

REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE

Notre Dame Sixth Form College

August 1996

THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL

***THE FURTHER EDUCATION
FUNDING COUNCIL***

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

*Cheylesmore House
Quinton Road
Coventry CV1 2WT
Telephone 01203 863000
Fax 01203 863100*

CONTENTS

	Paragraph
Summary	
Introduction	1
The college and its aims	2
Responsiveness and range of provision	6
Governance and management	16
Students' recruitment, guidance and support	25
Teaching and the promotion of learning	34
Students' achievements	45
Quality assurance	58
Resources	64
Conclusions and issues	74
Figures	

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 106/96

NOTRE DAME SIXTH FORM COLLEGE
YORKSHIRE AND HUMBERSIDE REGION
Inspected February 1995-May 1996

Summary

Notre Dame Sixth Form College in Leeds is the only Roman Catholic sixth form college in the Yorkshire and Humberside region. It provides a broad range of GCSE and GCE A level subjects, and some GNVQ courses, for full-time students aged 16 to 19. The governors are strongly supportive of the college's Catholic mission. They and the staff have created a strong sense of corporate identity. The college has close and effective links with its partner schools, with parents and with the Catholic community. Its curriculum is enriched by an extensive programme of extra-curricular activities and a compulsory religious education programme. Staff at all levels show care and concern in their dealings with students. Standards of teaching are high, and students' progress is rigorously monitored. Students achieve good results in external examinations, particularly at GCE A level. The college has recently introduced a well-designed quality assurance system. Teachers are well qualified and committed to the success of their students. Staff teaching on vocational courses lack up-to-date experience of industry. The college should: extend the range of its provision to match the objectives stated in its strategic plan; address some weaknesses in its support and guidance processes; enable staff to become more involved in strategic planning; align its quality assurance cycle with its planning cycle; and improve the level of technician support, library resources and the quality of some of its accommodation.

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

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Science	2	English	1
Mathematics and computing	2	Modern Languages and classics	1
Business	3	History, law, politics and economics	1
Creative and performing arts	1	Geography, psychology, sociology and religious education	2

INTRODUCTION

1 Notre Dame Sixth Form College was inspected in four stages between February 1995 and May 1996. Eleven inspectors spent 52 days in the college. They observed 111 teaching sessions, examined students' work, inspected the college's enrolment and induction procedures and attended tutorials and assemblies. Inspectors also held meetings with governors, staff, students, parents, employers, community representatives, staff from partner Catholic primary and high schools, and representatives of the Diocese of Leeds, Leeds Careers Guidance Limited, higher education and the local training and enterprise council (TEC).

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 Notre Dame Sixth Form College is a designated institution under the terms of *The Further and Higher Education Act 1992*. It is the only Roman Catholic sixth form college in the Yorkshire and Humberside region. It was established as a sixth form college in 1989 and occupies the premises of the former Notre Dame High School for Girls, near the centre of Leeds. The site belongs to the Roman Catholic Diocese of Leeds and is administered by the Diocesan Trustees. The college concentrates on providing full-time General Certificate of Education advanced supplementary/advanced level (GCE AS/A level) and General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) courses for 16 to 19 year old students. Vocational programmes were introduced in 1991. These now include intermediate and advanced General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs), and programmes accredited by the National Nursery Examinations Board (NNEB), RSA Examinations Board (RSA) and Pitmans.

3 The college sees its primary role as providing full-time courses for students from its four Roman Catholic 11 to 16 partner schools. An increasing number of students are recruited from other Catholic and non-Catholic schools, some from as far away as Bradford and Wakefield. The proportion of non-Catholic students at the college is currently 18 per cent. Nineteen per cent of students receive discretionary awards. In the immediate vicinity, there are specialist further education colleges of art and design, music, technology, building, catering and caring, and a large general further education college. Notre Dame Sixth Form College is the largest provider of GCE A level courses in the area, although there are approximately 50 local schools and colleges which offer a post-16 curriculum similar to that of Notre Dame. These include one Roman Catholic 11 to 18 school.

4 The college has grown steadily from 450 students in 1989 to 695 in November 1995. All students are 16 to 19 years of age and attend the college full time. Eighty-two per cent are following advanced level programmes. Student numbers by age, by level of study and by curriculum area are shown in figures 1, 2 and 3, respectively. The college has 53 full-time equivalent teachers and 16 full-time equivalent staff. A staff profile, with staff expressed

as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4. The senior management team comprises the principal, two vice-principals and the college administrator. There is also an extended management team which comprises the senior management team and six senior teachers.

5 The primary goal of the college, according to its mission statement, is 'to develop fully the educational potential of each student through an appropriate and challenging curriculum'. The college's mission also gives priority to 'providing high quality teaching of courses which are relevant to the needs of students in an environment which encourages and enables them to increase their knowledge and practice of their faith'. The college aims to establish a community based on Christian values in which the dignity and integrity of the individual are respected. Staff and students are expected to uphold the Catholic ethos of the college.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

6 The college offers a broad range of GCSE and GCE AS/A level subjects and some vocational courses. Twenty-eight GCE A level, 13 GCE AS and 21 GCSE subjects are currently taught. New GCE A level subjects, such as media studies, are planned in response to changes in demand. The GCE AS subjects attract only a small number of students. Vocational programmes comprise advanced and intermediate GNVQs in health and social care and in business, and an intermediate GNVQ in art and design. There are no foundation level GNVQ programmes; the college intends to introduce some in September 1996. A nursery nursing course was successfully introduced in 1994. Students may also take accredited courses in business skills, text processing and computer literacy.

7 The Catholic dimension is given a high priority. The college's admissions policy gives priority to Roman Catholic applicants. All students are required to attend weekly religious assemblies and to take part in a religious education programme. A Roman Catholic priest is both college chaplain and head of religious education. He and his team conduct regular acts of worship including twice-weekly masses. Students have the opportunity to take part in retreats and every year a group of about 30 students goes on a pilgrimage to Lourdes. The daily tutorial is expected to begin with a prayer or reflection. Parents value the college's religious principles and practices, and consider that these are presented in a manner that encourages commitment by young people. The college fulfils the requirements of sections 44 and 45 of *The Further and Higher Education Act 1992* by providing weekly opportunities for students to participate in an act of worship and by providing a religious education programme for students.

8 The college is increasingly popular with students and their parents. Applications for entry in September 1996 are almost double those received at the corresponding time last year. Although the college has met its overall growth targets, there are some shortfalls in specific areas. Only 8 per cent of students are enrolled on GNVQ programmes, and the numbers

recruited to GNVQ art and design and health and social care courses are very small. Recruitment to the advanced GNVQ in business has declined this year by more than 50 per cent, although the national trend is upwards. The advanced GNVQ in leisure and tourism failed to attract sufficient students and, at the time of the inspection, the business skills course had only five students.

9 Students have a wide choice of additional activities to enrich their main course of study. All students are required to take part in the enrichment programme during the first year of their course, and many continue to do so afterwards on a voluntary basis. The weekly programme includes sport, drama and leisure activities. Over 100 students are involved in an annual major drama production, and there are numerous other public performances. At the end of the first year, most GCE A level students take part in a week of residential trips and other activities. A community service programme includes placements in local schools for about 40 students considering teaching careers. Students participate in local charity events and raise funds for the Catholic Fund for Overseas Development. Those taking an advanced GNVQ in business study a modern foreign language. Last year, 108 candidates entered for the GCE A level general studies examination. Students are encouraged to enrol for courses in information technology.

10 The college's strategic objectives for 1995 to 1998 include providing more vocational courses, meeting a potential increase in demand for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, introducing more varied forms of learning individually, and opportunities for students to work on their own using resources designed for the purpose. The college has some way to go in meeting these objectives. For example, at the time of the inspection there were no staff with specialist qualifications for teaching students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Departmental plans do not show sufficient appreciation of the changes that would be required to make alternative forms of learning effective. Aspects of the curriculum are also underdeveloped: for example, very few students combine a GNVQ programme with a GCE A level. The college has identified the need to establish a college board to co-ordinate curriculum planning.

11 Some teachers have useful contacts with external organisations. Theatre studies and art and design students benefit from extensive opportunities to work with local theatres and art galleries. Science staff have developed close links with the University of Leeds, and the college has increasing contact with Trinity and All Saints' College of Higher Education. The college's links with parents are close and effective. In some subjects, teachers from the college and partner schools do not do enough to keep up to date with curriculum developments at each others' institutions so as to ensure a smooth transition from school to college. The college has identified European links as an area requiring development: this year, only seven students took part in thin the student exchange with France.

12 Some departments have created links with employers which enrich students' learning. For example, design and technology students work with practising engineers under the Engineering Council neighbourhood engineering scheme; they also carry out projects on the premises of a local bottle manufacturer. In other departments, links with employers are not so well developed. Most students on vocational courses undertake some work experience. For GCE A level students, the main opportunity for work experience and work shadowing is the college's annual 'enhancement week', which involves some 40 students.

13 The college has a good working relationship with Leeds TEC. The principal has regular meetings with TEC representatives and a vice-principal sits on a liaison group of the TEC and Leeds further education colleges. The national targets for education and training and the 'World Class Leeds' targets feature in strategic planning. Funding from the local TEC has assisted the development of the nursery nursing course and the planned media studies programmes. It has also helped the college to establish quality standards for work placements. The principal is a member of the Leeds post-16 working group which comprises representatives from the local authority and Leeds further education colleges.

14 The college has recently set up a marketing group which has raised the college's profile by widening the range of its marketing activities. The prospectus and the course directory are attractive and informative. Some marketing is carried out jointly with the Leeds further education colleges through the publication of a magazine for young people. The college conducts little formal market research of its own. A feasibility study relating to part-time and adult provision, planned for 1995-96, has not yet been carried out.

15 The college's equal opportunities policy is placed firmly within the context of its religious mission. The principal takes personal responsibility for equal opportunities, and delivers an annual report for the governing body. Equal opportunities issues are addressed in assemblies, tutorials and the religious education programme and in the teaching of some subjects, such as classics, law and politics. The college carries out some monitoring, for example of courses which recruit significantly more men than women or visa versa. However, there is no working group to reflect the views of staff and students, and there are no references to the equal opportunities policy in the college's marketing and publicity materials. The college recognises its need to improve the monitoring of the implementation of the policy.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

16 The governors are highly supportive of the college's Catholic mission. The governing body has eighteen members, ten of whom are foundation governors appointed by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Leeds. It includes two staff governors, a parent governor, a representative of the local TEC

and the principal. There are 12 men and six women. Members bring to the board a valuable range of skills and expertise and a significant amount of previous experience as governors. The governing body and the college have a good relationship with the Diocese of Leeds. Meetings of the governing body take place twice a term. Governors are kept well informed about the work of the college. At each meeting, they receive a detailed written report from the principal and a financial statement from the college administrator. Governors have recently approved a code of conduct and a register of interests.

17 The corporation has five committees dealing with audit and remuneration, buildings, curriculum, finance and students' liaison. They have agreed terms of reference. The students' liaison committee, made up of four governors and four students, meets regularly and is an effective channel of communication between governors and students. The finance committee has had only one formal meeting in the current financial year. The governing body is clerked by a governor, and both the finance committee and the audit and remuneration committee are clerked by the college administrator, who has a major financial responsibility within the college. These clerking arrangements are not in accordance with guidance issued by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC).

18 The governors' and senior managers' commitment to the college's mission and ethos has led to a shared view of the way in which the college should develop. Governors visit the college regularly and have had some formal training, although a number expressed a wish for further training. Governors and staff contributed to the college's mission statement, and staff are consulted about the strategic plan. Some parts of the plan are not presented clearly enough, and the financial forecast for the period 1995-98 does not provide a sufficiently detailed analysis to support planning.

19 The members of the senior management team work together effectively. Minutes of their meetings are made available to staff. They are heavily involved in the management of the curriculum and of the pastoral system: the 44 group tutors and 27 heads of subject departments report directly to them. Much of their time is spent working with personal tutors and with individual students. For example, they carry out most of the interviewing for admission to the college. They each have a teaching load. The diversity of their roles limits the time they can spend on strategic management. The college plans to address this by creating five new senior tutor posts.

20 Most subject departments are effectively managed. The teachers in each department meet frequently to discuss curriculum issues, course administration and students' progress. There are strong informal links between departments, although there is scope for more sharing of good practice. Heads of department feel that they require further training in resource management. Six cross-college co-ordinators report to the senior management team and have responsibility for specific aspects such as examinations, the enhancement programme and the tutorial programme.

21 The small size of the college has resulted in the development of informal but largely effective channels of communication. Communications are made easier by common break and lunch times and a shared staffroom in which teaching and non-teaching staff meet each other frequently. The principal conducts a weekly briefing which is supplemented by a staff bulletin, and chairs a termly meeting of the whole staff. The over-reliance on informal channels of communication restricts the opportunities for staff to become involved in the college's strategic planning and decision making. The recent introduction of more systematic forward planning for departments has gone some way to addressing this, but departmental plans are still insufficiently linked to the college's strategic plan. The college is reviewing the structure of meetings and is establishing a college board to improve the formal channels of communication and consultation.

22 Management information is accurate and readily available to senior managers. It is widely used by departments. The management information system supports the use of performance indicators for student enrolments, retention, attendance and achievement. College enrolments have been close to targets in the last two years, although the forecasting of anticipated enrolments for certain departments has been widely inaccurate, particularly in vocational areas. The college monitors retention rates carefully and seeks students' reasons for leaving their programme of study. Partner schools are notified of the examination results and destinations of their former pupils.

23 Arrangements for health and safety are not yet satisfactory. The college has a policy on health and safety that has been approved by governors. However, the governors have not monitored or reviewed the implementation of the policy regularly, nor ensured that those responsible for its implementation possess the appropriate qualifications and expertise. The governors' buildings committee has included health and safety as part of its responsibilities. The principal has a weekly meeting with staff involved with the premises and an action plan is agreed.

24 Staff understand the system for allocating funds to departments. Budget holders receive regular accounts. Funds for consumable materials are allocated on the basis of student numbers, adjusted by a weighting factor which reflects the varying costs incurred by different departments. Funds for capital projects and major computer purchases are allocated centrally in response to bids. The college receives 97 per cent of its income from the FEFC. Its average level of funding for 1995-96 is £18.97 per unit. The median for sixth form colleges is £19.37 per unit. The college's income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1995 are shown in figures 5 and 6.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

25 Pre-enrolment guidance is effective. The college uses its well-established links with its partner schools to ensure that prospective students are given comprehensive information and guidance about the college and its courses. A course directory provides clear information about course requirements. The programme of guidance events includes visits by year 11 pupils to the college, a GNVQ information evening for potential students and their parents, and a two-day course in college which gives prospective students the opportunity to sample the subjects in which they are interested. Specialist careers officers are involved in many of these events. All applicants are interviewed at their school by a senior member of staff, to ensure that the advice offered is consistent and impartial. They receive a second interview at college before enrolment.

26 On arrival at the college in September, students follow an effective centrally-organised induction programme. It starts on their first day at college and continues in tutorial periods during the early stages of their course. They receive a student handbook and planner which contains a diary to help them plan their private study. Some important information, including the availability of support services and statements of the college's policies relating to students, are not included in the student handbook. Tutors do not use the college charter as an opportunity to discuss students' rights and responsibilities as part of their induction: students do not receive a copy and most are unaware of it. Parents receive a handbook and are invited to a parents' evening early in the term, to familiarise them with college procedures. In October of their first term, students sit written assessments in each subject, after which they discuss their progress with their teachers and tutors. Those who wish to change subject or course are able to do so through a well-understood procedure which involves discussion with a vice-principal, the relevant staff and, where appropriate, with parents.

27 A rigorous process of regular formal written assessments and reviews continues throughout students' courses. Students' potential grades at GCE A level are predicted on the basis of their GCSE results and compared with their grades in the assessments. When their progress is unsatisfactory, students are required to repeat assessments or to sit additional ones. At each stage, students discuss their progress with teachers and tutors. Parents receive a written report and are invited to college for discussions with teachers. Students appreciate the realistic feedback which the assessment and review process gives them. They are expected to set personal targets for improvement, record their progress in their student planner and maintain a record of their achievements. However, some targets are not specific enough and few students use the planner systematically to record their progress. Although the college has developed a college-wide timetable for the completion of records of achievement, the degree of commitment amongst tutors and students varies widely, and only a minority of students complete them.

28 Many subject departments provide extra lessons for students who need additional support. For the final term of the GCE A level course, the weekly group tutorial is replaced by a series of subject surgeries to help students revise for their examinations. Additional help with mathematics is timetabled so that students from any subject area can take part. There are no systematic arrangements to identify, and meet the needs of, those students who require additional support in the core skills of language, numeracy and information technology.

29 All students attend a daily 15-minute group tutorial. The college encourages tutors to begin each tutorial with a prayer or a short reflection. Once a week, tutor groups meet for a longer tutorial session during which individual discussions or group activities take place. The tutorial programme includes topics such as study skills, health education and guidance on careers and higher education choices. Students particularly enjoy the contributions from outside speakers but they commented on the lack of structure and focus in some tutorial sessions. In some cases, while tutors are holding discussions with individual students, the rest of the group is insufficiently occupied.

30 Students' attendance is monitored rigorously. All students are expected to register their time of arrival at college by means of a swipecard. A register is taken at the daily tutorial, as well as at every class. The information derived from the swipecard system is sometimes unreliable, and this causes some frustration for students and their tutors. Students whose attendance or workrate gives cause for concern are referred by subject teachers to the relevant head of department. If the problem persists, it is referred to a vice-principal. Group tutors are not always kept sufficiently informed when students have been referred in this way.

31 Students do not have direct access to independent professional counselling within the college. When students are considered to be in need of such help, senior managers or the chaplain arrange appointments with appropriate external agencies. The availability of this support is not widely publicised to students. Students do not generally regard the chaplaincy service as fulfilling the function of an independent counsellor. The college plans to strengthen its personal counselling provision by publishing a register of approved outside agencies which students may contact directly or through their tutors. Group tutors have identified the need for staff development in counselling skills.

32 Students value the guidance they receive on higher education. Staff spend a considerable amount of time helping students to make their choices and prepare their applications. A series of group tutorials is devoted to higher education guidance and includes visits from former students and mock interviews. A three-day higher education guidance programme takes place each summer term, with contributions from outside speakers. The college has the support of a careers officer from Leeds Careers Guidance Limited for two mornings a week. Many students find it difficult to obtain appointments because the careers officer is not

available at times when they are free, such as at lunchtimes. The careers library is poorly resourced, and the accommodation for careers interviews is inadequate.

33 Relationships between staff and students are marked by care and concern for the individual. Staff at all levels provide a strong network of academic and personal support. Students report that senior managers and governors welcome students' views and take them seriously. The students' council makes a valuable contribution to the college, providing an effective channel of communication between the tutor groups and college management. It has been successful in effecting changes in areas such as improvements to students' social facilities, and the pattern of the college day. However, it was not consulted when the college charter was drawn up.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

34 Of the 111 teaching sessions inspected, 78 per cent were judged to have strengths which outweighed weaknesses. Less than 2 per cent of the sessions were judged to have weaknesses which outweighed strengths. The average level of attendance in the sessions inspected was 80 per cent. The following table shows the grades awarded to the sessions inspected.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade 1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE AS/A level	30	37	8	0	0	75
GCSE	5	3	8	0	0	16
GNVQ	0	5	3	1	0	9
Other	2	5	3	1	0	11
Total	37	50	22	2	0	111

35 Overall, the standards of teaching are high. Teachers have high expectations of students, and are effective in conveying to students their own knowledge and enthusiasm. They stimulate students' interest by using a suitable variety of teaching methods and encouraging students to play an active part in lessons. Teachers plan their lessons well, using detailed schemes of work and course outlines which they share with the students. They set work regularly and return it promptly. Their supportive comments enable students to understand how their work can be improved. There is regular testing to measure students' progress.

36 Science teachers varied the classroom activities to include lectures, demonstrations, practical investigations and discussions. They presented the subject matter in an interesting way, making good use of question and answer techniques. In a minority of sessions, they failed to check students' understanding sufficiently. Most practical classes were well organised and managed. Dictating notes or asking students to copy them from an overhead transparency slowed the pace of some lessons unnecessarily.

37 In mathematics, the teachers presented principles clearly and encouraged the students to contribute ideas and ask questions. They provided help to individual students during lessons and in extra support sessions. Little use was made of information technology. In a GCSE session, the teacher used simple but effective techniques of folding paper to illustrate some principles of geometry. After establishing understanding by working through some problems with the whole class, the teacher gave the students examples to work on individually. Students whose lack of response in the class exercise demonstrated their poor levels of understanding received individual help from the teacher. The syllabus used for students of lower ability was not appropriate to their needs and the teaching approach was too abstract.

38 Business studies teachers used a variety of effective teaching methods including student presentations, group work, question and answer sessions and role play. In one GNVQ class, students gained an insight into the resolution of problems relating to human relationships at work through a role play in which they considered how an employee's poor punctuality and attendance should be addressed. Some of the teaching was unsatisfactory because of poor lesson planning and an over-reliance on dictation. During such sessions, students found it difficult to maintain their concentration and, on occasions, there was insufficient time to summarise the main outcomes of the lesson. Insufficient use was made of information technology. Schemes of work referred only to the topics to be covered; there was no mention of the teaching and learning strategies to be used.

39 In art and design and in performing arts, teachers set students exciting assignments and personal projects which extended their skills and knowledge. During practical sessions, they made full use of every opportunity to draw students together so that they could learn from each other and share examples of good practice. A similar approach was taken to joint projects involving students from different disciplines. For example, a recent production of 'The Little Shop of Horrors' involved students studying art and design, music, drama, design technology, theatre and media studies. Students were expected to assess their own work and that of their peers. Visits from professional artists supplemented the work of the teachers.

40 Teaching in English was lively and drew an enthusiastic response from students. Teachers kept students interested by organising work in different ways. Students worked individually, in pairs and in groups; they read aloud from texts; they took part in question and answer sessions; and they spent time listening to the teacher. In a GCE A level class, the teacher gave examples from students' written work and explained how these could be improved. Two students who had written commendable essays read them aloud. The class then discussed the essays and offered helpful suggestions. Teachers were skilled in planning lessons to meet the needs of students of differing abilities within the same class. They gave clear

instructions and made good use of questioning to check students' understanding. In English literature teachers placed a strong emphasis on involving all students, encouraging a personal response and developing the skills of discussion and critical analysis.

41 Foreign language teachers encouraged students to work hard, checked their progress through regular testing, offered extra help outside scheduled classes and prepared students well for the external examinations. They taught literature in a way which encouraged students to think for themselves. In most cases, they used the language being studied as the main means of communication. Foreign language assistants provided weekly opportunities for students to develop their speaking skills. The teaching methods used for some of the very small groups were inappropriate. Teaching and learning in classical civilisation and Latin were planned meticulously. The subjects were brought to life by good use of resources and by links with contemporary issues. Visits to museums and theatres added interest and enjoyment.

42 The standard of teaching in history, law, politics and economics was high, particularly at GCE A level. Teachers produced useful handbooks which contained syllabus information, course outlines, assessment guidelines and practical advice on study skills and examination techniques. Classroom activities were lively, and included effective use of teaching aids such as video recordings. Teachers gave clear explanations. They varied the pace of work appropriately in order to keep students interested, while checking on their understanding and pausing to reinforce key points. In most lessons, teachers encouraged students to think for themselves. In a lively and stimulating history lesson, students examined the connections between Hitler's personality and the persecution of the Jews. The teacher displayed considerable skill in persuading students to interpret the evidence and present alternative views.

43 Teachers of geography, psychology and sociology presented their subjects enthusiastically and encouraged students to make comments, ask questions and join in discussions. Overhead projectors and video recordings were used effectively but there was no use of information technology. In some lessons, material could have been presented more effectively in the form of handouts. Discussions in small groups encouraged students to contribute. Their classroom experience was enriched by outside visits including fieldwork. The cramped accommodation used by some classes restricted the range of teaching and learning methods which could be employed.

44 The religious education programme is central to the college's mission and makes a significant contribution to the maintenance of its Christian ethos. In GCE A level Christian theology and in other religious education classes, the good relationships between tutors and students helped to provide a productive climate for honest and open discussions. Teachers questioned students sensitively in order to extend their thinking. However,

they made insufficient use of resources such as the overhead projector, video or information technology to enhance teaching and learning. In a small number of lessons, the work proceeded at too slow a pace.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

45 The 210 students, aged 16 to 18, who were entered for GCE AS/A level examinations in 1995 scored, on average, 5.2 points per entry (where grade A=10 points, E=2). This places the college among the top 10 per cent of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure, based on the data in the 1995 performance tables published by the Department for Education and Employment. This represents an improvement on the previous year's average score of 4.7 points per entry. The average national points score for sixth form colleges in 1995 was 4.8 points per entry. The college's average points score per candidate in 1995 was 16.1. Thirty-two per cent of GCE A level candidates gained four or five passes, including general studies.

46 Of the 642 examination entries at GCE A level in 1995, 52 per cent gained grades A to C and the overall A to E pass rate was 87 per cent. The national figures for sixth form colleges were 50 per cent and 84 per cent respectively. Of those subjects with 10 or more entries, pass rates in chemistry, classical civilisation, French and law were over 10 per cent higher than the national average for sixth form colleges, both for A to C and A to E grades. The results in physical education, computing, psychology and sociology were more than 10 per cent below the national averages on the same measure. In 1994, 46 per cent of GCE A level subject entries gained grades A to C and 81 per cent grades A to E, compared with the national figures for sixth form colleges for students aged 16 to 18 of 48 per cent and 83 per cent respectively.

47 Of the 363 entries for GCSE subjects in 1995, 42 per cent were graded A to C. This is below the national average for sixth form colleges of 48 per cent achieving grades A to C. Students repeating key subjects such as mathematics, English and science scored below the national average whereas students taking new subjects such as Latin, law, sociology and drama scored highly. Of the 32 students in their final year of study on the vocational courses included in the Department for Education and Employment's 1995 performance tables, 84 per cent were successful. This places the college among the top third of colleges on this performance measure.

48 In science classes, students showed considerable enthusiasm and demonstrated a good level of understanding. In practical sessions, they worked well both individually and in pairs, showing a good grasp of basic techniques. Examination results at GCE A level were particularly good in physics and chemistry. In 1995, both subjects gained an A to E pass rate of 100 per cent. Seventy-three per cent of chemistry students and 57 per cent of physics students gained grades A to C, compared with the national

figures of 53 per cent and 50 per cent respectively. However, in biology the proportion of A to C grades was low. In GCSE science, only 12 of the 64 candidates gained grades A to C.

49 Mathematics students responded readily in class and their written work was of a high standard. The work in their files showed that they had assembled suitable notes and formulae to prepare them for examinations. Their ability to apply mathematics to real life situations, including the use of information technology, was less highly developed. Results in GCE A level mathematics and further mathematics in 1994 and 1995 were above national averages for sixth form colleges. Those in computing were poor: of the 16 GCE A level entries in 1995, only 44 per cent gained grades A to E compared with the national rate of 80 per cent.

50 GNVQ business studies students performed well in group work. The standard of presentation of their written work was generally high. They were able to apply information technology in a business context. Sixty per cent of those completing the advanced GNVQ course in 1995 progressed to higher education. Although the pass rates of those completing GNVQ business courses in 1995 were over 90 per cent, a high proportion of the students who were originally enrolled had left before completing the course. A significant proportion of students also fail to complete GCE A level business studies and other business-related courses such as office skills and procedures. The examination results of GCE A level business studies students have improved considerably over the last three years. The pass rate was 92 per cent in 1995, though the proportion of A to C grades remained below the national average.

51 Creative and performing arts students achieved high standards in their practical work. They were well motivated, and there was a sense of real enjoyment in the classes observed. Art and design students produced highly original work in collage, sculpture and ceramics. Theatre studies students directed each other with confidence and assurance in the theatre. The college celebrates students' success in exhibitions and performances in which they learn from each other and generate ideas collaboratively. The work in GCE A level design and technology was of a high standard, and 100 per cent of the students taking the examination in 1995 gained a pass grade.

52 English students were learning to work effectively as members of a group. They demonstrated good analytical skills, mastery of the technical language of literary criticism and the ability to draw on other texts to support their arguments. The study skills of English students were well developed, and resulted in notes and essays of good quality, though few used wordprocessors to produce their coursework and essays. Results at GCE A level in 1995 were good: 13 of the 17 entries in English literature were graded A to C, 18 per cent above the national average for sixth form colleges. However, results at GCSE were below the national average.

53 Before enrolling for GCE A level languages, students are normally expected to have achieved at least grade B at GCSE in the language to be studied. Students of modern foreign languages, Latin and classical civilisation have achieved outstanding results at GCSE and GCE A level over the last two years. In the five subjects at GCE A level in 1995, 97 per cent of students gained grades A to E and 78 per cent gained grades A to C. The proportion of A to C grades was 32 per cent above the national average for sixth form colleges in French and 26 per cent above in classical civilisation. Students' written coursework was of a high standard, and their responses in class were articulate and intelligent. Students of classical civilisation developed effective research skills and worked well in small groups. Students' files were well organised, and were regularly inspected by teachers. Note-taking skills were well developed, and in Latin and classical civilisation students made good use of information technology.

54 Examination results at GCE A level in history, economics and politics are consistently above average for sixth form colleges, and the results in law are outstanding. In 1995, all 66 candidates entered for GCE A level law gained an A to E pass, and 54 gained grades A or B. The proportion gaining A to C grades was 43 per cent higher than the national average. Students in these subjects prepare work in advance of lessons, ask probing questions, demonstrate a capacity for independent thought and participate fully and effectively in group discussions. Their written work is often fluent and the more successful students produce essays of a high standard. Some students' information technology and note-taking skills are weak, and some economics students lack confidence with mathematics.

55 Students of GCE A level Christian theology achieved 100 per cent pass rates in 1994 and 1995. In class, they responded willingly and thoughtfully to the teacher, and listened carefully to each others' contributions. They extend their experience and understanding by giving up their free time to collect for charities, attend retreats and youth groups and organise the college trips to Lourdes. The examination performance of students of sociology, psychology and geography has, in most cases, been above average for sixth form colleges over the last three years. Students in these subjects show a good understanding of their subject in class and in their written work.

56 The enhancement programme and other extra-curricular activities enable students to develop additional skills. Sports teams compete at county level. The college won the West Yorkshire football championship in 1995, and some students are members of the Roman Catholic schools national teams. Individual students have won national and county honours in rugby league, swimming, athletics, gymnastics, golf and dance. Several have successfully auditioned for the national youth theatre.

57 Most course completion rates are high. For example, of those students who started the two-year GCE A level course in 1993, 94 per cent sat the examination in 1995. Completion rates of over 80 per cent were achieved by 22 of the 27 GCE A level subjects. Only in psychology was the completion rate poor, at 44 per cent. The completion rate for students on the one-year GCSE course in 1995 was 78 per cent. All the GNVQ students on one-year intermediate programmes, and 78 per cent of the two-year advanced GNVQ students completed their courses. In 1995, 85 per cent of students completing the GCE A level programme gained entry to higher education, 7 per cent found employment, 5 per cent continued at the college for a third year and the destinations of 3 per cent were unknown. Half of those completing advanced GNVQ programmes went on to higher education and the other half found employment. Of the students completing intermediate programmes, 36 per cent progressed to further courses at Notre Dame Sixth Form College, 15 per cent went on to further education elsewhere and 49 per cent gained employment.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

58 During the current academic year the college introduced a cycle of reviews in which curriculum and cross-college managers assessed the strengths and weaknesses of their area of responsibility, drew up plans and set targets to address the weaknesses. The plans were discussed with senior managers and modified where appropriate. Staff endorsed the value of the review process and welcomed the opportunity to discuss future priorities with senior managers. The reviews and plans provided comprehensive coverage of the major areas of the college's work. The self-assessments were, in most cases, appropriately self-critical and contained timescales within which targets were to be met. Some of the plans were agreed too late to have a significant impact in the current academic year. Targets were not referenced to those in the strategic plan. The college recognises the need to align its quality assurance cycle more closely to its strategic planning cycle.

59 As part of the quality assurance system, members of the senior management team have carried out classroom observations of all teaching staff during the current academic year. The policy on teaching evaluation reflects the importance which the college attaches to high teaching standards. Observation proformas were devised and the criteria for judging the quality of teaching discussed with staff. After the observations, teachers and heads of department received both verbal and written feedback on the quality of teaching and learning observed. A minority of lessons, where significant weaknesses were identified, were revisited and a follow-up report prepared and discussed with heads of department. It is intended that the programme of observations will continue on an annual basis.

60 The quality assurance system includes five performance indicators to support judgements about the curriculum. These relate to enrolments,

students' achievements, retention, value-added data and destinations. Most teachers understand and endorse the use of these indicators but their use in the self-assessment reviews and forward plans was inconsistent. Performance measures have been developed for some college-wide functions, notably the library and staff development. The college measures students' progress on GCE A level courses by comparing their estimated grades with those predicted from GCSE achievements. After examination results are known, the difference between actual and predicted grades is used to calculate the average value added in each subject.

61 The college charter generally has a low profile in the college. Governors, staff and students were insufficiently involved in its production. There is no mechanism for monitoring or reviewing performance against the statements in the charter. A number of subject departments obtain students' views about their courses by means of questionnaires. Because these are not designed to a common format, the college is unable to produce an annual summary of students' views as recommended in *The Charter for Further Education*.

62 The college's self-assessment report was written after consultation between senior managers, governors, and members of teaching and non-teaching staff. It follows the main headings of the FEFC's inspection framework. The report is evaluative and clearly identifies strengths and areas for future development. It is unusually open and detailed about areas for development. Some of the statements lacked supporting evidence. The judgements of inspectors broadly matched those in the report.

63 Staff development is well organised. The co-ordinator carries out an analysis of staff-development needs on a rolling two-year programme. Annual reports summarise the major areas of activity and contain an evaluative commentary. There are appropriate opportunities for non-teaching staff to undertake training and development activities. The funding allocated to staff development is small. Last year it amounted to 0.2 per cent of the staffing budget, augmented by a specific grant from the local TEC for the development of vocational programmes. The analysis of staff-development needs is not linked to the strategic priorities of the college. The college's appraisal scheme extends to all staff and operates over a two-year cycle. Appraisees can choose their appraisers and the appraisal focuses on a particular theme. In the last cycle, the role of the tutor was the chosen theme. After consultation with staff, the college has decided not to link appraisal to teachers' overall performance.

RESOURCES

Staffing

64 Teachers bring a high level of commitment, enthusiasm and creativity to their work. They have high academic qualifications: 93 per cent possess

a first degree and 33 per cent have a higher degree. Almost all have a teaching qualification. Seven teachers act as examiners for external examining bodies. The full-time teachers are supported by external professionals such as visiting artists. Several teachers involved in vocational programmes have achieved internal verifier awards. Few teachers have commercial or industrial experience to support the teaching of vocational programmes, and few have recent experience of teaching students with learning difficulties. In some departments, staff are not always deployed efficiently.

65 The administrative and technical support staff provide a valuable service which is appreciated by the teaching staff. However, there is insufficient technician support, particularly in areas such as art and design where teachers undertake many of the tasks usually carried out by technicians. The library is staffed by only one person. This restricts the service that can be provided and results in significant difficulties if the librarian is absent. One of the technicians covers for the librarian at lunchtimes. No member of staff has the necessary skills and expertise to oversee health and safety within the college.

Equipment/learning resources

66 Most departments have an adequate range of basic resources including textbooks, audio-visual equipment and materials relating to the subject area. Textbooks are lent to students without charge. In some departments, staff have produced learning materials of good quality. For example, history teachers have developed a bank of articles and in mathematics, revision aids provide a useful resource for students. However, few materials have been designed specifically to enable students to work on their own. Some of the equipment is old and unreliable. In some departments staff have supplemented the stock by purchasing their own materials.

67 The bookstock in the library is inadequate for many subjects. The library budget is low at £2.75 for each full-time equivalent student. There are some 6,800 books, fewer than 10 for each full-time equivalent student. Some of these books are out of date. The library committee is currently raising funds to purchase a security system. The quiet study facilities provided by the library are appreciated by the students. At some times during the week not enough study spaces are available for the students who require them.

68 The college has one computer for every 10.2 students, but students do not always find it easy to gain access to these machines. Currently, the library is being reorganised to accommodate 14 computer workstations. These will be linked to the computer network on which the college's software and compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) material is available. The college does not have a formal policy for the maintenance and replacement of its equipment.

Accommodation

69 The college has a variety of buildings, some of which date back to 1904 when the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur established a school on the present site. A major building programme to provide additional accommodation began in 1992, but because of the contractor's financial difficulties, was not completed until September 1994. The new buildings include a hall, which can accommodate all the students for events such as assemblies, a library, a drama studio, a lecture theatre, offices, a students' common room and classrooms for mathematics and classical civilisation. This accommodation is of good quality. The hall is particularly impressive. Along with other institutions in the vicinity, the college has been the target of numerous burglaries. The college has spent £50,000 over the past three years to improve its security. Signposting is poor both externally and internally.

70 Some of the classrooms are attractive and comfortable. Most departments have a group of rooms located together, and many teachers use one room for the majority of their teaching. One of the mathematics rooms has been made into a stimulating learning environment, but the opportunity has not been taken to create an attractive mathematics centre from the suite of rooms. The Christian theology classrooms are spacious, well decorated and easily adaptable to suit a variety of teaching strategies. The college's theatre and adjoining lecture theatre provide high-quality accommodation for theatre studies, lectures and visiting speakers.

71 Some rooms within the college are poor and others are barely adequate for the purpose for which they are being used. The baserooms for art and design are overcrowded and short of storage space for students' work. Modern languages classrooms are too small and cluttered. Several rooms in the older parts of the building are too small and the arrangement of the furniture restricts the range of activities which can be undertaken. Many of the rooms in the old buildings are in need of redecoration and refurbishment. In some areas of the college, little has been done to enliven rooms and corridors with posters or displays of students' work. An exception is the classics room, where photographs of classical artifacts, vase paintings and architecture are used to bring the subject to life. A time-line along one wall gives a historical perspective to the literature studied. Teachers refer regularly to items on display, using them as a resource for learning during the course of a lesson.

72 There is no learning resource centre within the college. A new students' common room is not popular with students, many of whom prefer to use the refectory which is often crowded. In many parts of the college, access for students with restricted mobility is limited. There are no lifts, and steps make some ground floor rooms inaccessible. Within the new building, facilities for wheelchair users are of good quality.

73 The college has a programme of planned maintenance which has been drawn up by external consultants. The principal and site manager tour the college and grounds each week to prioritise the work to be undertaken. The building programme and the money spent on improving the security of the building has reduced the amount available for general maintenance and improvement.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

74 The college has made significant progress towards fulfilling its mission to develop the educational potential of each student within a Catholic environment. Its particular strengths are:

- the strong sense, amongst governors, staff and students, of shared values and a common purpose
- the broad range of academic programmes and the development of some vocational courses
- the enrichment of the curriculum through the enhancement and religious education programmes
- the strong links with partner schools, parents and the Roman Catholic community
- effective departmental management
- an effective programme of pre-enrolment guidance
- the care and concern for students displayed by teachers, support staff and managers
- the rigorous monitoring and review of students' progress
- the high standards of teaching
- good examination results at GCE A level
- the systematic observation and evaluation of teaching by senior staff
- the system of self-assessment and forward planning for all major areas of the college's work
- the high academic qualifications of teachers

75 If the college is to build on these strengths it should:

- continue to extend its range of provision in line with its strategic objectives
- enable staff to play a more active role in strategic planning
- ensure that all students receive a copy of the college charter and that it is regularly reviewed
- improve some aspects of students' guidance and support
- align the quality assurance cycle to the college's planning cycle
- increase the industrial and commercial experience of staff teaching vocational courses
- increase the level of clerical and technician support
- improve library resources
- improve the quality of some of the accommodation.

FIGURES

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

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

 - 3 Full-time student numbers by curriculum area (as at November 1995)

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

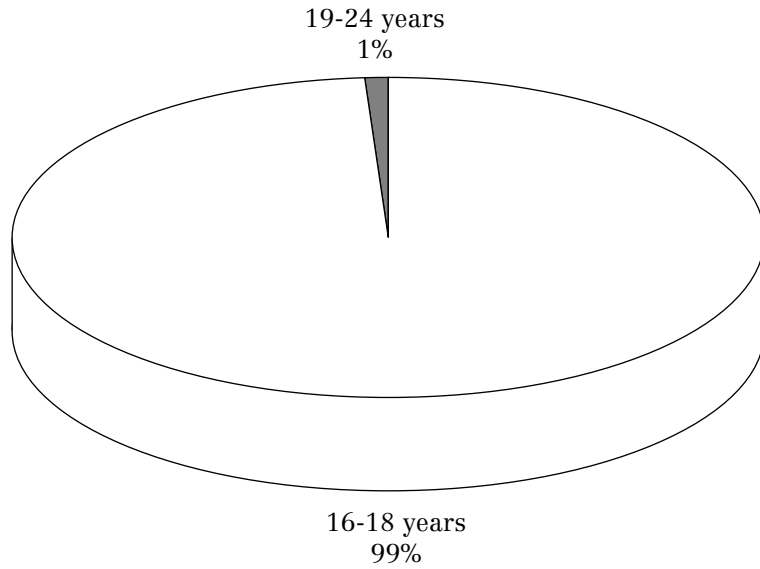
 - 5 Income (for 12 months to July 1995)

 - 6 Expenditure (for 12 months to July 1995)

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

Figure 1

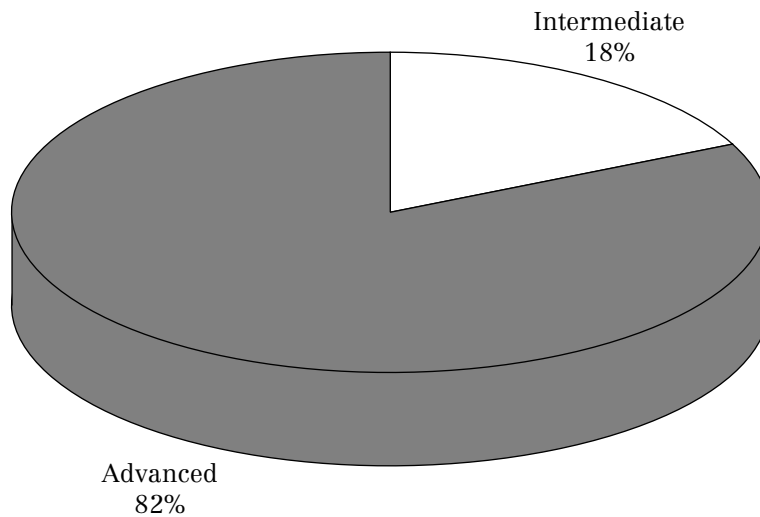
Notre Dame Sixth Form College: percentage student numbers by age (as at November 1995)



Student numbers: 695

Figure 2

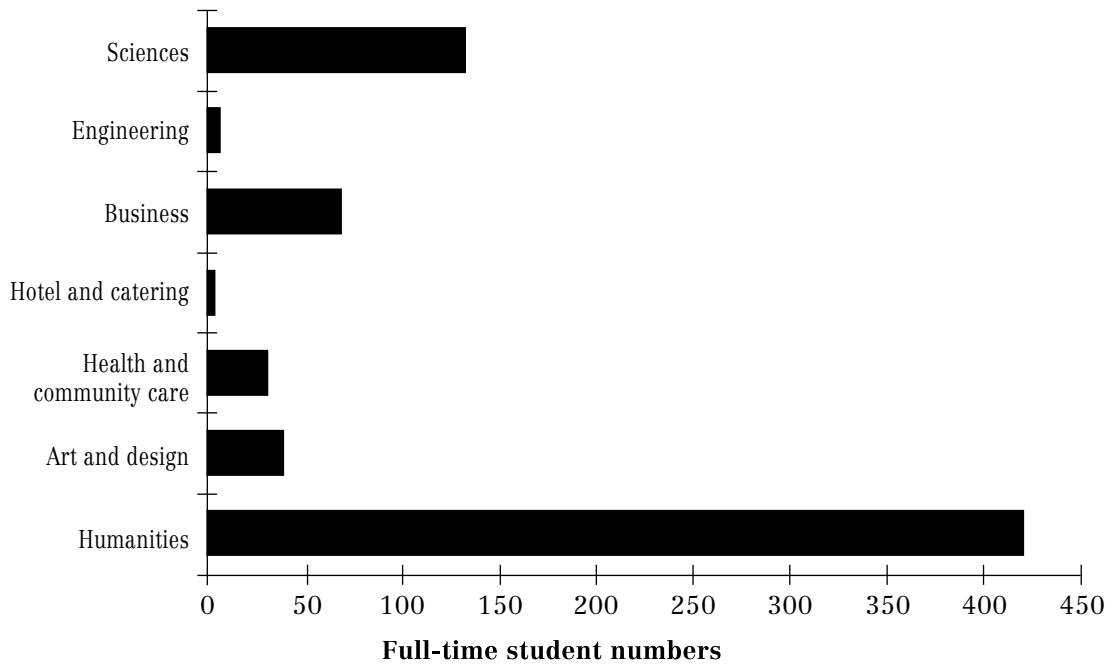
Notre Dame Sixth Form College: percentage student numbers by level of study (as at November 1995)



Student numbers: 695

Figure 3

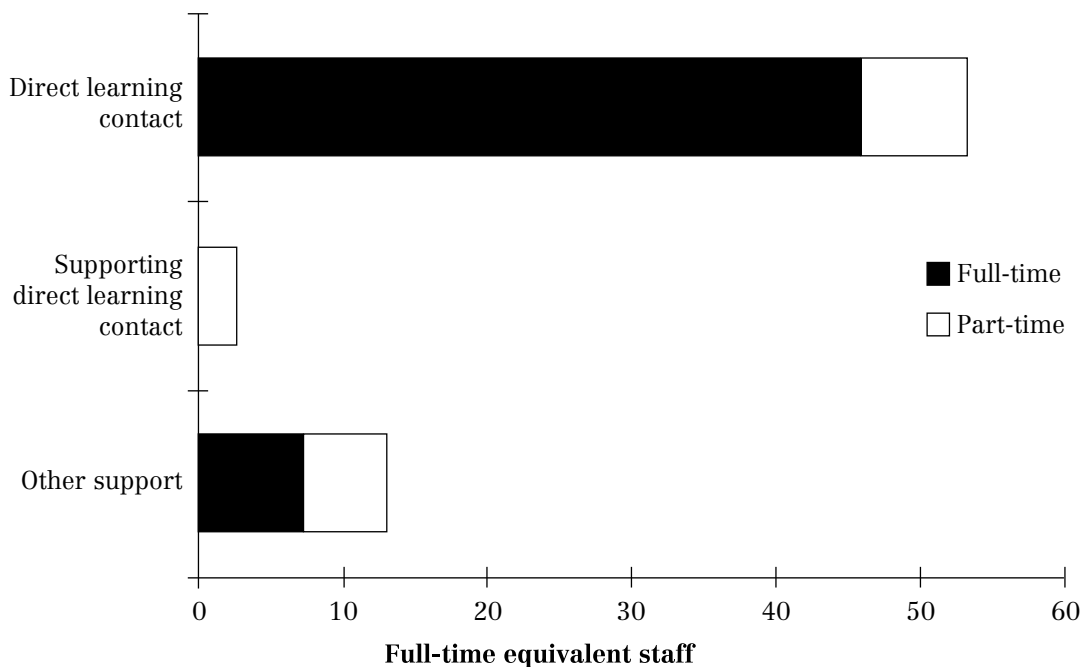
Notre Dame Sixth Form College: full-time student numbers by curriculum area (as at November 1995)



Student numbers: 695

Figure 4

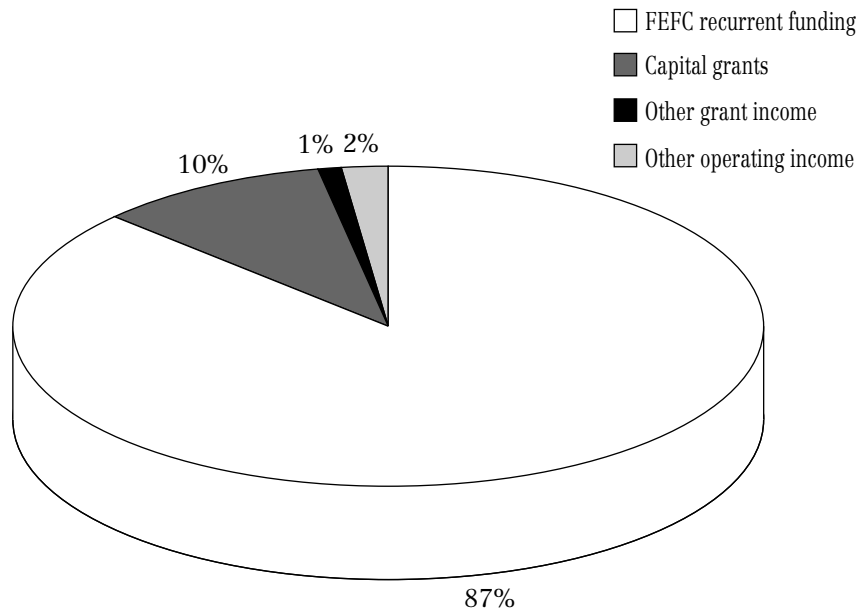
Notre Dame Sixth Form College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1995-96)



Full-time equivalent staff: 69

Figure 5

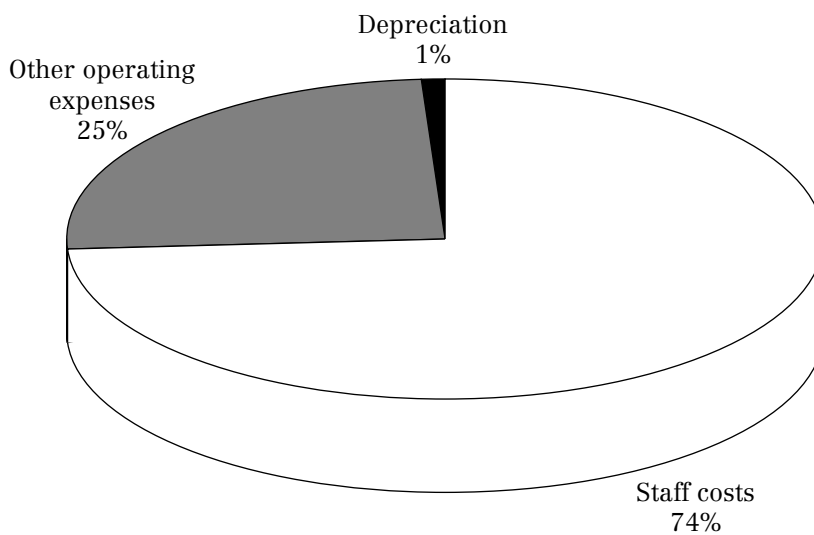
Notre Dame Sixth Form College: income (for 12 months to July 1995)



Income: £2,022,848

Figure 6

Notre Dame Sixth Form College: expenditure (for 12 months to July 1995)



Expenditure: £2,074,784

Published by the
Further Education Funding Council
August 1996