

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

**St Francis Xavier
Sixth Form
College**

July 1997

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL**

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

College inspections are carried out in accordance with the framework and guidelines described in Council Circular 93/28. They involve full-time inspectors and registered part-time inspectors who have knowledge and experience in the work they inspect. Inspection teams normally include at least one member who does not work in education and a member of staff from the college being inspected.

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GRADE DESCRIPTORS

The procedures for assessing quality are set out in the Council Circular 93/28. During their inspection, inspectors assess the strengths and weaknesses of each aspect of provision they inspect. Their assessments are set out in the reports. They also use a five-point grading scale to summarise the balance between strengths and weaknesses.

The descriptors for the grades are:

- grade 1 – provision which has many strengths and very few weaknesses*
- grade 2 – provision in which the strengths clearly outweigh the weaknesses*
- grade 3 – provision with a balance of strengths and weaknesses*
- grade 4 – provision in which the weaknesses clearly outweigh the strengths*
- grade 5 – provision which has many weaknesses and very few strengths.*

By June 1996, some 329 college inspections had been completed. The grade profiles for aspects of cross-college provision and programme areas for the 329 colleges are shown in the following table.

College grade profiles 1993-96

| Activity | Inspection grades | | | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Programme area | 9% | 59% | 29% | 3% | <1% |
| Cross-college provision | 14% | 50% | 31% | 5% | <1% |
| Overall | 12% | 54% | 30% | 4% | <1% |

FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 95/97

ST FRANCIS XAVIER SIXTH FORM COLLEGE

GREATER LONDON REGION

Inspected March 1996-April 1997

Summary

St Francis Xavier Sixth Form College is a Roman Catholic college located in the London borough of Wandsworth. The college's mission is centred on its Roman Catholic ethos and values which are supported by all staff and which inform all the college's activities. The college is well managed and effectively governed. Governors are committed to the college and its values. The college offers a broad range of GCE A level and GCSE subjects, and vocational courses. There is an extensive programme of enrichment studies and a religious education programme in which all students take part. Teaching is generally of a high standard. There is a well-organised tutorial system and students receive good pastoral support. GCE A level and GCSE pass rates compare favourably with national figures in a significant number of subjects, but are poor in a few. Students' achievements on vocational courses are generally good. There are well-planned quality assurance procedures which involve all staff. Students benefit from good learning resources and attractive teaching accommodation. The college should: improve students' achievements in some subjects; improve the quality of some tutorial sessions; strengthen its links with employers; make better use of performance indicators at college, course and subject level; ensure that course and subject reviews are of a consistently high quality; improve retention rates, in particular on two-year courses; develop a more consistent approach to surveys of students' views; improve the information, guidance and support provided for part-time students; encourage teachers to gain relevant industrial or commercial experience; and provide more study spaces and better access to computers outside lesson times.

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

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

| Curriculum area | Grade | Curriculum area | Grade |
|---------------------------|--------------|---|--------------|
| Sciences | 2 | Art and design subjects | 2 |
| Mathematics and computing | 2 | Media studies, performing arts | 2 |
| Business studies | 2 | Social sciences, religion and theology, physical education and classical civilisation | 2 |
| Leisure and tourism | 2 | English, modern languages | 1 |
| Health and social care | 2 | History, geography, politics | 2 |

INTRODUCTION

1 St Francis Xavier Sixth Form College was inspected between March 1996 and April 1997. The college's enrolment and induction procedures were inspected in September 1996. Sixteen inspectors spent 62 days in the college. They visited 163 lessons and scrutinised students' work and documentation relating to the college and its courses. Inspectors attended a meeting of the corporation. Meetings were also held with governors, managers, chaplains, teachers, students, employers, parents, senior staff from partner schools, a representative of the local training and enterprise council (TEC) which is called AZTEC, and a senior official from Wandsworth Education Authority.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 St Francis Xavier Sixth Form College is a Roman Catholic college situated in the London borough of Wandsworth, at the border with the London borough of Lambeth, in the area covered by AZTEC. It was established in 1985 following the reorganisation of Catholic secondary education in Lambeth, Southwark and Wandsworth which are in the Archdiocese of Southwark. It operates in partnership with local parishes and Catholic schools. Students from eight partner schools comprise approximately 64 per cent of the intake. There is a substantial number of schools with sixth forms in the area and six further education colleges within easy travelling distance.

3 In 1996, 35 per cent of the students came from the London borough of Lambeth, 27 per cent from Southwark, 15 per cent from Wandsworth and the remainder from other London boroughs. Lambeth and Southwark have high levels of urban deprivation and high unemployment rates. In November 1996, there were 1,273 students enrolled at the college. Almost 90 per cent are full-time students aged between 16 and 19. The area is ethnically diverse and 56 per cent of the college's full-time students describe themselves as being from non-European minority ethnic groups. Fifty-nine per cent of students are female and 41 per cent male. The college has recently introduced provision for adults during the daytime and evening. Student numbers by age, by level of study and by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figures 1, 2, and 3. The college employs 100 full-time equivalent members of staff. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4.

4 In pursuit of its mission, the college 'proclaims Christian values in the Catholic tradition and strives to create an ethos in which all individuals are given equal opportunity to fulfil their unique potential and to grow in respect of self, others and God'.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

5 The college provides a broad range of academic and vocational courses for students aged 16 to 19 of all abilities, and for a small number

of adults. Sixty-three per cent of full-time students study general certificate of education advanced supplementary/advanced level (GCE AS/A level) or general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) subjects; 37 per cent are enrolled on vocational courses. Students can choose from 29 GCE AS/A level and 16 GCSE subjects. Twelve general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) courses are available in six vocational areas and Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) national diplomas are offered in science and in business and finance. In business, and leisure and tourism, vocational courses are available at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels. There are intermediate and advanced level courses in science, art and design, information technology, and nursery nursing. Courses leading to other vocational awards are available, including national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at levels 1 and 2 in administration and the RSA Examinations Board (RSA) qualifications in information technology. The college has a commitment to modern languages which are a compulsory element on some vocational courses.

6 All students follow a core curriculum which includes religious education and an additional programme of courses to extend and enrich the students' experience. The carefully-structured general religious education programme covers a range of issues concerning belief, ethics and spirituality. The topics are founded on Roman Catholic theology but are relevant to students of any faith or to students who do not adhere to any religion. As well as helping the college to achieve its mission, the religious education programme encourages students to develop skills in self-expression and communication. The additional enrichment programme is well planned and imaginative. Students choose each term from a selection of over 60 sporting, cultural or recreational activities. This varied and much-valued programme includes subjects as diverse as squash, ice-skating, computer skills and drumming. Students may take part in sporting activities outside normal course hours and the college fields successful soccer and basketball teams. There is a well-established European exchange programme which caters for about a dozen students each year.

7 The college's growing community education programme offers daytime and evening courses in a variety of subjects to about 175 part-time students. Seventeen courses are running in areas including business and computing, fitness and languages. Part-time provision is heavily reliant on self-financing evening classes which are expected to raise some £25,000 this year. A summer term daytime class for unemployed young adults in information technology is funded by the European Social Fund. The college sponsors Myrrh Education and Training, an external institution.

8 The spiritual development of students is promoted daily through prayers, and through the 'thought for the day' aspect of the registration period. Mass is offered at least twice a week in the college and major

Catholic feasts are also celebrated. The college fulfils the requirements of sections 44 and 45 of the *Further and Higher Education Act 1992* in providing these opportunities for collective acts of worship. Involvement with organisations such as the Fund for Overseas Development, Amnesty International and the Inner Cities Young People's Project, further promotes the students' moral and spiritual growth. The Archdiocese of Southwark fully supports and promotes the college; the Bishop takes a special interest in the college and visits it regularly.

9 The college has strong links with its eight partner schools. A local special school for children with hearing impairments places and supports about six of its students at the college each year. A formal contract guarantees a place to all applicants from the partner schools, on a course for which they are suitably qualified, subject to receiving a satisfactory reference. There are some links between partner schools and some individual departments, such as drama and leisure and tourism. In other subject areas, there is little regular contact.

10 There are some good links with higher education institutions and the college is active in developing these further. Several establishments have agreed to offer conditional places to students who successfully complete their courses at the college. There are arrangements for students from the college to spend time with students in their first year in higher education. The college is active in gathering information to assist students in making their choices, for example, about the acceptability of GNVQ to admissions tutors in higher education. Some productive contacts have been built up with local employers by vocational course team leaders, with the support of the work experience co-ordinator. The art and design department has good contacts with local artists. Intermediate business students have benefited from visits from local employers and from links with a high street bank. The science department has a flourishing advisory board for its vocational courses with representation from three local firms, a hospital and two universities. Employers make little input into other vocational courses.

11 Relationships with the local TEC are good; the college now responds enthusiastically and effectively to funding opportunities offered by the TEC. The principal takes the lead in these initiatives. A recent joint bid with five other colleges to gain competitiveness funding for information technology training for small and medium-size enterprises has been successful. In recent years, funding has been obtained from a variety of sources, including commercial sponsorship, the TEC, income-generating activities, European funding and funding from the Home Office. Since incorporation, good links with Wandsworth Education Authority have been maintained. The college was an active member of the consortium through which the technical and vocational education initiative was taken forward. This has brought a number of benefits to the college, such as the development of links with colleges and schools in Europe, and funding to support curriculum initiatives in the college.

12 The marketing and promotion of courses is the responsibility of one of the vice-principals supported by the external relations committee. Representatives from the college make regular visits to schools and participate in local careers initiatives such as Southwark Education Authority's road show. Every year the college pays for all year 10 pupils from the partner schools to attend open events at the college. There is a planned programme of advertisements and articles in the local press. Information about the college can be found on the Internet. Publicity material, including the prospectus, is designed and produced by a team led by the media resources officer. The prospectus for full-time courses is an attractive and informative document, but other printed material is not all of a consistently high standard. The community education programme is based on a comprehensive analysis of market intelligence, but the college does not yet have a systematic approach to the collection and use of similar information relating to its full-time courses.

13 The college has a concise and well-publicised equal opportunities policy which was developed following widespread consultation. The implementation of the policy is comprehensively monitored. Equality issues are addressed at course level, for example, through the choice of topics for students' assignments in history and geography, the selection of texts in English, the range of educational visits, local contacts in art and design, and the general religious education programme.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

14 The corporation comprises 18 members. Eleven are foundation governors appointed by the trustee of the college, the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Southwark. The foundation governors have a duty to ensure that the business of the college is conducted in accordance with the practices, rites and doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church. The archdiocesan representative on the inspection team was satisfied that the college promotes the Roman Catholic religion, as required by the instruments and articles of government and that a Catholic ethos permeates the work of the college. Four governors are appointed by the foundation governors. One of these is nominated by the local TEC; another is a specialist in education for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Two are staff governors elected by the teaching and support staff, respectively. The principal is a governor also. Three governors including the chairman, are local parish priests. Other governors have backgrounds in education, business, management consultancy, personnel, finance and the law. There are four women governors, and four members of the corporation are drawn from non-white minority ethnic backgrounds. There is no student governor but ways of taking into account the views of students are being considered.

15 Governors conduct their business effectively and make good use of their expertise. There are three committees of the corporation: audit; finance and general purposes; and remuneration. They have clear terms

of reference, membership and quorum rules. Governors distinguish properly between their role and that of the college's managers. Governors are well informed. The full corporation receives well-presented reports from its committees, the principal and other senior managers, and from college committees. Governors thoroughly scrutinise the reports presented to them. There is lively debate, for example, on matters affecting the mission of the college such as the difficulty in meeting the target number of students who are Roman Catholic. Governors take a close interest in examination results. Recently, they expressed concern that an enterprise business plan had been inadequately researched and costed and as a result a revised plan has been commissioned. All committee meetings are scheduled to ensure regular reports to the full board. Governors receive good support from their clerk, who is the college administrator. Governors have recently agreed a code of conduct and established a register of interests which is kept up to date. There have been induction and training events for governors and a development and training policy has recently been agreed. Governors are considering ways of evaluating their own performance.

16 Governors are committed to the work of the college. They were fully involved in drafting the college's charter and ensured that it covered all relevant issues and was drafted in language which would be understood by students. The chairman visits the college fortnightly and has regular meetings with the principal. As a parish priest, he knows many of the students and their families. The governors are currently considering ways in which they can increase their influence on curriculum matters. Governors serve on college committees and working parties, including the vision and values working party, the health education committee, and the equal opportunities working party.

17 Senior managers provide a clear strategic direction for the college. The principal, vice-principals and college administrator meet once a week. Minutes of their meetings are clear and include action points. Management structures and lines of accountability in the college are clear. There has been significant change in the college over the past year. At the time of the inspection, the senior management structure of the college had just changed. A finance manager and management information officer were appointed at the beginning of the academic year. The recent reduction in academic faculties from five to four is becoming well established, although some staff have yet to become accustomed to the changes.

18 The senior managers, the four heads of faculty, and co-opted members comprise the college's management and development committee. This group meets once a month and provides an effective focus for the management of the college. It has eight subcommittees: student support and guidance; curriculum standards; computer-aided learning; external relations; staff development; premises; health and safety; and enterprise. These provide effective channels for communication from course teams to senior managers. The detailed staff handbook contains the strategic plan and useful information about college policies and

procedures. The principal briefs staff collectively each week on current developments, including funding issues. Faculty heads and other staff are briefed regularly by senior managers about operational matters. Daily bulletins provide staff and students with information such as arrangements for examinations. Although staff feel well informed, some staff lack confidence that their views are communicated above faculty level.

19 Faculty and departmental management is generally effective. Meetings are well run. Performance targets covering enrolments, attendance, retention, students' achievements and progression are monitored. Each faculty is organised into two divisions, each comprising six to 10 tutor groups. The divisions are led by the deputy head of faculty and the senior faculty tutor. This arrangement is proving to be effective as a way of strengthening the support given to students. However, the management within the four faculties varies in quality.

20 The college's management and development committee plays a critical role in developing the strategic plan. Staff contribute to strategic planning through its subcommittees. Faculties and departments produce action plans which reflect priorities in the college's strategic plan. All staff receive a copy of the final plan but the link between this and their day-to-day work is not always clearly understood. The strategic plan includes targets, such as enrolments, the proportion of Catholic students and progress towards the national targets for education and training. However, some are imprecise and there are areas which are not covered, for example, the developing community education programme.

21 There is an effective system for allocating funds to faculties for consumable items. Heads of departments negotiate with their faculty head to determine their share of the budget. The bidding system for capital items is understood and considered by staff to be fair. The college is identifying the most efficient ways of distributing resources by accurately specifying the unit costs of courses. It is participating in a benchmarking project with other sixth form colleges and intends to use this information to improve its cost effectiveness. The staffing budget is decided by senior managers in consultation with the college's management and development committee in accordance with strategic priorities.

22 The data from the management information systems are becoming increasingly reliable. Confidence in their value as a management tool is growing. Information systems staff are keen to provide users with information in a useful format, to avoid input duplication and to improve the access managers have to the system. The use of data for target setting at departmental level is uneven; a few teams still use their own, rather than centrally-produced data. Destination data for students going on to higher education are available but other destination data are incomplete.

23 The college's average level of funding for 1996-97 is £22.21 per unit. The median for sixth form colleges is £19.36 per unit and for general further education and tertiary colleges it is £17.97 per unit. The college exceeded its forecast of funding units by 4 per cent in 1993-94 and by 10

per cent in 1995-96. It fell short of target by 1.2 per cent in 1994-95. The college considers this was mainly due to its failure to meet its target number of students who are Catholics. The college's income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1996 are shown in figures 5 and 6.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

24 The college places a high priority on providing effective guidance and support for students whilst helping them to fulfil their potential through increased independence. It offers an environment within which students support each other and respect each other's views. Individuality is encouraged, but there are firm, clearly-understood expectations of commitment and behaviour. Parents are seen as essential in creating an effective partnership between the college and its students, and they are kept informed of students' progress on a regular basis.

25 A clearly-stated admissions policy builds upon the well-established links with the Catholic partner schools and a special school for children with impaired hearing. Some partner schools commented that their pupils view the college as the natural place to progress for post-16 study. Applications from suitably-qualified candidates which are received by early December lead to an initial guidance interview at which pupils are expected to be accompanied by parents or guardians. Late applicants are interviewed within a month of their application. The college sets stringent standards for the processing of applications and informing applicants of the outcome of interviews.

26 Enrolment procedures are well planned and organised. Students are re-interviewed by their tutors, who check their application in the light of GCSE results. Specialist teachers and careers staff are available to advise students who have changed their minds or have not achieved the required qualifications. Great pains are taken to provide programmes of study which take account of the needs of individuals, where possible. For example, a student from Iran whose first language is Farsi was able to enrol on a programme of two, one-year GCE A levels, with additional provision for substantial support for English. At the beginning of the year, the principal and other senior members of staff welcome new students and introduce them to aspects of the college. This introduction is followed by an induction programme which helps students to get to know each other and, for GCE A level students, eases the transition from GCSE to advanced level study. Induction activities are carefully planned and encourage students to think about the wider aspects of their studies. Students are introduced to the college's charter which is published in the students' handbook, are encouraged to consider the issues covered and are asked to sign an undertaking to abide by the stated codes of behaviour.

27 The tutorial system is designed to meet the needs of individuals and groups of students. Students and their parents speak highly of the tutorial support. Each faculty plans its own tutorial programme around a common core. Tutors are supported in their work by the deputy heads of faculty

and by senior faculty tutors who are responsible for planning the programmes, providing supporting materials and intervening in disciplinary matters when necessary. Tutor groups contain students from different courses which helps to integrate students across the college. Students in their second year of study welcome and reassure new students at the beginning of the year. Tutor groups meet daily with their tutors for prayer, consideration of the thought for the day, registration and the exchange of information. A weekly tutorial period is used for group activities which include careers education, discussion of social or moral issues, talks by invited speakers and the maintenance of records of achievement. Some of the group tutorial sessions observed were less effective than others.

28 Opportunities for students to review their progress are provided at a termly counselling session with their tutor. During the session, action plans are drawn up and problems aired. The discussion is largely based upon reports from teachers. A co-ordinator has been appointed to ensure that all students complete records of achievement and to respond to future developments in the recording of achievements. Most students come to the college with a record from their schools, and feel they benefit from keeping it up to date.

29 The college has identified poor punctuality and attendance as problems and has introduced an electronic absence registering system. Despite a few teething problems, this has been of great value in improving punctuality and in rapidly identifying students who are selective in the lessons they attend. The monitoring is backed by sanctions for offenders, including suspension or dismissal from the college. Students say that while those sanctions are taken seriously, tutors usually deal with individual problems in a supportive rather than punitive spirit.

30 The chaplaincy is integral to the life of the college. The two chaplains support staff and students. They take care not to become too closely identified with the college's management structures so that they are seen as approachable and impartial by students. They are based in a room next to the students' common room which students can use as a drop-in centre. The chaplains organise masses and liturgies, support students' initiatives such as fund-raising for Children in Need, and accompany groups of students on retreats. They hold a small fund of money which can be used to help students in financial difficulty. Although they are not professionally qualified as counsellors, they have counselling skills which are much valued by students and by teaching staff who will refer students facing problems to the chaplains. They do not record the type or extent of the counselling they carry out, so the college has no information on the current level of need of the students. They report that requests for counselling have increased noticeably over the last year. The chaplains have links with outside agencies to which they refer students who need more specialised help. Noticeboards around the college also display the telephone numbers of agencies which students can contact directly.

31 A good range of support, expertly delivered, is available for students who need it. The college co-ordinator liaises effectively with partner schools to ensure appropriate support is in place when students transfer to the college. Six students with a hearing impairment currently have signers. There is a range of language support; 50 students whose first language is not English receive skilled support in their normal lessons, in special language sessions and in a workshop. This support is financed by funding from the Home Office. All intermediate level students undertake screening tests and their needs for language support are assessed early in their courses. Learning support tutors liaise closely with tutors and send them copies of students' learning plans and reports on the progress students are making. Staff also receive detailed background information on common conditions such as asthma, sickle cell anaemia and diabetes. The needs for learning support of students on GCE A level courses are not systematically assessed. Provision of support for such students depends on problems being identified by a teacher, or by students referring themselves for help. There is a workshop to help GCE A level students with essay planning. Students with dyslexia are provided with effective support. All foundation level students receive a weekly double period of language and numeracy support. There are mathematics workshops open to any students who feel they need help. The college intends to expand the diagnosis and provision of numeracy support.

32 All students take part in a planned programme of careers education, mostly through the tutorial system. This is delivered by a comprehensively resourced careers department, strategically situated within the library. The provision addresses the needs of different groups of students. For example, GNVQ students have interviews in January, and their programme is negotiated through the specialist course teams. Appointments slips for careers interviews contain the notional cost to the college, to encourage students to recognise their value. A job club is run three days a week when students can drop in, for example, for help with the preparation of their curricula vitae and job applications. Job vacancies are displayed on a noticeboard. The careers department plays a key role in helping advanced level students with applications to higher education, provides information and guidance on choosing a course and organises mock interviews. There is good communication between the department and tutors, who are responsible for writing references. For example, a copy of students' action plans are sent to tutors after initial careers interviews. Advice on careers is realistic. Information about the daily travelling costs to higher education institutions which students consider to be local is prominently displayed. Careers staff attend key enrolment and recruitment events and are available to give students advice after the publication of examination results in August. An interesting initiative is the hiring of a London Underground train to take 400 students to the Wembley Careers Fair each year.

33 Arrangements for providing information, guidance and support for part-time students are not yet fully in place.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

34 Strengths outweighed weaknesses in 72 per cent of the teaching sessions inspected. This is higher than the national figure of 63 per cent for all lessons observed in 1995-96 quoted in the *Chief Inspector's Annual Report 1995-96*. Weaknesses outweighed strengths in only 5 per cent of the lessons. The following table summarises the grades awarded to the lessons inspected.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

| Programmes | Grade 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Totals |
|-------------------|----------------|-----------|-----------|----------|----------|---------------|
| GCE AS/A level | 28 | 35 | 21 | 1 | 0 | 85 |
| GCSE | 4 | 7 | 4 | 2 | 0 | 17 |
| GNVQ | 11 | 14 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 29 |
| Other | 5 | 14 | 9 | 4 | 0 | 32 |
| Total | 48 | 70 | 37 | 8 | 0 | 163 |

35 The average attendance in class during the inspection was 82 per cent. The figure recorded for sixth form colleges in the *Chief Inspector's Annual Report 1995-96* was 84 per cent. Inspectors noted poor punctuality at the first lessons in the morning and after the lunch break.

36 Courses were carefully planned, although schemes of work and lesson plans varied in the amount of detail shown. Some schemes of work were simply lists of topics while others gave details of suggested teaching methods and resources which might be used. Students on most vocational courses take part in well-planned work experience programmes. They complete assignments during their placements which make a valuable contribution to their learning. Where there have been difficulties in securing suitable placements for students on leisure and tourism programmes, the students take part in an extensive programme of work-related visits and external projects. Educational visits are a feature of many courses, for example, visits to parliament, museums, galleries, cinemas, theatres and concerts. Contacts with local artists and performers enrich the studies of students on arts and performing arts courses. Students on GCE A level biology and geography courses take part in a programme of residential fieldwork. Classical civilisation students make effective use of an annual visit to Greece. History and geography students undertake research into relevant topics, such as tourism in Port Antonio and the history of Jamaica.

37 On all courses, work was set regularly, and marked and returned to students, usually with little delay. Most teachers added written comments, or discussed work with students in class to ensure that they knew how to

improve their standards. In most cases, marking was consistent and accurate. However, some teachers paid insufficient attention to the correction of spelling and grammatical errors in students' work. Teachers kept careful records of students' progress. The tracking of students' achievements on GNVQ courses was particularly thorough. In GCE A level and GCSE modern languages courses, students' marks were meticulously recorded by teachers. Students kept a log of their completed work which highlighted the skills that needed to be developed. The written feedback given to students after internal assessments pinpointed areas needing attention and included a prediction of the grade which would be awarded if the same standard was achieved in the final examination.

38 In science courses, teachers' planning took account of the background knowledge students had gained through previous study at school. The quality of teaching was high. Lessons were well prepared and contained a carefully-considered balance of theoretical and practical work. In most lessons, teachers provided a variety of suitable activities which helped to maintain students' interest and promote learning. Teachers checked students' learning and understanding through the frequent use of questions and set exercises. Students worked in groups to good effect. Dialogue about scientific concepts helped to develop their understanding of complex ideas. Teachers made good use of high-quality learning aids such as handouts, overhead transparencies, computer programmes, text books, models and experimental equipment. In a well-planned GCE A level biology lesson on photosynthesis, students used thin layer chromatography to separate and identify leaf pigments. They worked with great care using an exemplary handout prepared by the teacher.

39 In computing and mathematics, teachers followed an agreed sequence of topics which made it easy for them to teach any group. Lessons were well planned to maintain students' interest and motivation. Teachers' exposition was clear, their notes well prepared and they made effective use of the whiteboard. Teachers in mathematics and computing classes were skilled at intervening to help students when they were working on set problems and assignments. In a GCE A level statistics class on contingency tables and the testing of hypotheses, students worked with enthusiasm on the problems they had been set and also made use of the data they had collected on a biology field trip. In practical computing classes, students were developing their knowledge and understanding through working on suitable assignments. Teachers gave students useful feedback on their work which helped them to achieve high standards.

40 In business classes, teachers set activities which were appropriate for the material being covered and took account of the needs of students. GCE A level students are given helpful suggestions for reading and research for each section of their course. Students were expected to analyse business issues and tackle problems in a rigorous and systematic manner. Much of the work was challenging and there was a sense of urgency in many lessons. In a BTEC national diploma lesson, students were working on an

assignment on the recruitment and selection of staff. The teacher used a video to record four students interviewing the 'candidates' for a job who were drawn from the foundation GNVQ course. The GNVQ students were also carrying out the exercise as part of one of their own assignments. The teachers gave constructive feedback to the students forming the interviewing panel. In a few lessons, the pace of work was too relaxed; in others, teachers allowed a few students to dominate the discussion while the rest remained silent.

41 The college timetable allows advanced GNVQ leisure and tourism students to study GCE A level or GCSE subjects but the take up of relevant options, such as the sports leaders award which is available as part of the enrichment programme, has been poor. Teachers provided students with a wide range of interesting and relevant activities although more opportunities to undertake practical work would be beneficial. Good use was made of role-play and group work. For example, in an advanced GNVQ lesson, students were working in groups considering the impact of worldwide tourism. Each group of students was required to make a presentation as part of their assignment. During this well-managed session, the teacher noted key points made by each group so that all students could benefit. Some lessons were less well structured; there was too little opportunity for students to take an active part in the lesson or teachers gave insufficient guidance for students working independently.

42 In health and social care and nursery nursing, teachers made effective use of their own and students' experiences, including experience gained during work placements. In an intermediate GNVQ lesson, the teacher used a short dialogue from a novel to introduce the importance of communication in relationships. She asked students to read parts in the scene and then to enact conversations between characters to explore how they might react. The students demonstrated a mature understanding of people's behaviour in difficult situations. In some lessons, teachers failed to challenge students sufficiently for the stage of the course they were at; in others, students did not receive the guidance they needed to complete the tasks they had been set.

43 In arts, performing arts and media classes, the learning in the classroom, studio and workshop was enhanced by a stimulating programme of educational visits and productive contacts with artists, performers and local companies. For example, GCE A level media and film studies students took roles as extras in a BBC production called 'Flight' produced by Hindi Pictures in conjunction with the BBC's Black Screen Unit. In a challenging lesson on the interpretation of war, advanced GNVQ art and design students demonstrated that they had researched the theme well and were articulate when describing their working processes. The teacher had established a good working environment. Students' work was bold, confident and informed by their knowledge of the historical and contextual background of the topic. In a busy GCSE media studies lesson, the teacher effectively monitored video editing, desktop publishing,

computer editing and a production team meeting taking place in four different locations. Students worked well in teams or individually and made good use of technology. In some lessons, students were not always sufficiently focused on the task in hand. Students on advanced GNVQ art and design courses would benefit from the opportunity to develop expertise in a wider range of specialist options, such as graphic and product design.

44 Teaching in English and in languages was of high quality. Lively teachers conveyed their enthusiasm to the students. In English lessons, teachers provided work which was often challenging and made texts relevant to students' own experience. Teachers made effective use of resources and were careful to involve all students in the work through the use of questions. In one successful GCE A level English lesson, students studying Jane Austin's *Mansfield Park* made presentations in pairs on particular characters in the book. All students summarised the main points of the presentations and used this information to prepare a plan for an essay on the contrasts between the characters. In modern languages, the best practice was characterised by the effective use of humour, a good mixture of teacher-led activities and group work, sensitivity to the needs of individual students and the use of stimulating materials and activities. In a lively GCE A level Spanish lesson, students extended their vocabulary and practised the use of the subjunctive through taking part in an imaginative team game.

45 In other humanities subjects, teachers were confident and enthusiastic about their subjects. They encouraged students to take an active part in the lessons which were well prepared and achieved their aims. In some of the less effective lessons, the pace of work was not always appropriate, or the timing was misjudged so that lessons ended too soon, or parts were rushed. In a lively GCE A level history lesson, students compared Gladstone and Disraeli and demonstrated their understanding by answering knowledgeably the teacher's probing and challenging questions. In some subjects, teachers taught students how to apply their knowledge to answer examination questions. For example, students in a second-year GCE A level sociology lesson were analysing answers to past examination papers using forms which helped them to develop the key skills required in the syllabus. In a general religious education lesson, students were asked to encapsulate their image of God in a word, picture or song. They worked in small groups and became involved in intense discussion with their classmates. Students showed considerable maturity in sharing their ideas, values and perceptions with the rest of the class. All students were encouraged to contribute, regardless of their faith. In the Christian theology and religious education lessons observed, the teaching was in conformity with the rites, practices and doctrines of the Roman Catholic tradition.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

46 Most students at St Francis Xavier Sixth Form College enjoy their studies. They approach their work with enthusiasm. Good working relationships between staff and students promote effective learning. Students are motivated by the variety of teaching methods used and the wide range of educational visits and outside contacts which are provided. They respond well to the challenges of the work and the encouragement they receive to develop their own ideas. Students on all courses develop relevant skills, knowledge and understanding. However, the development of the key skills of communication, application of number and information technology is not yet consistent across the college. The requirements of GNVQs ensure that these skills are addressed throughout these courses. On courses other than GNVQs, the attention paid to the development of key skills varies. The general religious education programme, attended by all students, helps to develop students' communication skills. Students are encouraged to formulate their views and to share them in writing and verbally with others. They are expected to present cogent arguments from different viewpoints and to recognise and value the views and beliefs of others. They learn that listening is an essential part of good communication.

47 Students' work in their files and the marked work seen by inspectors showed an appropriate range of achievement. Some work of a high standard was seen in most areas. The work was usually well presented and some students had made effective use of computer packages, mainly to wordprocess their work.

48 In 1995-96, students aged 16 to 18 who entered for one or more GCE AS/A level examination scored, on average, 4.7 points per entry (where grade A=10 points, E=2) according to the performance tables published by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE). This is lower than the figure of 5.1 for 1994-95 and higher than the 4.4 achieved in 1993-94. The college has been placed in the top third of colleges in the further education sector for the past three years on this performance measure. In 1996, there were 521 entries in 29 subjects. The overall pass rate of 87 per cent at grades A to E is comparable to the national rate of 86 per cent for sixth form colleges; the figure of 46 per cent at grades A to C is below the national figure of 51 per cent. In most subjects, pass rates at grades A to E have varied considerably over the past three years. They have been above national figures for two or more out of the past three years in biology, computing, further mathematics, electronics, media studies, music, performing arts, Christian theology, classical civilisation, English, French, German, Italian, Spanish, history. They have been below national figures for two or more years out of the past three in economics, theatre studies, physics, mathematics, geography, physical education and art. Pass rates were good in the last four of these subjects in 1996.

49 The college subscribes to an independent external service which provides an analysis of the value added to students' achievements by

comparing their actual performance at GCE A level with their predicted performance based on GCSE achievements. At GCE A level, for the past three years, the pass rates in most subjects have been in line with expectations. The average over a three-year period gives no pass rates below those expected; they were above those predicted in history, computing, geography and Spanish. In 1996, pass rates in history, Spanish and French were significantly above those predicted but were below in GCE A level economics.

50 The DfEE's 1996 performance tables show that 95 per cent of the 56 students in their final year of study on advanced vocational courses were successful. This places the college in the top 10 per cent of colleges in the sector on this performance measure. According to the same tables, 82 per cent of the 119 students in their final year of study on intermediate vocational courses were successful. This places the college in the top third of colleges in the sector on this performance measure. Pass rates in most other vocational awards were well above national figures. For example, there were pass rates of 100 per cent in the BTEC national diploma in science, 96 per cent in the BTEC national diploma in business and finance, 94 per cent in the intermediate GNVQ in science, and 91 per cent in the foundation GNVQ in business. About 80 per cent of students achieved the college certificate awarded for the religious education programme.

51 In 1996, there were 666 entries in 23 GCSE subjects. The overall pass rate at grades C or above was 53 per cent which is comparable with the national figure. Pass rates at grades A* to C have been above national figures for sixth form colleges for two or more of the past three years in nine subjects: American studies, English language, French, Spanish, media studies, photography, physical education, sociology, and textiles. They have been below national figures in four subjects and, of these, only mathematics is still offered.

52 Retention rates for full-time students on one-year courses are generally good. Of the 72 students who started a programme of four GCSEs, 88 per cent completed the course. The figure has improved over the past three years from 75 per cent in 1994. However, retention rates in a number of two-year courses are low. In GCE A levels, the retention rate over the two years of the course has declined from 82 per cent in 1992-94 to 66 per cent in 1994-96. Last year retention rates were below 60 per cent in 13 subjects and above 85 per cent in only three.

53 Progression to further and higher education and into employment is good. The college carries out an annual survey of the destinations of leavers. Last year, 435 of the 505 students surveyed responded. Sixty-four per cent of students completing GCE A level and BTEC national diploma courses progressed to courses in higher education. Eighty per cent of students completing a GCSE courses went on to further study as did 60 per cent of students completing intermediate GNVQ courses and 72 per cent of those completing foundation GNVQ courses. Most of these

students continued their studies at the college. All nine students who obtained the advanced diploma from the Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education, 22 per cent of students completing intermediate GNVQ courses and 14 per cent completing advanced courses gained employment.

54 The college has a good record of sporting success in the region. In 1996, the college's football teams won seven trophies, including the further education cup. The basketball team players are the Wandsworth under-19 champions and last year, the women's basketball team reached the quarter finals of the national competition. Students have achieved notable success in tai kwon do, judo, swimming and cross-country running. The annual talent show offers students the opportunity to display their skills as entertainers. A prize-winning Irish dancer has been chosen to appear in a television show; another student has achieved some commercial success as a singer. Students' art work has been exhibited in public galleries such as the 198 gallery in Brixton which promotes black African and Caribbean art.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

55 All staff and governors have been involved in developing a whole-college approach to quality assurance. Most staff appreciate the value of quality assurance. There is a clearly-defined annual quality assurance cycle which sets out a logical sequence of quality assurance requirements for all course and subject teams. This entails setting realistic targets for the next academic year, monitoring progress throughout the year, and reviewing students' achievements. A thorough review of each faculty's results is conducted each autumn by the senior management team. This focuses on trends over the years and variations in levels of achievement. Checklists for course teams cover a wide range of features of course management and delivery. The curriculum standards committee is an effective forum for promoting quality and sharing good practice throughout the college.

56 Many end-of-year course reviews have developed into rigorous self-assessment documents which address issues under the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) inspection headings. Through developing GNVQ programmes, staff have gained valuable experience in evaluating courses; moderators' reports record the evolution of good practice in this respect. For some GCE A level and GCSE subjects, there are examples in which rigorous analysis has produced relevant and realistic targets which form the basis for subsequent planning and review. Some self-assessment reports remain descriptive rather than analytical, fail to address key issues such as poor examination pass rates, and do not establish a clear agenda for development.

57 The use of performance indicators to evaluate the quality of the college's provision is improving. Most teachers are confident about using

the value-added data provided on GCE A level results, but some still use examination results crudely and focus exclusively on averages and overall patterns, rather than examining trends in pass rates for comparable groups of students over several years. The college has begun to set specific targets for retention rates over the two years of advanced level courses.

58 The departments use surveys of students' views to help evaluate particular aspects of course delivery such as induction. Surveys vary in quality. Some ask precise questions about the way students are taught whereas others require general comments. Students are also surveyed on the overall provision and facilities at the college when they complete their courses, but it is recognised that the timing for this is too late. There are other surveys, for example, to help evaluate the careers advice and higher education guidance. The tutorial system is monitored through regular surveys and careful analysis of results. The number of surveys means that students tire of completing them and staff are unable to analyse the responses fully.

59 Support staff work to service standards which they have agreed with their line managers but there is not yet a systematic annual cycle of review. Many service standards for office, reception and learning support staff have been agreed and are clearly documented; others have not been formalised in this way.

60 The observation of teaching forms part of the quality assurance procedures. This is organised within faculties, and there are variations in the practice and frequency of observation. Most staff are observed annually but in some departments, including English, it happens more frequently. Senior staff may be observed by those they manage. The practice of lesson observation pre-dates appraisal and no connection has been established between the two processes. The feedback from observations has proved beneficial to all concerned in sharing good practice and in helping individual teachers to develop a wider range of teaching styles. Heads of faculties and departments use the outcomes of observations to inform the self-assessment process.

61 The appraisal system for all staff has completed its first annual cycle. It is closely related to personal development and is used to identify the training needs of staff. Staff value the benefits already achieved such as increased opportunities for assessor training, the development of information technology skills, and the raising of awareness on a range of disability issues.

62 The college has allocated a minimum figure of £26,000 to staff development in 1996-97, which is 0.75 per cent of the total college budget. In addition, there are 25 hours each year which are set aside for training and development for all staff. A major portion of the budget is delegated to budget holders who approve requests which match the development needs of individuals identified through appraisal. A further criterion is that requests must relate to the aims of the college or department. Evaluative reports on training indicate that training carried out within the

college is well regarded and skilfully uses the expertise of members of staff to assist others. New entrants to teaching receive a valuable year-long induction. There is no such comprehensive system for support staff. The college is seeking Investor in People status as a means of further enabling all staff to contribute to the college's strategic aims.

63 The students' charter clearly indicates the range of services students can expect. Relevant sections are included in the college prospectus, such as the service students can expect prior to starting their course. Other information about the college's commitments to students during their time at the college is given in the diary which all students receive. The charter is discussed in the tutorial programme and students receive timely reminders of its main features. A complaints procedure is fully explained and has proved effective when invoked.

64 The college's self-assessment document is, on the whole, detailed and accurate in identifying strengths and weaknesses. It draws on departmental self-assessment reports which vary in quality. There are good examples in the report of action plans which have precise timescales for action and which name those responsible. In a few cases, action plans are vaguely expressed. Some key issues on teaching and assessment are not specifically addressed. The analysis of retention rates is insufficiently detailed. Some claims of successful achievements by students lack the necessary supporting evidence.

RESOURCES

Staffing

65 The college employs 74 teachers (64 full-time equivalent) of whom 85 per cent are full time. The college makes little use of part-time staff. There are appropriate personnel policies and procedures in operation. The deployment of staff is monitored effectively. College statistics show that 32 of the teachers are Catholic, about half are women, and three are from minority ethnic backgrounds. Twelve per cent are under 30 years of age; 25 per cent are over 50. The college's management and development committee of nine includes two women. All its members are white. There are a further 12 full-time equivalent staff who support direct learning, the majority of whom are part time, and include technicians, library staff and language assistants. There are also 24 full-time equivalent non-teaching staff, of whom about half are full time.

66 Teaching staff are well qualified. Over 85 per cent have degrees and teaching qualifications, and a significant number have higher degrees. Their level of commercial, industrial, and professional experience varies. The experience of business teachers is dated. Some teachers of health and social care have relevant professional experience. Those teaching mathematics and computing have little industrial experience and few opportunities to develop it. Several English teachers have relevant backgrounds in journalism and librarianship. Science teachers have little

recent industrial experience but attempt to update themselves by visiting students on work placements. In leisure and tourism, outside speakers are invited to assist in the work to compensate for the lack of experience amongst teachers. Progress towards the achievement of assessor and verifier qualifications varies; good progress has been made in health and community care, art and design, business, and science but progress in leisure and tourism has been slower.

67 Most staff responsible for central support functions such as estates, finance, information technology, the library, and human resources are well qualified and have relevant backgrounds and experience. Library and learning resources staff provide an effective service. The level and quality of technical support is good. Science technicians are well qualified and have suitable experience. The support provided for information technology is well regarded by staff.

Equipment/learning resources

68 The standard of general classroom equipment is good. Most rooms are equipped with a video player, television, overhead projector and audio equipment. Where these are not provided as permanent fixtures, they are readily available. The standard of specialist teaching equipment is also good, although there are some minor weaknesses. Art and design students have access to an excellent drawing office, but the design equipment available for ceramics, fashion, and textiles is limited. Students studying film, media, music, and theatre studies use a wide range of specialist equipment. Science equipment is up to date. There is an appropriate range of specialist equipment for childcare courses. Language students have access to an excellent language laboratory and to satellite television.

69 The library contains a wide range of books, compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) databases, video and audio cassettes, newspapers and periodicals. The library budget, excluding staffing, is £21,160 for 1996-97, of which £14,200 is for books and periodicals. In most curriculum areas, there is a wide range of materials and the bookstock is good. In addition, text books are provided for students and there are good resources within departments. The library is small for the number of students using it. The 79 study spaces provide a ratio of full-time equivalent students to places of 14:1. During peak hours the library becomes crowded.

70 The college is well provided with up-to-date computer equipment. There are approximately 230 workstations available for students, a ratio of full-time equivalent students to computers of 4.8:1. In addition to those provided in dedicated computer suites, there are some computers available within faculties. The number of computers available to students on an open access basis is low; there are 20 within the library, including three machines with multimedia facilities. Some teachers allow students to join classes to study privately when computers are available. It is college policy to maintain computing equipment for three years and then replace it if it

breaks down again. Access to information technology for specialist use is generally good, but there are insufficient workstations in base rooms for health and care, and science students, and there is no specialist computer equipment for music students. In addition to the computers on the main site, there are 20 at Alderbrook school which are used by part-time students studying information technology.

Accommodation

71 The buildings provide a secure and welcoming environment for staff and students. Grounds and building are well maintained and there is parking on site for members of staff. Accessibility by public transport is good. The college also has use of the top floor of the nearby Alderbrook school for adult and community classes where the recently-refurbished teaching rooms provide an attractive learning environment. There are no lifts in the buildings and, as a result, people with restricted mobility can only gain access to ground-floor rooms, which exclude the library and the chapel. Provision is made for students with hearing impairment through the installation of visual fire alarms and the provision of induction loops.

72 Departments' teaching rooms are clustered together and staff work in other rooms nearby. Rooms are well decorated and good use is made of students' work for display, in classrooms and corridors. Some of the rooms are too small for the groups using them, and there are problems with temperature control and noisy heaters in some of them. The standard of specialist accommodation is generally good. Rooms used for art and design have been inventively modified and workshops are well organised. Areas used for teaching, practice, rehearsal and performance by music and drama students are warm, comfortable and spacious. However, the music suite is not soundproofed. There are dedicated facilities for media studies. A suite of rooms provides health and care students with an appropriate environment for learning. There are sufficient science laboratories; they are clean and well organised but some are too small for the larger groups which use them.

73 There is a chapel on the site and the multipurpose hall is also used for worship. There is a variety of social facilities, including the hall, which is used for sports, and a large outdoor area where students play games, including football, volley ball, and basket ball. The canteen, which seats about 150, is small for the numbers on site; it is used by staff and students. Staff have access to an adjacent common room, seating about 60. The students' common room seats about 80 and is well used and well maintained. There is also a nursery available to staff and to members of the public.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

74 St Francis Xavier Sixth Form College is making good progress towards fulfilling its mission. Strengths of the college include:

- a Catholic ethos which informs all college activities
- governors who are committed to the college and its mission
- effective management at all levels
- a broad range of vocational and academic courses
- strong links with the Roman Catholic partner schools and a school for the deaf
- the extensive enrichment programme
- the religious education programme
- effective arrangements for guidance and a high level of pastoral support
- a well-organised tutorial system
- well-qualified staff
- teaching which is of a high standard
- some good examination results in vocational and academic courses
- well-planned quality assurance procedures which involve all staff
- good provision of books, specialist equipment and up-to-date computers
- good teaching accommodation which is enlivened by the display of students' work.

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

- strengthen its external links, in particular with employers
- improve the information, guidance and support provided for part-time students
- improve the quality of some tutorial sessions
- make better use of performance indicators at college, department and course levels
- ensure a rigorous and analytical approach to course and subject reviews throughout the college
- improve pass rates in some GCE A level and GCSE subjects
- improve retention rates, in particular, on two-year courses
- develop a more consistent approach to surveys of students' views
- encourage some teachers to gain relevant industrial or commercial experience
- provide more study spaces and better access to computers outside lesson times.

FIGURES

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

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

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

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

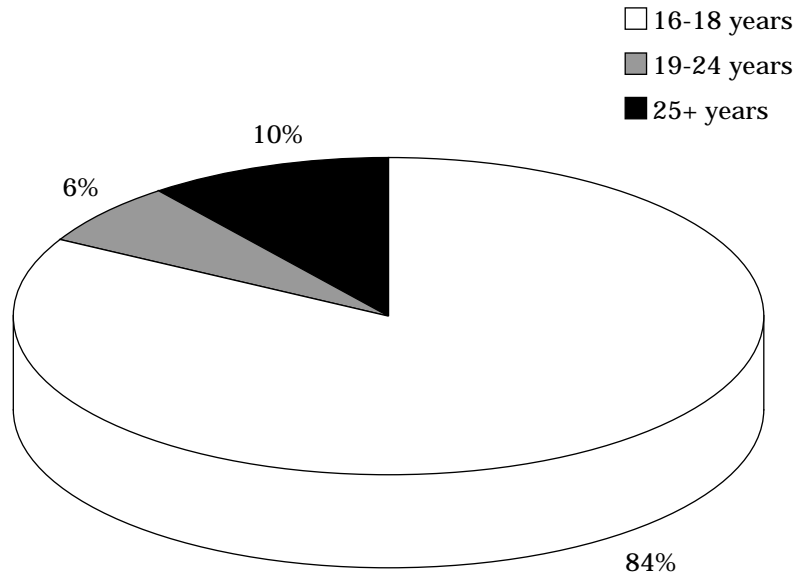
 - 5 Income (for 12 months to July 1996)

 - 6 Expenditure (for 12 months to July 1996)

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

Figure 1

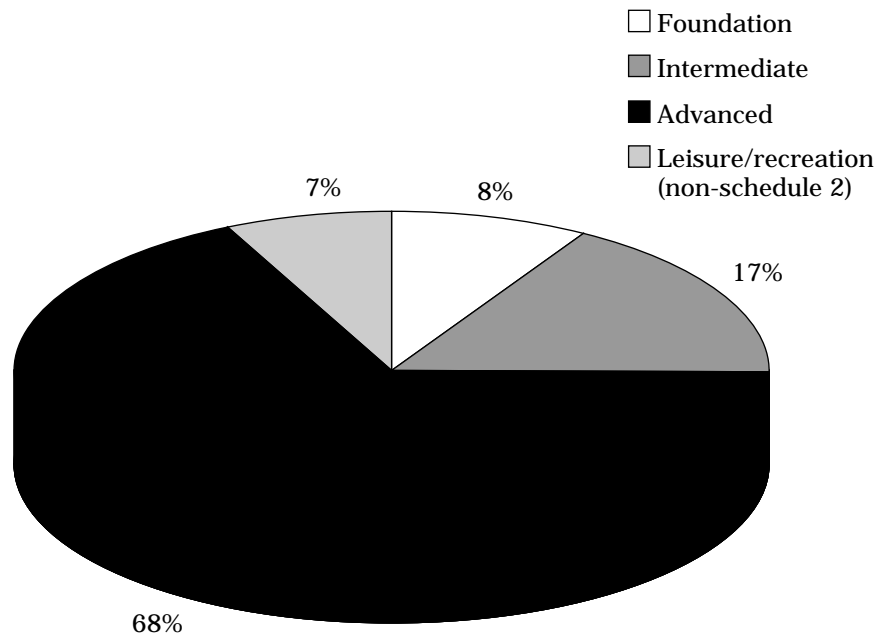
St Francis Xavier Sixth Form College: percentage student numbers by age (as at November 1996)



Student numbers: 1,273

Figure 2

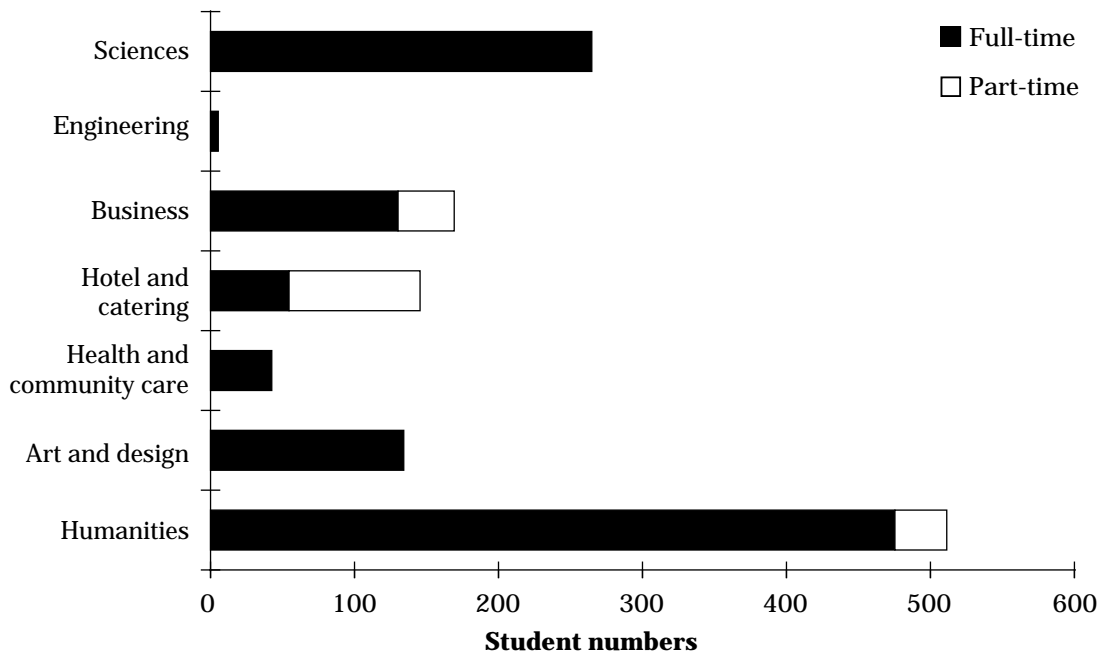
St Francis Xavier Sixth Form College: percentage student numbers by level of study (as at November 1996)



Student numbers: 1,273

Figure 3

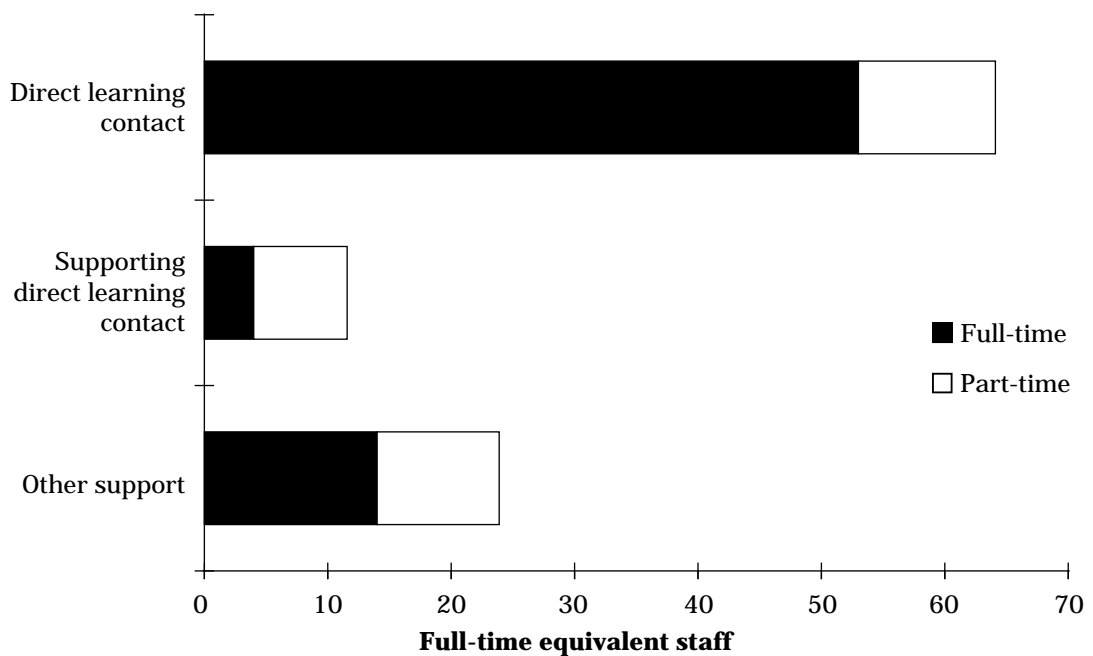
St Francis Xavier Sixth Form College: student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at November 1996)



Student numbers: 1,273

Figure 4

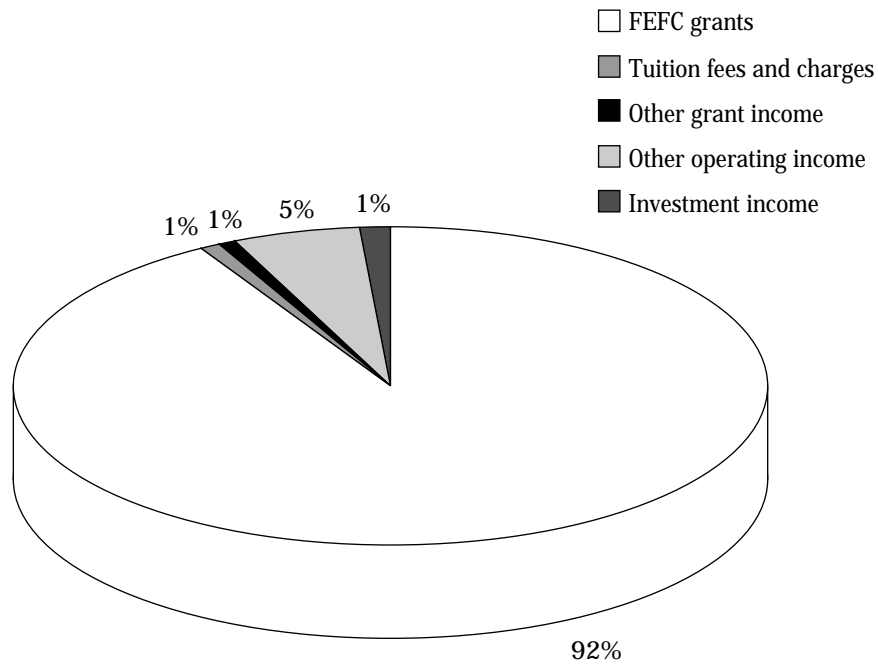
St Francis Xavier Sixth Form College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (as at November 1996)



Full-time equivalent staff: 100

Figure 5

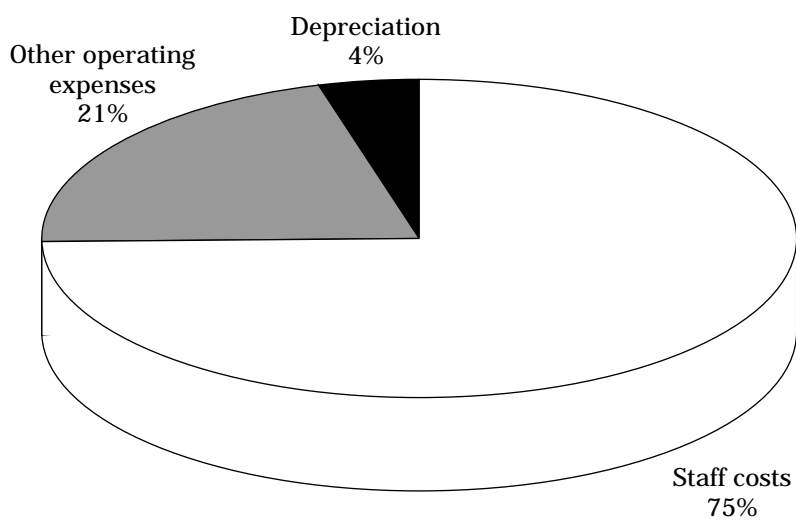
St Francis Xavier Sixth Form College: income (for 12 months to July 1996)



Income: £3,814,000

Figure 6

St Francis Xavier Sixth Form College: expenditure (for 12 months to July 1996)



Expenditure: £3,769,000

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