Regent Sixth Form College

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Basic information about the college

Name of college:	Regent Sixth Form College
Type of college:	Sixth Form College
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Address of college:	Regent Sixth Form College
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Chair of governors:	Mohammed Mulla
Unique reference number:	130757
Name of reporting inspector:	John Phipps HMI
Dates of inspection:	19-23 January 2004

Part A: Summary

Information about the college
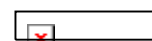
Regent Sixth Form College was established in 1976 and is one of three sixth form colleges in Leicester. There is also a large further education (FE) college locally. The student numbers have increased dramatically over the last three years. In 2001, there were 2,936 enrolments at the college. This grew to 4,651 enrolments in 2003, a 55% increase over that period. In 2003, approximately 54% of the students were aged 16 to 18; this has decreased from 82% in 2001. There has been a major change in the proportions of students on courses at different levels. In 2001, 3% of the provision was at level 1, 35% at level 2 and 62% at level 3. In 2003, this changed to 22% at level 1, 36% at level 2 and 42% at level 3. This pattern is most unusual for a college designated as a sixth form college. This difference is exemplified further, since 40% of students on long courses are aged over 19 compared to 8% in sixth form colleges nationally. Approximately 82% of the full-time students are from minority ethnic backgrounds. This is the highest proportion of any college in Leicester. The college also has, at 55%, the highest proportion of students from disadvantaged areas of any other college locally.

Applications to the college come from pupils in all the secondary schools in the city and from wider afield. The applications procedure is through a common application form involving all Leicester schools. Many of the applications are from students who are relatively recent arrivals in the United Kingdom. For example, 7% of the full-time students are Somalis who have recently arrived from European countries. The Local Education Authority (LEA) has now come out of special measures. However, although the general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) pass rate for pupils aged 16 in the city has improved to 43%, this is still 10 percentage points below the national average.

The college offers 33 subjects at general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) and advanced subsidiary level (AS level). Five courses leading to vocational advanced level qualifications are also on offer. These are in business studies, health and social care, information technology (IT), leisure and recreation, and travel and tourism. Five courses are also offered at Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) introductory diploma or certificate level. There are 21 courses or subjects offered at level 2 and a foundation level programme. Access to higher education (HE) and a number of part-time day and evening courses are offered to students aged over 18. In addition, the college provides training at a variety of off-site venues. For example, training in business administration and in customer care is provided to staff of the University Hospitals of Leicester. The mission of the college is `creating the future - raising achievement'. Equality and diversity are given a high priority within the institution through the clear set of values stated.

How effective is the college?
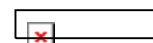
Provision is good in humanities subjects, satisfactory in science and mathematics, business, visual and performing arts and media, and English and communications. The provision in information and communications technology (ICT) is unsatisfactory. The college has good support arrangements for students, and is effectively led. There has been a major change in the curriculum offer, which has been implemented quickly. The college's key strengths and areas for improvement are listed below.

Key strengths

- o   much good teaching in humanities, and English and communications subjects

- o   good internal progression routes

- o a wide range of provision

- o effective personal support for students

- o an effective strategy for improving retention rates

- o a good range of enrichment programmes

- o good links with the community

- o a diverse and inclusive college community and

- o students and staff who treat each other with respect in a productive atmosphere.

What should be improved

- o retention rates in a number of areas

- o pass rates

- o the effectiveness of teaching

- o the provision in ICT

- o access for those with physical disabilities

- o private study and social spaces

- o the quality of self-assessment

- o internal lesson observation arrangements

- o collection and use of value added data

- o the use of management information and target setting.

Further aspects of provision requiring improvement are identified in the sections on individual subjects and courses in the full report.

Quality of provision in curriculum and occupational areas
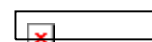
The table below shows overall judgements about provision in subjects and courses that were inspected. Judgements are based primarily on the quality of teaching, training and learning and how well students achieve. Not all subjects and courses were inspected. Inspectors make overall judgements on curriculum areas and on the effectiveness of leadership and management in the range: Outstanding (grade 1), Good (2), Satisfactory (3), Unsatisfactory (4), Very Poor (5).

Area	Overall judgements about provision, and comment
Science and mathematics	**Satisfactory.** There are low retention rates in GCSE mathematics and low pass rates in GCSE mathematics and AS-level and GCE A-level biology. Over half of teaching and learning is good or better, but there is some unsatisfactory teaching. Although information and learning technology (ILT) is used effectively as a teaching tool, some teaching is poorly planned.
Business and administration	**Satisfactory.** Retention rates have improved significantly and all are now at or above the national average. Pass rates in AS-level accounting have declined over the last three years and are well below the national average. Staff provide very good on-course support and use assessment strategies effectively. Teaching staff are well qualified, but make insufficient use of ILT in the classroom.
Information and communications technology	**Unsatisfactory.** The pass rates are consistently low on most courses and many students are underperforming. There is much poor punctuality and attendance, which reduces the effectiveness of teaching and learning. Participation has been widened and strategies for improving performance are showing some effectiveness. There is insufficient choice of advanced vocational courses.
Visual and performing arts	**Satisfactory.** There are low retention and pass rates on some

and media	courses. Generally teaching is satisfactory or better. Students' work is of a high standard, particularly in the visual arts. There is a good programme of enrichment activities. Much of the accommodation is adequate or good. However, there are serious access problems for students with physical disabilities and poor changing facilities for dance students.
Humanities	**Good.** Retention and pass rates have improved and are very good in most subjects. Pass rates at AS level and GCE A level are better than predicted from students GCSE grades on entry. Most teaching is good or better and some is outstanding. Tracking and monitoring of attendance and progress are very good. Staff are well qualified. Most classrooms lack audio visual and ILT resources to enhance the development of teaching and learning.
English and communications	**Satisfactory.** Pass rates are good at entry level and on GCE A-level courses; they are average on the GCSE course. Pass rates on AS-level courses have been below average. Teaching is good. Students are well supported.

## How well is the college led and managed?

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The new principal and senior managers have created a positive culture with improvements in students' pass rates as the main priority. Managers and teachers share a set of core values and are committed to achieving clear strategic objectives. Overall curriculum management is satisfactory, but the rigour with which key issues are tackled varies. College retention and pass rates improved significantly in 2002/03. Many courses and subjects still have poor retention and pass rates. Governors, managers and teachers are involved in the planning process including the recent redefining of the mission and strategic objectives. Appraisal insufficiently informs the staff development needs of individual teachers. Quality assurance arrangements are well documented. Self-assessment is thorough, but analysis and evaluation are insufficiently rigorous in some curriculum areas. Promotion of social inclusion and widening of participation are strong features of the college. Governance is satisfactory. Financial management is sound. Taking into account staff deployment, class size and outcomes, the college provides reasonable value for money.

To what extent is the college educationally and socially inclusive?

The college's approach to social and educational inclusion is good. The college is very effective in widening participation and promoting inclusion. More than four out of five college students are from a minority ethnic background. This is very much higher than the proportion in the local area. Some 80% of students speak at least one language in addition to English. The college runs successful initiatives to promote inclusion, for example a current project provides mentoring for Somali students newly arrived from the Netherlands. More than half of students aged 16 to 18 receive educational maintenance allowances, and a high proportion of adult students receive adult learning grants. The college offers a good range of courses at level 3. In the last two years, it has significantly broadened its offer and over half of its new full-time students are enrolled on courses at level 2 or below. Up to half of the college's full-time students receive some form of additional learning support. The college offers part-time provision in 13 community venues to around 350 students. A quarter of the college's

opportunities policy. Its race equality statement meets legal requirements and it is making progress on developing an action plan to formally implement this. Analysis of students' performance by race and gender is thorough, including monitoring of pass and retention rates and disciplinary records. Use of this information at curriculum level is limited.

How well are students and trainees guided and supported?
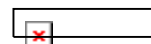
Support and guidance for students are good. The college provides good pre-entry guidance for students. Interview procedures are effective in ensuring students receive impartial advice and join appropriate courses. Induction is well planned. Personal support for full-time students during their programmes is very good. Tutors respond quickly and sympathetically to students with personal problems. Some students also have mentors who complement the work of tutors well. Students attend weekly group tutorials that do not always fully engage their interest. The college places a strong priority on attendance and has a comprehensive and effective system of absence reporting and follow-up. Many students receive significant financial support from external and internal sources to help them pursue their studies. The college provides extensive additional learning support to meet the individual needs of full-time students. Arrangements to identify and provide this support are not sufficiently systematic. Guidance for students wanting to progress to HE is good. Guidance for students on courses below level 3 has developed substantially and is also good.

Students' views of the college
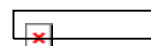
Students' views about the college were taken into account and a summary of their main comments is presented below.

What students like about the college

- o   the friendly environment

- o   helpful teachers and tutors

- o   the wide range of enrichment activities

- o   being part of a multi-ethnic community

- o   students' views are acted upon and the range of learning resources.

What they feel could be improved

- o   the social spaces and a dedicated room for worship

- o   insufficient private study spaces

- o   canteen too busy at peak periods

- o   short lunchtime and insufficient textbooks for ICT in the learning resources centre.

Other information
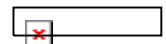
The college inspection report will normally be published 12 working weeks after the formal feedback of the inspection findings to the college. Once published, the college has two months in which to prepare its post-inspection action plan and submit it to the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The college's action plan must show what action the college will take to bring about improvements in response to issues raised in the report. The governors should agree it before it is submitted to the local LSC. The local LSC should send to Ofsted only action plans from colleges that have been judged inadequate or have been awarded a grade 4 or 5 for curriculum provision, work-based learning and/or leadership and management.

Part B: The college as a whole
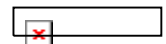
Summary of grades awarded to teaching and learning by inspectors

Aspect & learner type	Graded good or better (Grades 1 to 3) %	Graded satisfactory (Grade 4) %	Graded less than satisfactory (Grades 5 to 7) %
Teaching 16-18	68	25	7
19+ and WBL*	80	20	0
Learning 16-18	68	27	5
19+ and WBL*	80	20	0

Key: The range of grades includes: Excellent (Grade 1), Very Good (Grade 2), Good (Grade 3), Satisfactory (Grade 4), Unsatisfactory (Grade 5), Poor (Grade 6) and Very Poor (Grade 7).

*work-based learning

Achievement and standards

1. The majority of the college's provision is for full-time students aged 16 to 18 on level 3 courses. However, the college is unusual in terms of the volume of p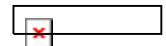rovision which is at levels 1 and 2. The college is also unusual within the sixth form college sector in its commitment to significant provision for the local adult community. In addition to evening provision onsite, the college provides basic skills courses of various kinds at a wide range of other locations in the city as part of a Skills for Life partnership.

16 to 18 year olds

2. In the three years to 2002, retention rates have been steadily rising. There was a significant rise during 2002/03, from 74% to 85%. This is comparable with the national average for sixth form colleges. Retention rates rose during this period for all course levels, the rise at level 1 from 47% to 88% is 7 percentage points above the national average. This rapid improvement in retention rates is partly the result of new effective strategies implemented by staff across the college.

3. Overall pass rates have improved substantially over recent years. However, they remain below national averages for this sector at some levels. Level 1 pass rates rose to 67% in 2003, this is 7 percentage points above the national average. Level 2 rates have risen significantly during the period 2001 to 2003, from 46% to 72%, but remain well below sector averages of 86%. At level 3, there has been a similar improvement from 58% to 68%, but these also remain below the national average for sixth form colleges.

Adult learners

4. The college has a higher proportion than usual of full-time students aged over 18. Retention rates for these students also show significant rises and are well above national averages. Pass rates for all courses are at the national average and are particularly good at level 2, which at 86% is 7 percentage points higher than the national figure.

All students

5. The overall GCE A-level pass rate for 2003, was 91%, which is slightly below the national rate. In 2003, 14 subjects out of those offered at GCE level had 100% pass rates. The proportion of higher grades increased by 4 percentage points to 49%. Pass rates for AS-level subjects rose to 79%. This remains below the national average. At subject level, there are very wide variations in pass rates for both GCE A and AS level. At AS level, there are a number of subjects with very low pass rates.

6. Achievement on advanced vocational certificate of education (AVCE) courses is variable, but overall is below the national average. Large numbers of students take the AVCE (double award) over one or two years. In 2003, 63% of the one-year students passed, matching the national average. Some 70% of the two-year students passed, but this figure is below the national average. In health and social care, and business, pass rates are below average, but for the small number of students who took a leisure and recreation qualification, they are above average.

7. Pass rates on GCSE courses vary considerably between subjects. In English language, the A* to

C pass rate is slightly above the national average for 2003. Pass rates in art and photography are high. However, in several subjects pass rates are poor. Retention rates in IT have risen slightly over the last three years, but the pass rate has declined from 55% to 25%. Retention rates are good on GCSE science courses, but the pass rate of 34% is well below average. In GCSE mathematics, retention and pass rates are well below average. Pass rates on the general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) intermediate courses also vary. In business, the retention rate for this course is well above average and pass rates have risen from 80% in 2001, to 93% in 2003.

8. Retention rates are high on entry level and level 1 courses. The certificate of achievement in English has a 90% retention rate and a pass rate of 80%. The free-standing mathematics units also have very high retention rates and good pass rates. The college offers a foundation level GNVQ course and in 2003, this course had a 93% retention rate and a pass rate of 48%.

9. The standard of students' work is particularly high in visual arts, graphics and photography. Displays of work are effectively used to enhance the positive ethos of the college. In many other subject areas, the standard of work is good, for example in GNVQ business, humanities lessons and some English lessons. The behaviour of students in lessons is very good and most students are keen to learn and make progress. They respond and work to a particularly high level in law, responding to imaginative and challenging teaching. However, in a minority of lessons, for example some IT lessons, students do not work productively and fail to maintain interest.

10. There is good progression between levels within the college. In English, progression from entry level to GCSE is high, although the number progressing from AS level to GCE A level is unusually low. There is a good and improved rate of progression from the college to HE. Progression from advanced level courses is particularly good in science, mathematics, IT, law and from the access to HE course.

11. Attendance levels at the college are satisfactory. During 2002/03, the attendance rate rose by 6 percentage points to 79%. This is slightly below the average for sixth form colleges, but is a significant rise. At the time of the inspection, the college was recording rates of attendance that were satisfactory. However, punctuality to some lessons was poor.

Quality of education and training
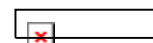
12. Teaching is good or better in most lessons. It is very good in humanities subjects, where some outstanding teaching was observed. Over half of the lessons in these subjects were very good or outstanding. The quality of the teaching of the remaining subjects was lower than that normally seen in sixth form colleges. The teaching at level 1 was generally better than at other levels. The weakest teaching was at level 2. Although the number of lessons observed where adults were being taught was small, there is a strong indication that the teaching of students aged over 18 is better than for those aged 16 to 18.

13. Most lessons are well planned. For example, visual and performing arts lessons are part of coherent schemes of work with sound lesson plans. Teachers of humanities subjects plan and manage well a wide range of activities to challenge and inspire students. However, in science and mathematics, there is a need to improve the schemes of work and their use since these documents do not sufficiently address the needs of all students.

14. The use of ILT in the humanities and science and mathematics areas is good. This teaching and learning aid is used effectively in many lessons providing stimulating and interesting activities for the students. The use of ILT is very much underdeveloped in many other areas. In practical lessons, teachers check on the understanding and progress of students effectively. During many theory lessons, there are insufficient checks to ensure that all students, irrespective of their abilities, are progressing sufficiently quickly. Students generally are attentive and work hard. Many of the lessons

observed had students with a wide range of abilities. Strategies to meet all their needs are underdeveloped.

15. Teachers on the main site are well qualified. Most have first degrees in appropriate subjects and are teacher-trained. Professional development is clearly linked to the priorities within the college's development plan. In particular, the college supports staff without teaching qualifications to gain post-graduate certificates in education. New staff receive a thorough induction. Newly qualified teachers are mentored by an experienced member of staff during their first year of teaching. The college sets aside a number of days each year for training and makes effective use of these to update staff on new or revised procedures. The college has recognised that some staff working off-site in community settings are inadequately qualified, and provides them with in-service training and support to gain initial teacher-training qualifications.

16. Specialist equipment in some areas is good, particularly in science and in visual and performing arts. Up-to-date computers are available across the college. They are used well in mathematics and science lessons, and there are adequate numbers for ICT provision both on the main site and at community venues. However, the use and availability of computers for teaching is poor in many areas. Insufficient numbers of computers are available at peak times for students' private study. Classroom resources, such as books and audio visual aids, are generally satisfactory across the college, apart from in some off-site centres.

17. The college learning resource centre is attractive and well furnished, with a space set aside for silent study. Close liaison between the librarian and curriculum areas ensures that the book stock meets the needs of most students. However, the space for students' private study is inadequate, particularly at peak times.

18. Social space for students inside the main building is confined to a recently refurbished canteen, and is not sufficient. Facilities for worship are inadequate, with no permanent prayer room. A recently installed lift serves all floors in the main building, but access for those with physical or sensory disabilities to classrooms and other teaching areas is poor. Access for such students to community premises varies, with some providing good facilities. The college has well developed plans to extend its main building. These plans address many of the weaknesses within the accommodation.

19. Assessment strategies at the college are good. In response to an issue raised at the previous inspection, all students now take a range of diagnostic tests on entry to the college. Enrolment and induction processes are good and care is taken that students are on appropriate courses. The college has a sound assessment policy that includes guidance on marking and feedback. The overall quality of the marking of work and the feedback to students is high. In most subjects, marking of work is explicitly based on exam criteria. Teachers use a range of strategies to monitor progress and learning in the classroom and record progress effectively. In the best lessons, teachers use imaginative assessment techniques which enliven lessons as well as reinforcing previous learning. Teachers regularly communicate with parents on progress issues. Students at risk are identified early.

20. An effective cycle of formal progress reviews has been established. This involves subject-based meetings with students before data on progress is passed to tutors. Interviews to set targets are then conducted by tutors. Targets are, however, often vague and do not relate sufficiently to academic development.

21. The college reviews its results thoroughly, including by gender and ethnic grouping, making modifications to provision as appropriate. Internal verification procedures are robust and moderators' reports confirm that the college complies satisfactorily with exam board requirements.

22. There is a good range of level 3 courses offered. A number of AVCE and BTEC courses as well as a wide range of AS-level and GCE A-level programmes successfully recruit students from a variety of backgrounds and abilities. The college has made a large and effective effort to meet the needs identified in a recent area wide inspection. This identified that there is a great need in

Leicester to widen the education and training provision at levels 1 and 2. The college now has developed its level 1 offer and as a consequence the proportion of students at this level increased from 3% of the student body in 2001/02 to 22% in 2003/04. For example, an entry-level certificate in English is popular for students who do not have sufficient qualifications to begin on a GCSE course. A similar approach has been used in mathematics where students are able to study for free-standing mathematics units in preparation for a GCSE course. These courses in English and mathematics are also used as a strategy to improve the key skills of students. In the past, the achievement levels of key skills of communication and application of number have been very low. Students are now on more appropriate courses, show more interest and are succeeding. The previous arrangements for delivering key skills were not successful since students did not complete their portfolios of evidence to the appropriate standard. The increase in the proportion of level 1 provision has resulted in the college changing its character considerably and improving progression routes within the institution.

23. The college offers a wide enrichment programme. Many of the students benefit from this programme which includes sporting, recreational pastimes as well as academic courses leading to accreditation. There are good links with local schools. For example, the college runs, in collaboration with a neighbouring school, a health and social care course. There are also some interesting courses run on employers' premises. A successful and extensive set of courses in business and administration are run with the local hospitals.

24. The college meets its legal requirements in relation to religious education and worship. A Christian union meets every week, as does an Islamic study group. However, there is a need for a permanent prayer room for students of a variety of religious backgrounds. This has caused some inconvenience to those who need to worship at specific times of the day or year.

25. Good initial guidance is provided to prospective students. Staff regularly visit a range of feeder schools and the college runs well-attended open days. The college is a full partner in the local common application process. All prospective students have two interviews prior to entry, one with a member of the college senior management team. This is particularly effective in ensuring students receive impartial advice, and join courses at an appropriate level. Local Connexions staff are available at these times to assist students wanting information on courses elsewhere. Induction is well planned. During the two-week induction period, the college assigns each student a temporary `welcome tutor' to help them settle in successfully. Students attend brief taster lessons in a number of subjects, which provide a good introduction to their programme. Part-time courses are advertised locally and students usually apply directly to the community venue where they take place.

26. Personal support for full-time students during their programmes is very good. Students have a personal tutor who they meet for individual interviews at least twice a term. Formal reviews of their progress take place twice each year. Tutors respond quickly and sympathetically to students with personal problems. There is a structured programme of weekly group tutorials, but these sessions do not always engage students' interest. Some 200 students, mostly following programmes at levels 1 and 2, also have personal mentors. These mentors complement the work of tutors very effectively. These students have better attendance and discipline records, and drop out of their studies less frequently, than those without mentors. Personal counselling is also available on the main site for students.

27. The college places a strong priority on attendance. Tutors are an effective central reference point for the college's comprehensive system of absence reporting and follow up. Full-time students' attendance rates have risen substantially since its introduction.

28. Many students receive significant financial support. More than half of students aged 16 to 18 receive educational maintenance allowances, and a high proportion of adult students have adult learning grants. In addition, many students receive valuable assistance from the college's student support fund.

29. There is extensive additional learning support for full-time students. This includes workshops, learning support assistants or teachers working within lessons, and one-to-one sessions. Many students receive useful help with literacy, numeracy and communications if English is not their first language. Small numbers receive support for other needs such as dyslexia, or medical problems.

Arrangements to identify and provide additional support are not sufficiently systematic. Support for some students is carefully assessed and planned, mainly following referral by feeder schools or teachers. However, a similar number of students receive support on an informal basis, using staff time originally allocated for a student with an assessed need. The college does not systematically plan, monitor or evaluate the support it gives informally. It does not sufficiently consider the impact of reducing the amount of support for those with assessed needs.

30. Guidance for students wanting to progress to HE is good. Local universities regularly promote their courses. The college ensures that students are aware of the wide range of taster courses these and other universities provide. The college guidance for students on courses below level 3 has developed substantially. College careers advisors work closely with local Connexions advisors to ensure students are well informed about the educational and employment opportunities available to them. College careers staff maintain a database of students' job aspirations to ensure relevant students receive invitations to attend events organised by employers visiting the college.

Leadership and management
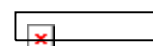
31. Leadership and management are satisfactory. In the last 16 months the senior management team, led by a new principal, have created a positive culture and ethos. They are confronting several years of poor achievements by creating conditions for students' future success. Teaching and support staff feel valued. Staff are consulted on many issues and their views are respected. They share a set of core values and the college mission to raise achievement. Significant improvements in the overall retention, pass and success rates of the college were achieved in 2002/03.

32. At the end of the academic year 2002/03, the college produced a three-year development plan with a new mission statement. It has clear strategic objectives and specific targets. These objectives include increasing participation, developing a more inclusive curriculum offer, promoting equality and diversity, providing students with the support needed to succeed and improving the quality of teaching and learning. Senior managers and governors took the lead in providing this fresh emphasis, but kept staff fully informed of progress. Monitoring of the implementation of the development plan is thorough.

33. Communications are effective and include a weekly staff briefing with senior staff and the publication of staff and student bulletins. These celebrate success as well as disseminating important messages and serve to reinforce the mission of raising achievement. The line management structure is clear and roles and responsibilities are well understood. A college calendar schedules formal meetings. The senior management team meets weekly. Agendas are short and focused. The management information system is in a stage of transition to a new system to overcome some technical difficulties. The development of an intranet provides access to key student reports and policies and better student tracking and analysis.

34. Retention, pass and success rates improved considerably in 2002/03. Retention rates are now at the national average but pass and success rates remain low in many areas. The most significant improvements were seen in the long level 2 courses. The overall improvements mask wide variation among individual courses or subjects. Demanding targets have been set for all courses in 2003/04. The quality of teaching and learning is just below that normally found in most sixth form colleges.

35. Curriculum management is good in humanities. In this area, communication systems and processes are effective. Staff are well supported, and are involved in evaluating the quality of their work and improving the provision. In most other areas, curriculum management is satisfactory. Curriculum team meetings are appropriately focused on teaching and learning, attendance, progress and achievement. In some areas, underperformance on some courses is not tackled and schemes of work and lesson plans are given insufficient attention.

36. Quality assurance procedures are well documented. Senior managers scrutinise every aspect of provision and set targets for improvement. Detailed data on attendance, retention and pass rates are collated. Analysis of these data and comparison with the previous year are a major focus of self-assessment reports. The standard of these reports is mixed. In some curriculum areas, analysis of data is used thoroughly, in others the use of value added data is underdeveloped. Self-assessment lacks rigour and is not always evaluative. Not all staff fully understand the approaches to self-assessment and improvement planning. Departmental action plans do not always address the specific curriculum issues identified. Target setting at curriculum level is at an early stage of development. Lesson observations conducted by senior managers are generally an accurate guide to the quality of teaching and learning. The grades awarded for internal lesson observations were slightly less generous than those of inspectors.

37. Some aspects of human resource management are still evolving. Evaluation of the impact of staff appraisal and development is hampered by the lack of basic data. The annual appraisal of most support staff has been carried out. However, approximately half of the teaching staff have no record of staff appraisal within the last two years. New teachers value highly their induction into the college and the support received from line managers and colleagues. The additional workload of heads of department has been recognised. They have been given extra time and professional support to fulfil these roles.

38. Promotion of social inclusion and widening of participation are strong features of the college. It has an appropriate equal opportunities policy and disability statement. The college's race equality statement meets legal requirements and progress is being made in completing the formal action plan. Race equality is promoted through the curriculum. For example, English teachers use texts and other materials from a range of cultures. The new student disciplinary code is generally effective. The college charter includes a complaints procedure. The few formal written complaints are handled sensitively and appropriately.

39. Governance is satisfactory. The college benefits from the wide range of expertise of new governors. The corporation has made good progress since the last inspection. Governors were involved in the creation of the new mission and development plan and have embraced its objectives with enthusiasm. They demand and receive data on a wide range of issues related to the prime aim of raising achievement and interrogate the data thoroughly. The corporation is very interested in the quality of the student experience and has as a standing item on their agenda a report by the student members. Individual governors have spent a day with the teaching staff in one of the departments. Key performance indicators have been set for the full corporation and its committees and are to be reviewed annually.

40. Financial management is sound. In an uncertain recruitment context a cautious approach has been adopted. Funding targets have been exceeded for the past two years. The college has held category A status for over four years. The financial implications of creating a modern, attractive learning environment have been carefully assessed. Taking into account the college deployment of staff, average class size and the improvements in retention and pass rates, the college provides reasonable value for money.

Part C: Curriculum and occupational areas
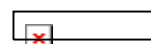
Science and mathematics
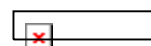
Overall provision in this area is **satisfactory (grade 3)**

Strengths

- o good teaching on level 1 provision

- o effective use of ILT as a teaching aid

- o good accommodation and resources.

Weaknesses

- o low retention and pass rates in GCSE mathematics

- o low pass rates in AS-level and GCE A-level biology

- o poor planning of teaching and learning.

Scope of provision

41. The curriculum area offers a range of science and mathematics courses. Most students are aged 16 to 18 and attend on a full-time basis. The college offers AS-level and GCE A-level courses in mathematics, statistics, physics, chemistry and biology. Biology, chemistry and mathematics are offered at GCSE level. Following a curriculum review, the college now offers level 1 provision in science and mathematics. Over 200 students were on level 1 mathematics courses in 2001/02, with a similar number currently enrolled this year. An access course with scientific components provides a route to HE for adults returning to study. There are currently 592 students following science and mathematics courses at the college.

Achievement and standards

42. Retention rates have improved significantly over the last two years and are now at the national average in all subjects except GCSE mathematics. GCSE mathematics retention rates are low and have been below the national average for three years.

43. AS-level and GCE A-level chemistry and mathematics pass rates have improved to the national average. Pass rates on AS-level and GCE A-level biology and AS-level physics courses are low and have been below average since 2001. The A* to C pass rate in GCSE mathematics is low. It has been below the national average over the same period by as much as 17 percentage points. Similarly the A* to C pass rates in GCSE science have been below the national average by approximately 22 percentage points each year.

44. The standard of students' work is satisfactory and their coursework meets awarding body requirements. The standard of work in level 1 science is of a particularly high standard with students producing practical work which is accurate and thorough. The standard of mathematical work produced by adults on the access to HE course is also high.

45. In 2002/03, 65% of GCE A-level students progressed to HE, to follow a range of science and mathematics related courses such as engineering, theoretical physics, biomedical sciences. All students from the access course progressed to HE.

A sample of retention and pass rates in science and mathematics, 2001 to 2003

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
GCSE mathematics	2	No. of starts	217	262	250
		% retention	76	64	70
		% pass rate	13	22	23
GCSE science	2	No. of starts	22	32	35
		% retention	59	69	83
		% pass rate	15	33	34
AS-level mathematics	3	No. of starts	41	49	45
		% retention	85	71	84
		% pass rate	37	66	82
GCE A-level mathematics	3	No. of starts	38	12	17
		% retention	42	83	100
		% pass rate	31	100	82
AS-level biology	3	No. of starts	39	45	46
		% retention	87	60	89
		% pass rate	68	63	56
AS-level chemistry	3	No. of starts	30	30	38
		% retention	93	67	92
		% pass rate	61	65	86
GCE A-level biology	3	No. of starts	24	24	19
		% retention	75	88	89
		% pass rate	78	71	76
GCE A-level chemistry	3	No. of starts	13	18	16
		% retention	69	78	88
		% pass rate	56	86	93

Source: ISR (2001 and 2002), college (2003)
Note: Advance- level results for 2000/01 were for two-year GCE A level and are not comparable with those in the following two years.

Quality of education and training

46. In the best lessons, teaching activities are suitably varied and questioning is used effectively to check students' progress and to challenge and extend their thinking. Many teachers are enhancing learning by using computers or graphical calculators as an additional teaching strategy. There is

good teaching on the level 1 provision, where teachers engage students well and have high expectations. In these lessons, teachers use short tests to keep the students concentrating. Students respond well to using the computers to perform calculations and improved their understanding.

47. In a successful access to HE lesson, the students worked out surface areas by using everyday items to represent mathematical shapes, for example a tube containing chocolates for a cylinder and a cereal box for a cuboid. Students suggested their own item for a shape; the most unusual was an Indian coffin. This gave rise to good discussion about the shape of coffins in different cultures, which the teacher handled sensitively. In the poorer lessons, teachers fail to plan their lessons effectively. They do not consider the individual needs of their students. Their schemes of work and lesson plans are about teaching topics, not how students learn and understand. There is a lack of effective in-class assessment and an over-reliance by students on copying the correct answer down when the teacher provides it.

48. There is a good range of science and mathematics enrichment activities available to students, such as visits to the Eden project, the Space Centre in Leicester, a crisps factory, and a trip to the International Space Olympics in Moscow.

49. Teachers and technicians are well qualified and work together effectively to provide a safe working environment for students. There is regular, appropriate training to allow staff to update skills and develop their professional expertise. Accommodation is of a high standard and fit for purpose. Mathematics rooms have good IT resources with an IT suite used for the delivery of mathematics at all levels, fixed projectors in two rooms and an electronic whiteboard. All teaching areas are well decorated with displays of students' work. In mathematics, some of the displays are quizzes and problems set by the students to challenge each other. There is an adequate selection of books in the learning resource centre.

50. The assessment of students' work is generally good. Teachers assess work carefully and accurately. Written feedback provides encouragement, but does not always help students improve their grades. Subject teachers do not make sufficient use of specific, measurable action planning with students to help them improve.

51. The initial advice and guidance for students has improved since curriculum specialists have been involved in their interviews. Students praise the support they receive from subject teachers and mentors, they feel they can ask for and receive extra help from staff outside normal lesson times. Adults particularly appreciate the pastoral support they receive.

Leadership and management

52. Curriculum management is satisfactory. Teachers communicate well with each other and managers have encouraged the sharing of best practice. Quality assurance systems lack rigour and students' views and opinions do not sufficiently form part of the evaluative process. The judgements made about the quality of teaching and learning in internal observations were better than those awarded during inspection. The self-assessment report recognised the majority of weaknesses identified during inspection, but failed to identify the weakness in the planning of teaching and learning. Equality and diversity are celebrated and students feel part of a whole college community. Risk assessments for science practical work are not completed fully.

Business and administration
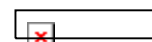
Overall provision in this area is **satisfactory (grade 3)**

Strengths

- o high pass rates in 2002/03 on most courses

- o very good subject-specific support.

Weaknesses

- o low and declining pass rates on GCE A-level accounting and AVCE business studies courses

- o lack of industrial updating of teaching staff

- o insufficient use of ILT within lessons.

Scope of provision

53. The college offers full-time AVCE single and double awards in business studies, GNVQ intermediate in business studies, AS level and GCE A level in business, AS-level accounting and a vocational GCSE in business. A foundation GNVQ in business studies started in September 2003 as part of the department's strategy to make appropriate provision at level 1. NVQs in business administration from levels 2 to 4 are delivered on a flexible part-time basis at a local hospital's premises. There are 51 accounting students, 210 business students and 39 students on NVQ programmes. There are 45 students on levels 1 and 2, and 249 on level 3 courses.

Achievement and standards

54. The department has followed strategies which have raised retention rates. They are now at or above national averages. Retention rates on the GNVQ intermediate business studies rose from 83% to 90%, well above the national average of 83%. Retention rates on the AS-level accounting course increased from 63% to 94%, also above the national figure of 86%. NVQ level 3 business administration now has a retention rate of 44%, which is also above the national average. The AVCE in business achieved a 100% retention rate. Retention rates on the AS-level business course fell in 2002, but rose again in 2003, to be comparable with the national average. All students who started on the NVQ level 3 course completed it.

55. There were high pass rates on most courses in 2003. The pass rate on GNVQ intermediate business studies is now 93%, having risen from 80%. Pass rates on the GCE A-level business studies course rose from 75% in 2002, to 93% in 2003. This is well above the national average of 82%. Pass rates on the AS-level accounting course have declined each year over the past three years. It is now low, at 50%. Pass rates for AVCE business studies fell from 96% to 63%, which is 21 percentage points below the national average.

56. Most students work well in lessons, especially during group work. The standards students achieve in lessons are at least satisfactory. However, in some lessons, students lack confidence in

articulating their views. This led on occasions, to a lack of clarity and understanding which was not resolved appropriately by the teacher. Most written work is satisfactory or good; portfolios are well organised and comprehensive evidence is retained to support the competencies achieved.

A sample of retention and pass rates in business and administration, 2001 to 2003

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
GNVQ intermediate business studies	2	No. of starts	24	24	31
		% retention	83	75	90
		% pass rate	80	89	93
AS-level business studies	3	No. of starts	87	75	71
		% retention	90	75	89
		% pass rate	55	61	84
GCE A-level business	3	No. of starts	7	34	29
		% retention	100	88	93
		% pass rate	100	77	93
AS-level accounts	3	No. of starts	27	33	34
		% retention	63	85	94
		% pass rate	65	54	50
AVCE business studies (double award)	3	No. of starts	*	43	16
		% retention	*	60	100
		% pass rate	*	96	63
NVQ business administration	3	No. of starts	*	31	61
		% retention	*	23	44
		% pass rate	*	86	100

Source: ISR (2001 and 2002), college (2003)
Note: Advanced level results for 2000/01 were for two- year GCE A level and are not comparable with those in the following two years.
*courses not running

Quality of education and training

57. Lessons are well planned and objectives for all lessons are shared with students. Teachers generally check on students' understanding. In weaker lessons, once students give a basic response, the teacher takes over and then provides the elaboration. In the better lessons, students are challenged to give reasons, further details are sought or the rest of the group is required to take the issue further. Teachers show an awareness of language difficulties, spelling words, taking care to explain meanings. For example, the segments of an orange were used to explain market segmentation. In another lesson, issues of race and religion were introduced into considerations of establishing a fitness centre for Asian women. The lack of computers in classrooms impeded opportunities to use ILT to enhance learning. For example, in lessons considering market research activities or using latest company accounts, Internet access was not available. In addition, too few real examples were taken from business to illustrate theory. Student punctuality was poor in the first lesson of each day, averaging, at the start of lesson, 50% of the eventual attendance.

58. Students' learning was enhanced by the variety of teaching methods used, especially in longer lessons. Students were rarely inattentive. Brainstorming and group work provided good opportunities for students to be imaginative and test their own ideas. Some students were able to use their

experience in part-time jobs to relate theory to practice. There were few occasions when students engaged in a discussion of any length.

59. All teachers are appropriately qualified. Training records show that all staff undertake professional updating. However, none has engaged in industrial updating. As a consequence, they do not bring experience of current business practices to the lessons. Classrooms are bright with suitable displays and posters. One classroom has an interactive whiteboard, but none of the other classrooms has a computer. The rooms do not have Internet-link capability. There is a small room with three computers serving as a resource to the business studies students.

60. All tutors set regular homework. Students' work is returned promptly and appropriately marked. Detailed comments are provided on assignments and guidance given to students on how to improve grades. Student reviews are carried out twice a year and additional support needs identified. Reports on progress are sent to parents in March each year, if there is a serious concern they are contacted immediately.

Leadership and management

61. Leadership of the department is satisfactory. There are fortnightly meetings of all staff with a clear agenda for improvement. The agenda always includes identifying students at risk of failing to complete courses successfully and actions to address the causes for these concerns. Every month, awards are made to the `student of the month' on each course as encouragement to work hard, improve performance or for particularly good achievement. Teaching staff follow the college quality procedures. Course reviews are carried out and progression monitored. In 2003, over 90% of level 2 students progressed to level 3 in the department. Key performance statistics are used to monitor retention and pass rates. Schemes of work indicate where issues of equality and diversity may be addressed. The self-assessment report identified strengths and weaknesses under all of the key questions. However, a number of strengths were overstated.

Information and communications technology
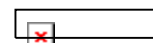
Overall provision in this area is **unsatisfactory (grade 4)**

Strengths

- o effective strategies for improving achievement

- o effective widening of participation.

Weaknesses

- o consistently low pass rates on most courses

- o underperformance of many students

o   poor punctuality and attendance to some lessons

o   insufficient range of level 3 courses to meet the needs of current students.

Scope of provision

62. Approximately 360 full-time students study from a range of courses, including AS level and GCE A level in ICT and computing, AVCE ICT, foundation and intermediate GNVQ ICT. Over 250 part-time students study from a wide range of part-time day and evening courses including entry level qualifications such as `IT for the terrified' and `introduction to webwise'. Level 1 courses offered include computer literacy and information technology (CLAIT) and level 2 courses such as the European computer driving license (ECDL) and CLAIT plus. The college runs an industry-designed course in networking which is studied by a small number of advanced level students. A number of the lower level courses are available in local centres. Recently introduced for full-time students are an entry level IT course and the level 1 BTEC introductory diploma in IT.

Achievement and standards

63. Retention rates on courses for full-time students vary considerably. Some advanced level courses have high retention rates of over 90%. The retention rate of part-time students on courses such as the CLAIT is consistently below the average for sixth form colleges. For level 2 courses, such as the ECDL, the retention rate is good at over 90%. The pass rates are low on courses for full-time students. Some pass rates are more than 20 percentage points below the average for similar colleges. On some advanced level courses, the proportion of high grades is also very small, with no students gaining high grades on the AS-level and GCE A-level ICT courses in 2003.

64. The standard of full-time students' work varies considerably, but is generally at a pass grade level. The quality of feedback varies, but the best enables students to improve. In practical lessons, many students use computers and software packages with confidence and explain what they are doing using the correct terminology. They have developed some research skills through the use of the Internet and through work in the college's learning resources centre. However, in about a quarter of lessons, a significant number of students do not actively participate, make little contribution to group work and are making unsatisfactory progress. Some answers to teachers' questions are superficial and the students do not give a detailed explanation of their answers. The syllabus requires students to understand commercial processes and how ICT is used in them. As many students have limited experience of the world of work, this makes it difficult to give in-depth answers to questions relating to the commercial use of ICT.

65. Punctuality was poor in a small number of lessons and, although attendance during inspection week was an average of 80%; in some lessons attendance was less than 60%.

66. Each year, about 70% of students progress to higher national diplomas (HND) or degree courses and others progress to higher levels of study within the college.

A sample of retention and pass rates in information and communications technology, 2001 to 2003

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
CLAIT	1	No. of starts	135	78	198

		% retention	67	69	68
		% pass rate	94	96	61
GNVQ intermediate ICT	2	No. of starts	91	59	102
		% retention	82	85	80
		% pass rate	15	74	49
GCSE ICT	2	No. of starts	19	34	43
		% retention	58	62	65
		% pass rate	55	43	25
AS-level ICT	3	No. of starts	41	40	37
		% retention	73	78	84
		% pass rate	23	0	45
AS-level computing	3	No. of starts	42	27	32
		% retention	95	44	72
		% pass rate	38	8	43
GCE A-level computing	3	No. of starts	53	26	9
		% retention	70	81	100
		% pass rate	24	52	33

Source: ISR (2001 and 2002), college (2003)

Note: Advanced level results for 2000/01 were for tw0-year GCE A level and are not comparable with those in the following two years.

Quality of education and training

67. Lessons are generally well planned and some make good use of a coherent variety of activities such as groupwork, teacher explanations and practical work. Most teachers use an open style of questioning and have a good relationship with students which encourages most students to participate. When undertaking exercises or practical work teachers carefully check progress. In the best lessons, teachers give sufficient information to ensure that students are able to make progress, but leave opportunities for the students to make decisions for themselves. When teaching theory, many teachers do not sufficiently check that the students understand. They sometimes give students too much factual information and do not require them to make many decisions. In only a few lessons, did students spontaneously seek clarification of points from the teachers. Teachers make little use of outside visits or visiting speakers to help the students to develop a better understanding. Limited use is made of work experience, mainly because of the difficulty in finding sufficient useful places, but some students have made visits to careers fairs and one group visited a space centre in Russia.

68. In one successful lesson, younger students with poor language skills were using well-written task sheets, some with visual images, which encouraged the students to read. With constant teacher encouragement, the students made many useful suggestions, completed written exercises rapidly and then used spreadsheets to check their written calculations. In another lesson, students used technically detailed learning material to plan and then build a computer network. They then discussed effectively as a whole group the calculations that they would need for configuring a larger network. The students regularly sit written tests and are achieving high standards of over 75%. On part-time courses, adult students make good use of their time, take care with their exercises and keep tidy files. Their teachers keep clear, yet simple, tracking documents and students are continually advised of their progress.

69. Teachers are suitably qualified with all having relevant ICT qualifications and experience. Almost all of the teachers have or are working towards teaching qualifications. A number have valuable industrial experience or are examiners and share this knowledge with others. Teachers of adults are sympathetic to the learning needs of their students and help them build confidence as well as develop their computing skills.

70. Most accommodation is good, with suitable furniture and stimulating displays of relevant materials. The hardware and software is up-to-date and sufficient. Students are able to use laptop computers, which are linked to the central system through wireless links. They use the communal computer resources well.

71. The learning resources centre is stocked with a range of texts and periodicals that are adequate for beginners courses and some advanced work. However, there are few books which students could use for detailed research in order to show a more in-depth knowledge and gain higher grades.

72. For students for whom GCE A-level and AVCE assessment methods are unsuitable, there is insufficient alternative provision.

Leadership and management

73. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Teachers meet regularly to discuss curriculum-related issues and identify students who may need extra support. Strategies employed to bring about improvements in students' pass rates are relatively new and have not yet raised standards sufficiently. Teachers undertake thorough annual course reviews and use these as the basis of a generally accurate self-assessment report. They are aware of low retention and pass rates, but do not use value added data sufficiently to help identify students who are not performing to their potential. There is an internal verification process that successfully identifies the suitability of assignments and verifies the standard of assessments. Students from differing backgrounds and abilities are encouraged and supported well.

Visual and performing arts and media
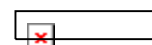
Overall provision in this area is **satisfactory (grade 3)**

Strengths

- o high standard of practical work in visual arts

- o good programme of enrichment activities

- o a well resourced dance studio

- o good support for students.

Weaknesses

- o low retention and pass rates on some courses

- o difficult access for students with physical impairments

- o poor changing facilities for students of dance.

Scope of provision

74. Approximately half of the 316 full-time students on visual and performing arts and media courses are on GCE A-level art and design and AS-level art studies, and fine art courses.

75. The range of provision includes courses leading to GCE A-level and AS-level qualifications in media, performance studies, film studies, music technology and dance. There are GCSE courses in photography, graphics and art.

Achievement and standards

76. Retention rates improved in 2003, with AS-level and GCE A-level photography and GCE A-level media all at or above the national averages. However, retention rates on GCSE media and photography and AS-level dance courses are all below the national averages. Pass rates improved in many areas. All students who completed AS-level and GCE A-level film studies, GCE A-level performance studies and GCSE art courses in 2003 passed. Students on GCE A-level art, graphics, dance, photography and film studies courses performed better than predictions based on their entry qualifications. However, pass rates in several areas are below the national averages. For example, pass rates on AS-level dance, AS-level performance studies, and GCE A-level photography are all at least 14 percentage points below the national average.

77. Students' practical work in art and photography, displayed throughout the college, is of a very high standard. Similarly some of the GCSE graphics and photography work is of an exceptionally high standard.

A sample of retention and pass rates in visual and performing arts and media, 2001 to 2003

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
AS-level media	3	No. of starts	48	53	43
		% retention	81	77	77
		% pass rate	85	56	79
GCE A-level media	3	No. of starts	26	26	24
		% retention	30	96	100
		% pass rate	86	84	62
GCE A-level photography	3	No. of starts	25	20	22
		% retention	76	65	100

		% pass rate	100	85	76
AS-level photography	3	No. of starts	*	61	49
		% retention	*	56	84
		% pass rate	*	47	83
GCE A-level art studies	3	No. of starts	26	31	12
		% retention	65	74	80
		% pass rate	76	96	92
AS-level film	3	No. of starts	*	33	22
		% retention	*	72	73
		% pass rate	*	92	100
GCE A-level art and design	3	No. of starts	19	31	15
		% retention	58	74	73
		% pass rate	82	96	100
AS-level performance	3	No. of starts	15	28	25
		% retention	87	82	68
		% pass rate	62	91	71

Source: ISR (2001 and 2002), college (2003)
Note: Advanced level results for 2000/01 were for two-year GCE A level and are not comparable with those in the following two years.
*courses did not run

Quality of education and training

78. Much of the teaching is good. Lessons are part of coherent schemes of work. They are carefully planned with supporting handouts that encourage students to develop theoretical concepts from their own practical work. Many visual arts projects are challenging. Students of photography work independently and experimentally. They use IT imaginatively using digital cameras, imported images from the Internet and graphics packages for image manipulation. Students have a high degree of confidence and skill. Challenging graphics projects are often set. Students research these well and complete the tasks to high standards. In the less successful lessons, teachers do not use questioning effectively and students are not encouraged to contribute sufficiently.

79. Resources are good. Art lessons are delivered in a spacious and well-lit studio. Graphics, photography, performance studies, film studies and dance are delivered in basement rooms. These are flexible creative working areas that allow teachers to share good practice and work co-operatively. The dance studio is well proportioned with a sprung floor, a wall of mirrors, retractable seating and a lighting rig. However, the changing facilities are very poor. Students with physically impairments have difficulty accessing courses that are delivered in the basement area because of the many changes of level, narrow corridors and outwardly opening doors. A music technology studio has recently been equipped to a high standard with a range of computers, a mixing desk and recording equipment. Good IT equipment is provided in the art, graphics and photography teaching areas. Staff are well qualified and either already have a teaching qualification or are working towards one. One full-time and two part-time technicians support the practical work well.

80. Assessment is undertaken regularly. The marking of coursework is carefully monitored. Work is returned to students promptly with a clear analysis of what is needed for improvement. Records of students' progress are maintained and used as a basis for target setting. However, the academic targets set are not effectively used to ensure students' performance improves.

81. College provision allows for good progression from level 2 to level 3. However, level 2 provision in performing arts is currently limited to a GCSE course in media. There are no level 1 courses. There is a wide range of professional links available to performing arts and media students. For example, visiting specialists help students develop their skills in printmaking and bookbinding. In addition, links exist with the Phoenix Arts Centre and the Haymarket Theatre, as well as the Anima Dance Company. Students also benefit from trips to Paris, St Ives, Bangalore and Iran.

82. Progression from the college to higher level courses is good. For example, 76% of art, graphic and photography students progressed to relevant FE and HE courses. Nearly 50% of students from performing arts and media progressed to HE courses in related subjects in 2002.

Leadership and management

83. Visual arts is led by an experienced manager who has effective systems in place for monitoring the work of the area. Regular, minuted team meetings ensure a high level of communication and co-operation. Schemes of work reflect the requirements of the examination boards and are externally moderated. There is a standard presentation of course documentation. These include, project briefs, assessment criteria and informative handouts. There have been substantial changes in the staffing of performing arts and media courses. This includes a change in the team manager. Some of the performing arts and media management systems are weak. Minutes of meetings lack detail and tight deadlines. Action plans are not reviewed regularly and lesson plans vary too much in quality.

84. New staff are given effective support. The staff appraisal system is used well to inform the staff development plan. Quality assurance systems are being further developed. Equal opportunity forms a natural part of the work of the area, catering for a multicultural and mixed ability student population.

Humanities
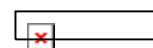
Overall provision in this area is **good (grade 2)**

Strengths

- o very good retention and pass rates in AS-level and GCE A-level law

- o some very good student achievement

- o most teaching good or better

- o good leadership and management.

Weaknesses

- o unsatisfactory retention and pass rates in GCSE subjects

- o inadequate audio visual and ILT equipment in classrooms.

Scope of provision

85. A total of 37 students are enrolled on GCSE courses in law and psychology. In September 2003, the college introduced AS levels in government and politics and religious studies, and AS-level philosophy was first offered in September 2001. A total of 67 students are enrolled on these courses. GCE AS and GCE A level in history, law, psychology, sociology are offered. Approximately 290 students are enrolled on these subjects at AS level and 130 enrolled at GCE A level. Approximately 160 students are taking AS level and 64 are taking GCE A-level law. Over 100 students are taking AS-level psychology and 39 are taking GCE A-level psychology. The provision in this curriculum area accounts for 14% of all college enrolments

Achievement and standards

86. Retention rates have generally improved and are now close to or above national averages for most AS-level and GCE A-level subjects. They remain unsatisfactory for GCSE subjects. Pass rates are good or very good in many subjects, but in some AS levels and GCE A levels and in GCSEs they have declined considerably or remain unsatisfactory. Pass rates are very good and considerably above the national average in GCE A-level sociology, AS-level and GCE A-level law and are now above the national average in GCE A-level psychology. Pass rates for AS-level psychology and sociology, although considerably improved, are below the national average. Pass rates in AS-level history have declined from 77% to 17% over three years, although retention rates have improved. GCE A-level pass rates in history have also declined. Pass rates in AS-level philosophy have improved, but are still well below the national average. Students' pass rates in AS-level and GCE A-level law and GCE A-level sociology are better than their achievements at GCSE would predict. In 2003, 51% of students achieved high grades in GCE A-level law, the national average being 25%. In AS-level law, 46% of students achieved high grades and the national average was 34%.

87. The standard of students' work is very good. Students are confident in asking questions and putting forward their ideas. Most students make very good progress in developing skills of analysis and evaluation. They use these skills to present well-reasoned arguments which they present clearly and with confidence. In a large GCE A-level law class, students were asked to develop and present a case in which they could use duress as a defence. They demonstrated very good knowledge of a range of cases and excellent skills of presentation, challenge and counter challenge. In most AS-level and GCE A-level lessons, students are able to identify assumptions and flaws in arguments. Students in GCSE lessons need more support to present their ideas with clarity and confidence and assess the value of evidence.

A sample of retention and pass rates in humanities, 2001 to 2003

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
GCSE psychology	2	No. of starts	21	26	32
		% retention	71	69	66
		% pass rate	40	44	33
AS-level law	3	No. of starts	80	34	106
		% retention	79	65	88

		% pass rate	56	50	88
AS-level psychology	3	No. of starts	66	67	90
		% retention	88	81	89
		% pass rate	43	59	68
AS-level sociology	3	No. of starts	48	40	61
		% retention	81	78	87
		% pass rate	85	65	75
GCE A-level law	3	No. of starts	2	42	44
		% retention	100	71	98
		% pass rate	100	97	98
GCE A-level psychology	3	No. of starts	6	25	33
		% retention	83	84	88
		% pass rate	40	67	83
GCE A-level sociology	3	No. of starts	2	28	17
		% retention	100	86	76
		% pass rate	100	88	100

Source: ISR (2001 and 2002), college (2003)

Note: Advanced level results for 2000/01 were for two-year GCE A level and are not comparable with those in the following two years.

Quality of education and training

88. Most teaching is good or better and, in AS-level and GCE A-level law, all teaching is at least very good. Teachers have high expectations of students. They plan and manage a wide range of activities to challenge and inspire students and to develop their skills of critical analysis, evaluation and well-reasoned argument. Most teachers are very skilled at managing group work. There is good rapport between staff and students, students show a positive attitude to their work and enjoy the learning that takes place in lessons. The small amount of weaker teaching lacked dynamism. Teachers did not always manage group work or supervise individual work effectively.

89. Staff are very well qualified and knowledgeable about their subjects. Those new to teaching are well supported and mentored. Staff are skilled in the use of ILT to enhance the range of teaching and learning strategies. They encourage students to use a range of very good websites and materials that they have developed for the college intranet. Most classrooms do not have audio visual and ILT facilities and this hinders the development of alternative teaching and learning styles. Private study facilities for students are limited, although most subjects do have a study area with a small number of computers. Teachers produce a wide range of well-produced handouts, fact sheets and reading guides to supplement textbooks.

90. There are clear assessment strategies and guidelines. Work is marked thoroughly and returned promptly with identified areas for improvement. Tracking and monitoring systems are used effectively to inform students of their overall progress and to identify students who need additional support. In most lessons, there are good strategies to assess students' learning and progress.

91. A wide range of visiting speakers is organised as well as visits, seminars and subject tutorials to enhance learning and teaching. Law students attend the law club at a local university and take part in a debating competition organised by the university.

92. Guidance and support for students are very good. Students appreciate the quality of the support and the time that teachers and support staff devote to their individual needs and interests. Students at risk of underachieving and withdrawing are given plenty of support. Progress reviews take place every six weeks when individual action plans are agreed with students. Links with HE institutions are strong in many subjects.

Leadership and management

93. Management and leadership are good. Staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities and they feel involved in evaluating the success of their courses. Suggestions made for implementing improvements and developments contribute well to the self-assessment report. Most teachers set themselves high standards and plan effectively to meet them. Tracking and monitoring systems are good, college policies are adopted, developed and implemented effectively. Courses with poor retention or pass rates are monitored closely and support is given for improvement. This is not always effective. Staff are committed to promoting inclusion and promoting equal opportunities. Teaching and learning materials promote equal opportunities and the tolerance of diversity and anti-discriminatory practices.

English language and communications
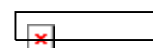
Overall provision in this area is **satisfactory (grade 3)**

Strengths

- o   much good teaching

- o   good support for students

- o   high pass and retention rates on the entry-level certificate in English and on GCE A-level English subjects.

Weaknesses

- o   low pass rates on AS-level English language and literature

- o   inadequate use of IT.

Scope of provision

94. The English language and communications area caters for 439 students. Some 94 students are

enrolled on the entry-level certificate in English and 224 students are enrolled on GCSE English language. The entry-level certificate in English is offered to students who want to gain a GCSE in English language or who want to improve their grade to an A* to C pass. In AS-level English language and literature and AS-level English literature, 75 students are enrolled and 22 students are enrolled in GCE A-level English language and literature.

Achievement and standards

95. The retention rates on GCE A-level courses have been above national averages for the last three years. The retention rate on the entry level certificate in English in 2003, the first year it was taught, was high at 93%. Retention rates for students on GCSE English language and on AS-level English language and literature courses have been below the national average. The retention rates for students on GCSE courses have improved and in 2003 were at the national average. The retention rate on AS-level English language and literature was well below the national average in 2003.

96. The pass rate for students on the entry-level certificate in English in 2003 was high, at 80%. The A* to C pass rate in GCSE English language have been just above average in 2002 and 2003. Pass rates on AS-level English language and literature have declined and in 2003, were well below average. Generally pass rates at GCE A level have been good.

97. Students on the entry-level certificate in English make good progress. Many of these students have low levels of achievement in English at the start of the course and improve their abilities in speaking, listening, reading and writing. However, some of these students find the progression to GCSE difficult. Many students on the GCSE English language course produce good standards of written work. In one lesson, students learned how to structure a short story in order to attract and hold the reader's interest. Students then wrote a short story, with several of the students producing original and interesting work. A few students show little involvement in the activities of their lessons. At GCE A-level, students make above average progress. On the AS-level language and literature course, students are progressing in line with expectations.

A sample of retention and pass rates in English language and communications, 2001 to 2003

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
Entry level certificate in English	1	No. of starts	*	*	106
		% retention	*	*	93
		% pass rate	*	*	80
GCSE English language	2	No. of starts	179	203	194
		% retention	72	71	79
		% pass rate	41	54	51
AS-level English language and literature	3	No. of starts	47	37	52
		% retention	89	92	69
		% pass rate	71	38	58
GCE A-level English language and literature	3	No. of starts	18	17	11
		% retention	39	82	91
		% pass rate	100	79	100
GCE A-level English literature	3	No. of starts	9	9	2
		% retention	78	89	100
		% pass rate	86	100	100

Quality of education and training

98. There is some excellent teaching of English and more that is very good. Teachers have good knowledge of their subject. Teaching is well planned; the objectives of lessons are clear and are shared with students. Teachers select a range of activities, texts and other materials that interest the students. In a GCSE lesson, the teacher introduced a short story by the Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe, the elements of culture were briefly reviewed and associations around the title `Civil Peace' were explored. In some lessons, teachers needed to demonstrate the task or provide students with a good model, but failed to do this.

99. Students are well motivated and learn effectively. During lessons leading to the entry-level certificate in English and on GCSE English courses, students develop their skills in speaking, reading for meaning and in textual analysis. They develop their knowledge of genres and of writers. On advanced courses, students learn to apply a range of theoretical frameworks and knowledge of history and of biography to the study of literature and language. In one lesson on the entry-level certificate, students were studying the balcony scene in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. students read the original text alongside a modern English version, analysed the emotions of the characters and in groups drafted and then performed their own versions of the dialogue.

100. Staff are well qualified, knowledgeable and enthusiastic. They communicate their interest and enthusiasm to students. Classrooms are attractive and have displays on the walls of students' work and other material related to the study of English. Book resources available in the library and in classrooms are satisfactory. On the entry-level certificate and GCSE on English courses, teachers do not use IT to promote students' learning and research skills sufficiently.

101. Students receive good feedback on their written work, which is detailed and indicates to students how they can improve. Teachers assess work accurately and keep detailed records of students' progress. In 2002, the college introduced the entry-level certificate to meet the needs of those students for whom GCSE is not appropriate.

102. Students receive good support. Course handbooks are informative. Teachers use interviews and induction to inform students clearly of the demands of the English courses. Students' literacy and numeracy needs are assessed and support is provided if it is needed. Students' attendance and progress are carefully monitored. The department provides revision workshops to help students prepare for exams. Teachers use tutorials to review students' progress. However, students' targets are often not sufficiently specific.

Leadership and management

103. Leadership and management of English are satisfactory. Improvements have been made to retention rates and new courses have been introduced to meet the needs of students. Self-assessment is broadly accurate and leads to improvement. However, there are no documented end-of-year reviews of courses. Staff work well as a team and share resources. The department promotes equality of opportunity through its teaching by using texts and other materials from a range of cultures of interest and relevance to students.
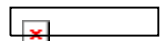
Part D: College data

Table 1: Enrolments by level of study and age

Level	16-18 %	19+ %
1	20	23
2	25	44
3	55	13
4/5	0	0
Other	0	20
Total	100	100

Source: provided by the college in 2004

Table 2: Enrolments by curriculum area and age

Curriculum area	16-18 No.	19+ No.	Total Enrolments (%)
Science and mathematics	546	61	15
Land-based provision	0	0	0
Construction	8	2	0
Engineering, technology and manufacture	27	1	1
Business administration, management and professional	242	552	20
Information and communication technology	177	233	10
Retailing, customer service and transportation	0	0	0
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	15	2	0
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	0	0	0
Health, social care and public services	44	1	1
Visual and performing arts and media	312	33	9
Humanities	517	36	14
English, languages and communication	314	45	9
Foundation programmes	91	4	2
Unknown AOL	386	327	19
Total	2,679	1,297	100

Source: provided by the college in 2004

Table 3: Retention and achievement

Level (Long Courses)	Retention and pass rate	Completion year					
		16-18			19+		
		2000	2001	2002	2000	2001	2002
1	Starters excluding transfers	245	8	66	99	78	146
	Retention rate %	83	50	47	73	68	55
	National average %	79	80	78	71	70	72
	Pass rate %	3	75	35	25	77	77
	National average %	70	66	71	67	70	75
2	Starters excluding transfers	1,158	863	864	150	127	169
	Retention rate %	78	79	70	66	68	42
	National average %	80	80	81	71	72	71
	Pass rate %	35	46	68	21	26	44
	National average %	80	85	84	70	68	71
3	Starters excluding transfers	1,050	1,507	1,482	156	215	302
	Retention rate %	41	72	77	54	53	62
	National average %	75	80	89	63	64	69
	Pass rate %	73	58	53	44	58	61
	National average %	85	86	88	65	67	75

Note: summary of retention and achievement for the last three years by age and level of course, compared against national averages for colleges of the same type (that is general FE/tertiary colleges or sixth form colleges).

Sources of information:

1. National averages: Benchmarking Data 2000 to 2002: Retention and Achievement Rates in Further Education Colleges in England, Learning and Skills Council, September 2003.

2. College rates for 1999/2000 to 2001/02: College ISR.

Table 4: Quality of teaching observed during the inspection by level

Courses	Teaching judged to be:			No of sessions observed
	Good or better %	Satisfactory %	Less than satisfactory %	
Level 3 (advanced)	71	25	4	51
Level 2 (intermediate)	63	23	14	22
Level 1 (foundation)	71	29	0	7
Other sessions	72	14	14	7
Totals	**69**	**24**	**7**	**87**

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