located. It appears utilitarian in sharp contrast to the adjacent Victorian blocks with their impressive clock tower at the entrance. Transformation of the buildings for further education was initially hampered by lack of finance. Since incorporation, the college has felt inhibited by delays in transferring formally ownership of these buildings from the county council. The college should now proceed to draw up a comprehensive estates strategy, seeking expert advice to deal with particular problems such as the listed buildings and the wide variety of users. Progress in conducting a space utilisation study has been slow; such data will be required to inform a more general review of accommodation.

72 Improvements to college accommodation have been made. These have been financed mainly from the revenue budget. The most notable have been the pleasant new library, and the much needed extension to the refectory. Other significant improvements include the creation of a theatre and a dance studio, the refurbishing and re-equipping of performing arts studios, the provision of large studios for art and design, and the development of good-quality media and music studios. The adaptations are not without their weaknesses. Some of the accommodation is too small; for example, the accommodation for photography and radio/journalism. Noise in some areas is a distraction, particularly in social studies, mathematics and English. A number of classrooms act as corridors. Ventilation remains inadequate in parts of the building. Some toilets are in need of refurbishment. The teaching accommodation in science is in urgent need of improvement and business studies accommodation does not reflect a modern business environment.

73 Access to the main building is good for students with restricted mobility and a lift enables them to use all floors. Toilets and changing facilities have been adapted for the use of such students. Mobility around the site is now relatively easy, although work is still being carried out to improve access to the college's listed buildings.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

74 The particular strengths of the college are:

- high standards of teaching and students' achievements
- good pastoral care for students
- the well-conceived tutorial system which operates reliably
- management which encourages staff to extend their skills by undertaking new initiatives
- the coherent cycle of development planning, quality review and strategic planning

-
- the strong team spirit among staff
 - the college board, which allows staff to develop collective responsibility for standards and the direction of policy
 - the student council which takes a positive role in shaping policy and practice.

75 If the college is to improve further the quality of its provision, it should address the following:

- the implementation of its revised mission statement to take further account of the opportunities arising from adult education, its leisure centre, and links with industry
- the need to bring membership of the corporation board into line with the instruments of government and to secure more appropriate arrangements for clerking
- the determination of the terms of reference of the college board to accord with its function
- the poor resourcing of science
- the development of a comprehensive estates strategy.

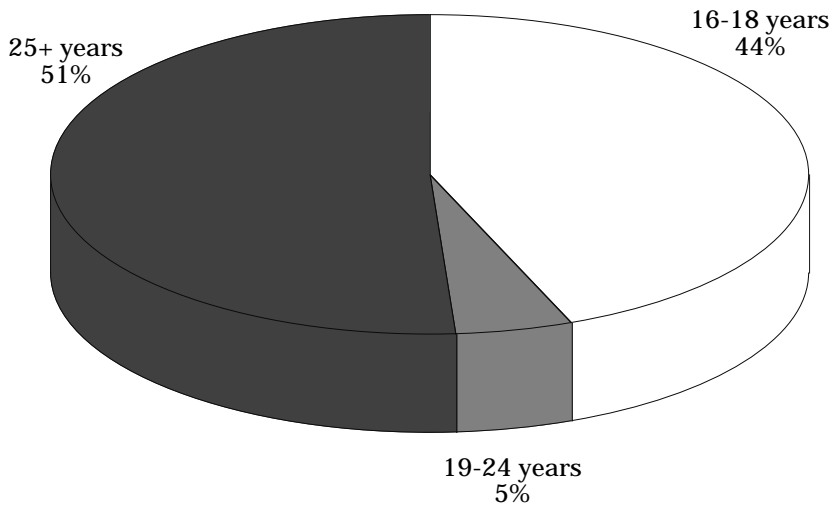
FIGURES

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

Figure 1

St Vincent College: percentage enrolments by age (1995-96)

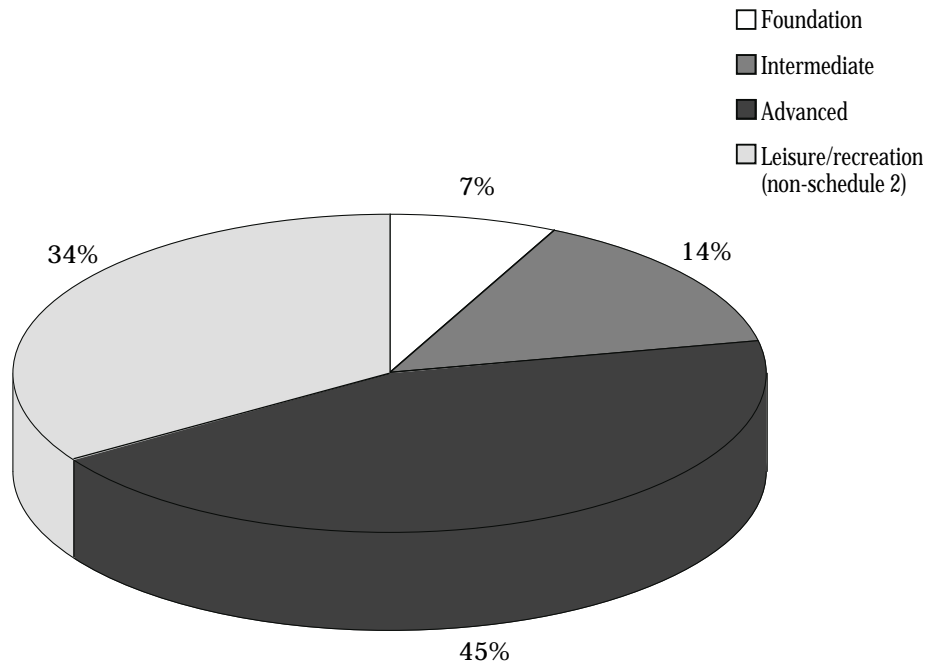


Enrolments: 2,440

Note: this chart excludes nine enrolments under the age of 16.

Figure 2

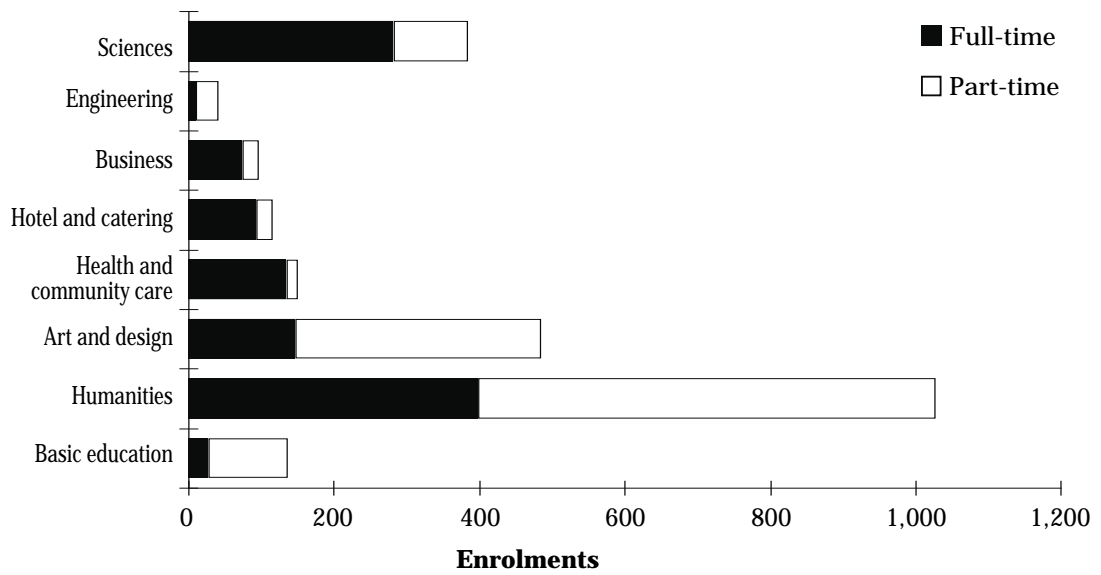
St Vincent College: percentage enrolments by level of study (1995-96)



Enrolments: 2,440

Figure 3

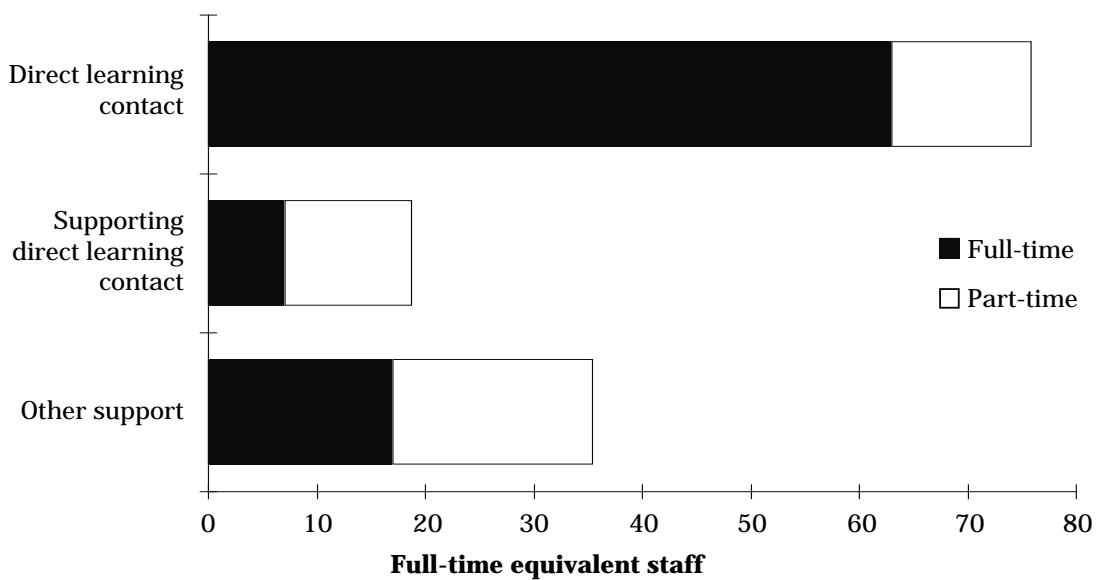
St Vincent College: enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1995-96)



Enrolments: 2,440

Figure 4

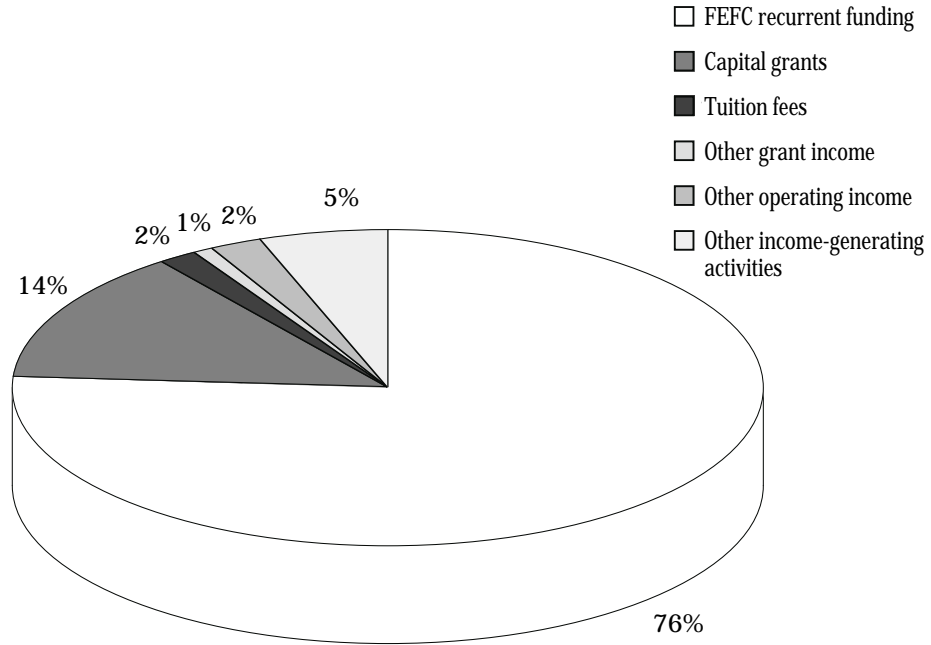
St Vincent College: staff profile - staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1995-96)



Full-time equivalent staff: 130

Figure 5

St Vincent College: estimated income (for 12 months to July 1996)

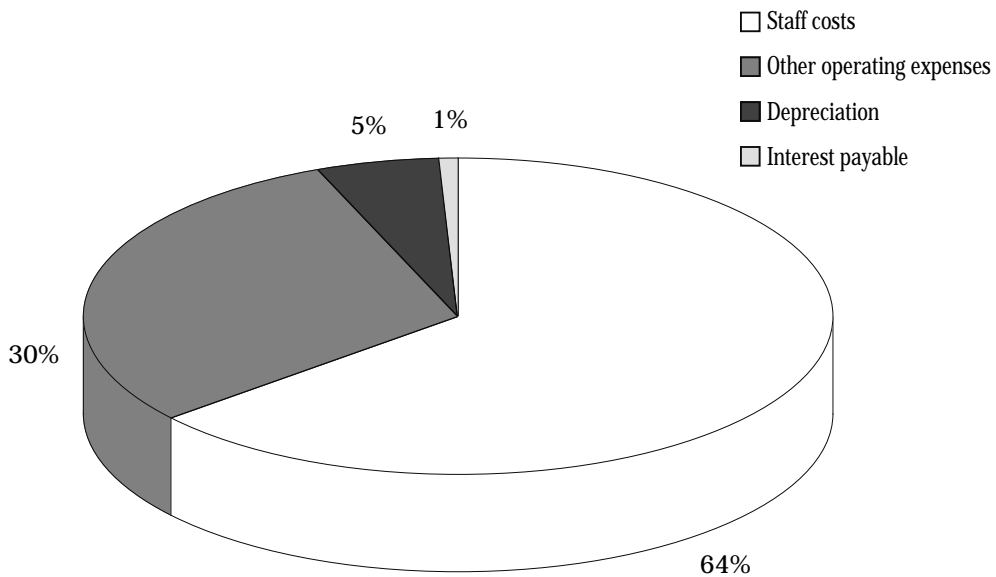


Estimated income: £4,551,000

Note: this chart excludes £15,000 education contracts.

Figure 6

St Vincent College: estimated expenditure (for 12 months to July 1996)



Estimated expenditure: £4,410,000

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