



ADULT LEARNING  
INSPECTORATE



## Esher College

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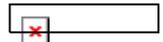
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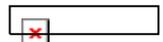
### Basic information about the college



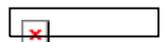
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Name of college:	Esher College
Type of college:	Sixth Form College
Principal:	Keith Blackwell
Address of college:	Weston Green Road Thames Ditton Surrey KT7 0JB
Telephone number:	020 8398 0291
Fax number:	020 8339 0207
Chair of governors:	Nigel Burbridge
Unique reference number:	130830
Name of reporting inspector:	Vincent Ashworth HMI
Dates of inspection:	31 January-4 February 2005

### Part A: Summary



### Information about the college



1974. In the immediate locality, staying-on rates for young people aged 16 in full-time education and training are high and unemployment is low. The college recruits students from over 100 different schools in a wide catchment area. Approximately 75% of students travel to the college from outside of Surrey, mainly from the South London boroughs.

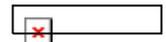
There are approximately 1,450 full-time students aged 16 to 18, of whom 52% are female. The majority of students aged 16 to 18 are on level 3 courses. Between 2001 and 2004, the number of enrolments at the college increased by over 13%. The college attracts students with a wide range of ability; most are relatively well qualified, with an average general secondary certificate of education (GCSE) score of 5.9. Approximately 10% of students are from minority ethnic backgrounds, which is a higher proportion than that of the local population.

The college offers courses in 9 of the 14 areas of learning. No courses are offered in construction, land-based provision, retailing, hairdressing and beauty or foundation studies. The most substantial areas of provision are science and mathematics, visual and performing arts and media, humanities and English. The college offers 33 subjects at general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) and 27 subjects at advanced subsidiary level (AS level). There are three subjects offered at GCSE level. Courses leading to advanced vocational certificates of education (AVCE) are provided in six areas: art and design; business; leisure and recreation; health and social care; media; travel and tourism. Vocational qualifications at level 2 are also provided in art and design, information and communications technology (ICT), leisure and tourism. There is no full-time provision at level 1.

Provision for adult students is relatively small. Courses for adults are self-funded and therefore did not come within the scope for inspection. In 2003, there were 349 adult students enrolled on part-time courses. The majority of adult students follow short introductory courses in ICT. Other provision for adult students includes courses in modern foreign languages, counselling skills and specialist training for science technicians.

The purpose of the college, set out in its mission statement, is to be the specialist provider of non-selective, open-access sixth form college education for South West London and North Surrey.

### How effective is the college?



Inspectors judged the overall quality of education to be outstanding in all of the areas of learning inspected. There was a contributory grade of good for drama and theatre studies. The standard of teaching and learning at the college is high. Leadership and management are outstanding and support for students is excellent. The college's key strengths and the areas that should be improved are listed below.

#### **Key strengths**

- high pass and retention rates in most subjects
  
- much good and very good teaching and learning
  
- open and consultative management

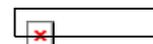
- high standard of students' work
- very good specialist resources and accommodation
- very effective support for students' individual learning needs
- strong commitment to equality of opportunity for staff and students
- extensive opportunities for students to enrich their learning and personal development
- good learning resources which are used effectively
- excellent management information systems.

***What should be improved***

- some cramped accommodation
- strategies for improvement in a small minority of courses
- aspects of the college self-assessment report which are insufficiently evaluative
- the use of information and learning technology (ILT) in a few curriculum areas
- the analysis of the impact of learning support on specific groups of students.

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

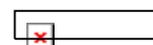
### Quality of provision in curriculum and occupational areas



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	<b>Outstanding.</b> Pass and retention rates are very high on most AS-level and GCE A-level courses, but pass rates in AS-level human biology are low. There is a high standard of teaching and ILT is used highly effectively to enhance and extend student learning. Subject support for students is very good. Leadership and management of the curriculum are strong.
Visual arts and design technology	<b>Outstanding.</b> Pass and retention rates are very high on most courses and a high proportion of students achieve grades A or B. Retention rates on AS-level fashion courses have declined in the three years to 2004. There is much good teaching and the standard of students' creative work is high. Specialist facilities for art and fashion are very good, as is support for students.
Performing arts and media	<b>Outstanding.</b> Contributory grade for drama and theatre studies is <b>good</b> . Pass and retention rates are high and GCE A-level media students make excellent progress relative to their prior attainment at GCSE. Very creative and well-structured teaching takes place in high-quality specialist accommodation. Students benefit from an excellent range of enrichment activities. There has been a significant decline in high-grade achievements in GCE A-level drama and theatre studies.
Humanities	<b>Outstanding.</b> Pass and retention rates are high on all courses and the proportion of students who achieve grades A or B is well above the national average. Teachers inspire and motivate students and make highly effective use of ILT to support learning. There are many good opportunities for subject enrichment. Students benefit from very good subject support.
English	<b>Outstanding.</b> Pass and retention rates are very high and many students achieve high grades in their examinations. Teaching is very good; lessons are imaginative and stimulating. Staff and students benefit from good curriculum management. There is a good range of enrichment activities and subject support for students is very good.

### How well is the college led and managed?



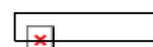
Leadership and management are outstanding. Heads of department manage courses effectively and most retention and pass rates are significantly above the national average for sixth form colleges. The principal and senior management team communicate a clear vision which is shared by staff and governors. There is a strong commitment to providing students with a broad educational experience. There is an open and consultative management style and staff are trusted and encouraged to take responsibility and develop themselves professionally. There are innovative systems for sharing good practice across departments. Quality improvement procedures are mainly comprehensive and rigorous, although elements of it are insufficiently evaluative. The management and capability of ICT and management information systems are excellent. Equal opportunities are very effectively promoted in the curriculum and the management of staff. Financial management is good and the college provides excellent value for money.

### **To what extent is the college educationally and socially inclusive?**



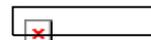
The college's response to educational and social inclusion is good. The college is oversubscribed; prospective students who apply after all the places have been filled are placed on a waiting list and are contacted by the college in order of application when a vacancy occurs. The college is actively involved in a local post-14 consortium and works with a local university targeting Year 10 pupils from backgrounds where young people do not traditionally go into higher education (HE). All teachers take into account the specific learning needs of students when planning their teaching. Support for students with specific learning difficulties is very good. The equal opportunities policy has been reviewed in the light of the Race Relations (amendment) Act 2000 and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 (SENDA). The performance of different groups of students in terms of their ethnicity, gender and disability is analysed at college and course level. Most of the college can be accessed by students with restricted mobility, and by September 2005 the college plans to implement the recommendations of its disability access audit in full.

### **How well are students and trainees guided and supported?**



Support and guidance for students are excellent. The college organises interviews, open evenings and 'taster' sessions to enable prospective students to make very well-informed choices. The thorough induction programme is highly effective and helps students to settle into college life and their studies quickly. Arrangements to identify and meet individual learning needs are very effective. Support is well planned and carefully designed to meet the learning needs of individual students. Tutorial arrangements are excellent. The tutorial programme is well structured and supported by a comprehensive scheme of work. There is an extensive programme to develop students' personal and social skills. There is a planned programme of individual reviews to monitor students' progress and to deal with causes for concern and personal matters. The college works closely with many agencies to provide wider support for students. Guidance and support for students applying to HE, for gap-year students and for those seeking employment, are strong. The analysis of the impact of learning support on specific groups of students is not well established. The college has implemented appropriate arrangements for child protection.

### **Students' views of the college**



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

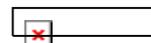
***What students like about the college***

- pleasant, friendly and respectful atmosphere
  
- being treated like an adult
  
- good pastoral and subject support
  
- wide range of enrichment activities
  
- the high standards of teaching
  
- the college's good reputation
  
- good learning resources.

***What they feel could be improved***

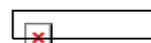
- more realistic information about the academic demands of courses
  
- quality of canteen food
  
- crowded social areas
  
- tutor periods.

## 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

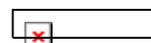


### Summary of grades awarded to teaching and learning by inspectors

Aspect and 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	83	16	1
Learning 16-18	81	18	1

*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).*

## Achievement and standards



1. The standard of students' achievements is high. The majority of students who commence advanced level courses complete them successfully. Overall pass and retention rates are high, above national averages, and have improved each year for the last four years. College data for 2004 indicate a retention rate of 93% and an overall pass rate of 94% for advanced level courses.

2. In 2004, the pass rate for GCE A level was 98%, AS level was 93% and AVCE was 99%. Some 50% of students who entered for GCE A-level examinations and 43% of students who entered for AS-level examinations achieved grades A or B. Higher-grade passes in several subjects are impressive. For example, in 2004, higher-grade achievement was 73% in GCE A-level design technology, 74% in GCE A-level chemistry and 75% in GCE A-level fashion. The average GCE/VCE point score for each candidate achieved by students at the college was 292, which is well above local and national averages for all schools and colleges. The progression rate of students from level 3 courses to HE is high. In 2004, 86% of students completing level 3 courses progressed to

university.

3. Analysis of students' value added achievements shows that overall students are doing better than expected in comparison with their GCSE scores on entry. In 2004, students' performance at GCE A level in media, English language, design technology and classical civilisation was significantly better than predicted by their GCSE scores. These subjects accounted for 15% of the total examination entries. In drama and French, students performed significantly less well. A three-year rolling average analysis for each individual GCE A-level subject shows that out of 31 subjects, students in 5 subjects, English literature, psychology, media, design technology and art and design consistently achieve higher grades than predicted. In GCE A-level drama and theatre studies, ICT and business students achieve below their expected grades. On advanced vocational courses, students' pass rates are generally in line with their predicted grades.

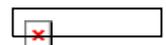
4. On level 2 courses, pass rates have improved from around the national average and are now high, at 94%. In 2002, the overall pass rate on general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) courses was unsatisfactory, but this improved to around the national average in 2003. Higher-grade pass rates in GCSE mathematics have improved in recent years and are now around the national average. Pass rates at grades A\* to C in GCSE English are high. Retention rates have improved significantly each year from 67% in 2001 to 90% in 2004. Pass rates on GCSE science courses are excellent.

5. There are no full-time courses at level 1, but a small number of students who are enrolled on level 2 or level 3 courses enrol on courses for additional qualifications at level 1. Pass rates are high and, with the exception of 2002, have been significantly above national averages. In the years 2001 and 2002, retention rates were poor. These improved significantly to well above the national average in 2003. College data for 2004 report a retention rate of 100%.

6. The quality of students' work is very good. Students express their views with clarity and confidence. Their written work demonstrates good research skills and high levels of critical awareness. In science and mathematics, students are confident, willing to attempt a range of problems and are able to argue their ideas coherently. On performing arts courses, students work effectively both in teams and individually, demonstrating high levels of mutual trust and co-operation. Their enthusiasm and artistic flair is clearly evident in their high standard of practical work. In visual arts, students paint and draw with conviction and make imaginative use of a wide range of sources. In design technology, students are innovative and their work demonstrates a good understanding of design, manufacture and marketing. Fashion students' work is well researched, ambitious and original. In humanities, students analyse complex concepts and express them clearly through well-structured written work. Students' skills of critical evaluation, research and analysis are developed to a very high standard in English.

7. The average attendance during the inspection was 85%. Attendance was highest in performing arts and media at 88%, and lowest in science and mathematics at 80%. Student punctuality was a concern in several lessons. This has been recognised by the college and action is being taken to improve punctuality during the day.

### Quality of education and training



8. There is much good and very good teaching. Teaching, learning and attainment were graded by inspectors in 71 lessons. Teaching was good or better in 83% of these and satisfactory in 16%. Only one lesson was graded unsatisfactory. This teaching profile is well above the average for sixth form college inspections. The proportion of teaching graded very good or excellent was 42%. The quality of teaching in science and mathematics and performing arts and media is excellent. Learning was good or better in 81% of lessons, satisfactory in 18% and less than satisfactory in 1%.

9. In the best lessons, teachers show a high degree of enthusiasm for their subjects and carefully prepare materials, handouts and classroom activities to ensure that they take account of students' individual needs, interests, abilities and progress. Teachers use a combination of whole-class teaching, group work and individual activities effectively to maintain students' interest and motivation. For example, in mathematics, students commonly work in pairs to discuss approaches to problems and then in larger groups to work on practical tasks which help them visualise the problems. Teachers challenge students to reflect and argue their ideas in a structured and articulate manner; group discussion and debate is regularly of a high standard. In many lessons, teachers make frequent reference to assessment and examination requirements and the techniques required for students to produce answers that will achieve the best marks.

10. The creative and imaginative use of ILT to support learning is a significant strength in lessons in science and mathematics, media, fashion, design technology and humanities. Many teaching and learning resources are available on the college intranet which students can access easily. Teachers are adept in accessing these materials in lessons and using animations, diagrams and interactive worksheets to extend learning. Specialist equipment and facilities, such as those used in design technology, visual and performing arts and media, are used effectively to develop students' practical skills. Support workshops are available across all subject areas; these are highly effective in helping students to consolidate their learning.

11. In lessons graded satisfactory, as distinguished from the good or better lessons, teachers dictate too many notes and students are given too few opportunities to participate. Group work is less skilfully organised and there are insufficient activities to meet the needs of both the most and least able students in the class. In some areas, ILT is little used.

12. The college employs 64 full-time and 35 part-time teachers who are well qualified and experienced, with many holding second degrees. Most have a professional teaching qualification while the few who do not are working towards one.

13. The standard of accommodation is generally very good, having been improved significantly since the last inspection. However, classrooms are too small for the number of students in art history and for larger classes in humanities and performing arts. Parts of the building are not fully accessible for students and staff with restricted mobility.

14. Students have good access to computers. A comprehensive ILT strategy ensures very good progress is being made to establishing an ILT environment that is valued by students and staff. Every classroom has a networked computer; many are connected to a data projector. In addition, laptops are available to staff and students who have particular requirements.

15. Study facilities are enhanced by a pleasant and welcoming learning resource centre. It contains a wide range of resources for independent study including a good stock of books, CD-ROMs and DVDs, open access to computers and a large quiet study area. Learning resource centre staff have good links with subject areas.

16. Assessment and monitoring of students' work are thorough and effective. Work is regularly set and marked and returned promptly. Subject teachers provide regular formative and summative assessments which are fair and accurate and of a high standard. Assignments are well marked and feedback to students is mostly clear and constructive, enabling them to improve their performance. In science and mathematics, and humanities, feedback does not always make it clear what students need to do to improve.

17. Both subject teachers and individual tutors monitor well the progress students make in relation to their target grades. Two profiling days are allocated annually to enable tutors to review the overall performance of individual students. Where students are underperforming, action plans are used to monitor improvements. Most action plans contain targets which are specific, measurable and achievable. In humanities and performing arts, the action plans do not include sufficient specific detail to monitor improvement. Parents and guardians receive regular progress reports on achievement, attendance and work completed.

18. An appropriate range of courses are offered at advanced level. The majority of students study four AS-level/GCE A-level courses in both their first and second years. Students' learning programmes have two distinct elements: core studies comprising their main programme of study; and extension studies. The latter provides a wide range of enrichment and skills courses as well as additional AS-level courses in subjects such as critical thinking, European studies, citizenship and public understanding of science.

19. Students benefit from very good curriculum enrichment. All Year 12 students participate in a wide range of sports, performing arts, community care, Duke of Edinburgh award, Young Enterprise and leisure interest courses in addition to their chosen academic and vocational courses. Enrichment activities within subject areas are extensive and add significant value to students' learning.

20. Staff teaching fashion and performing arts courses make good use of their industrial links and experience, but overall curriculum links with employers are not well established. A work placement programme to increase staff knowledge and understanding of the contemporary world of work has been introduced, but involves only a small number of staff. High numbers of students undertake work experience during 'Wider Skills' week each year.

21. Key skills qualifications are offered at level 2 or 3, as appropriate. All students are required to complete a level 2 qualification in information technology (IT), if they have not achieved an equivalent qualification at school. The central co-ordination and management of key skills has been strengthened and systems put in place to sharpen the monitoring of portfolio completion which is low. The pass rate for level 2 IT has declined over the last three years and was 48% in 2004, just above the national average. Students are encouraged to work towards one key skill at level 3, and for most this is in communication. Key skills have been integrated effectively across all subject areas.

22. Support and guidance for students are excellent. The prospectus explains college facilities well and details course content clearly through an informative annual supplement. The college operates an open access recruitment policy and prioritises applications strictly in accordance with the order in which they are received. The college organises interviews, open evenings and taster sessions to enable prospective students to make very well-informed choices. A specialist learning support tutor attends the interviews of applicants who declare a learning difficulty and/or disability. The thorough induction programme is very effective and helps students to settle into college life and their studies quickly.

23. Arrangements to identify and meet individual learning needs are very effective. The college identifies learning support needs through a range of well-established procedures including the application and enrolment processes, initial assessment, and through teacher and self-referral. In September 2004, 155 students were identified as needing additional learning support and 14% of all current students have special examination requirements. Students with dyslexia or other specific learning difficulties have a weekly timetabled period in the learning and skills advisory centre. Attendance at these sessions is high. Support is well planned and designed to meet the learning needs of individual students. There is an extensive range of specialist resources available to assist students in their learning.

24. Teachers receive comprehensive and detailed information about disabilities and medical conditions which affect learning. Teachers use this information and the related staff development well in their lessons and adapt appropriately their materials and teaching. Where appropriate, the college provides a support teacher to assist students in the classroom. The college promotes learning support well to all its students. Students without identified learning support needs make good use of the study and writing skills material, revision and examination tips, and workbooks available in the learning and skills advisory centre.

25. Tutorial arrangements are excellent. The tutorial programme is well structured and supported by a comprehensive scheme of work and detailed handbook for tutors. Tutors are well supported by the tutor team leaders. Students meet as a tutor group weekly to complete administrative tasks and receive information and updates from the college bulletin. In addition, there is an extensive

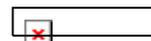
programme to develop students' personal and social skills. There is a planned programme of individual reviews to monitor students' progress and to deal with both causes for concern and personal matters. The college organises two subject tutorials weekly to enable subject teachers to see students either in groups or individually to deal with subject-related matters; additionally, there are a number of drop-in workshops organised during lunch periods. Students value these meetings and the sensitive individual support they receive. Quality assurance arrangements for tutorials are good.

26. The college provides good careers and HE guidance. There is an extensive annual programme of activities and events through both the tutorial programme and the careers department. The college hosts an annual HE convention at which over 80 institutions attend. The careers staff and Connexions service provide a high level of support to students applying for employment. Students make good use of the services provided, including interviews on demand, seminars on job seeking, and the writing of curriculum vitae. Local job vacancies are advertised through the college bulletin and on the college's website.

27. The analysis of the impact of learning support on specific groups of students is not yet sufficiently thorough. The college analyses the overall impact of support on retention and pass rates of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. However, the impact of learning support is not systematically analysed for specific groups, such as those with dyslexia, those for whom the college receives additional funding and for those with specific disabilities.

28. The college has made appropriate arrangements for child protection. A designated senior member of staff has responsibility for child protection and liaison with the local social services and other agencies. There is a detailed child protection policy and all college staff have received training. Members of the governing body have yet to receive training on child protection issues. The college has a well-publicised counselling service which works closely with external agencies to provide wider support for students.

## Leadership and management



29. Leadership and management are outstanding. Since the last inspection, a two-phase building and refurbishment programme has dramatically improved the learning environment for all students as well as improving access for people with restricted mobility. The project was astutely and efficiently managed by managers and governors. Over the last four years, enrolments have risen by 13% with the college being regularly oversubscribed. Overall pass and retention rates at level 3 are well above the national average for sixth form colleges and have shown steady improvement. Students' grades generally exceed expectations based on their prior attainment at school. The college's IT infrastructure and capability has been significantly enhanced as a result of large and continuous investment.

30. The principal and senior management team successfully communicate a vision and a philosophy which is shared and understood by staff and governors. There is a commitment to providing students with a broad educational experience both through additional AS levels and the college's extensive enrichment programme. Leadership of the curriculum is strong. Teachers and managers focus on maintaining and improving standards of teaching and learning. Considerable emphasis is given to meeting the needs of students as individuals. The consultative, open style of management is recognised and valued by staff. They feel themselves trusted and well supported by their managers in seeking to raise standards. Staff feel they are listened to and are able to give a number of examples of important issues where their views were sought and influenced decision making. At all levels, they are encouraged to participate and take responsibility. For example, all staff are expected to be a member of one of the standing committees. Communication is effective across the college. There are weekly whole staff briefings and a weekly paper bulletin, as well as daily updating through the college website. Minutes of all meetings are posted on the staffroom noticeboard. The senior

management team have run a successful open forum session where staff were able to raise questions on any aspect of the college. Senior managers devise frameworks for college systems which make them simple and straightforward for staff to implement.

31. Quality assurance systems are comprehensive and thoroughly implemented and contribute to the overall high level of achievement. All college targets for retention and pass rates have been met or exceeded. An excellent quality assurance manual sets out the quality agenda for the year and describes simply and clearly each stage of the process and how to complete the associated forms. Time is provided to ensure that staff at all levels contribute to annual reviews and the setting of targets. Annual reviews and action plans, set against identified quality factors, are produced by all courses and cross-college administrative services. These are then presented by the relevant manager to a joint review consisting of a senior manager, a governor and a member of the quality standing committee. For areas for which senior managers are responsible, a vice-principal from another college joins the review panel. Records of the review show the process to be challenging. Midway through the year, progress towards targets is reviewed and recorded. A small minority of course reviews are not sufficiently self-critical and fail to produce effective strategies to improve performance. No survey of students' views was available for 2004. Administrative departments do not formally survey staff satisfaction in relation to their services. The overall college self-assessment report is comprehensive, but elements of it are insufficiently evaluative.

32. The college has recently introduced interdepartmental reviews where paired departments review each other. Both departments benefit from the process which is a very effective means of sharing good practice. The system of lesson observation also encourages staff development and the sharing of good practice. The observations are conducted by a team of around 20 teachers, who are not necessarily managers and are drawn from all the divisions. All staff are trained before starting to observe and new staff regularly opt to join the team. The reports produced are detailed and offer constructive and practical suggestions for improvement. Teachers find the system supportive and valuable. Teachers who are observed as personal tutors are not observed teaching their subject; this prevents management from having a complete view of the quality of teaching in a particular curriculum area.

33. Staff development is very effective. An annual training plan is generated from individual, team and college targets. A significant amount of high-quality training with a focus on teaching and learning is provided by the college. Staff are encouraged and supported in furthering their professional development and all training activities are formally evaluated. Newly qualified teachers receive very good support and are allocated an individual mentor for their induction period. All members of staff have an annual performance review. Additionally, every three years, managers have an appraisal which focuses on their management role. Most reviews include a detailed evaluation of performance and set measurable targets for the coming year. In a minority of cases, the documentation does not indicate that a thorough review has taken place.

34. The college's equal opportunities policy emphasises the importance of effective recruitment, induction and support for individual students in ensuring equality of opportunity. The policy is particularly effectively implemented and monitored at course level where all subjects are required to integrate equal opportunities issues with their development plans. Departments produce strategies for equalising opportunity, promoting inclusivity and developing differentiated teaching and learning. The proportion of students at the college from minority ethnic backgrounds is higher than that in the local population. There is a detailed analysis at whole college and course level of student achievement by ethnicity, gender, disability and learning difficulty. The college works hard to attempt to ensure that the staff profile matches the student profile and it regularly analyses internal promotions and external appointments. Managers are very active in removing barriers to teaching for staff with disabilities or caring commitments. The college commissioned an independent disability access audit and has secured funding to implement all its recommendations by September 2005.

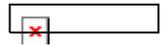
35. The college provides excellent value for money. Finances are well managed and resources are deployed efficiently. Managers and governors receive regular reports which monitor variances in the budget. The college is in financial health category A. Attendance, retention and pass rates and average class size are high. The major building projects have been completed within budget and on time. While resources are taken into account in introducing new courses, there is no formal

procedure for costing courses.

36. The management of IT and information systems is outstanding. The college has developed its own integrated database which provides a central resource for staff, enabling them easily to access a diverse range of information about individual students and groups. Staff were widely consulted during the development of the system and feel it saves them time and meets their needs. Data returns are timely and accurate and the college has been awarded Pathfinder status. A comprehensive quality data manual is produced annually which informs the self-assessment process.

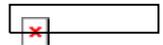
37. Governors demonstrate an excellent understanding of the college, its mission and the environment in which it operates. They have direct knowledge of key issues. They participate in the quality joint review panels and conduct student focus groups. An annual away day enables them to monitor their own performance thoroughly which is then effectively co-ordinated by the clerk. College managers and external speakers make presentations at the start of every corporation meeting to update them on emerging issues which are likely to have an impact on the development of the college.

### Part C: Curriculum and occupational areas



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#### Science and mathematics



Overall provision in this area is **outstanding (grade 1)**

#### **Strengths**

- very high pass and retention rates on most AS-level and GCE A-level courses
  
- a high standard of teaching
  
- good use of ILT in lessons
  
- very good subject support for students
  
- strong curriculum leadership and management.

## **Weaknesses**

- low pass rates on AS-level human biology.

## **Scope of provision**

38. AS-level and GCE A-level courses are offered in biology, human biology, chemistry, mathematics, further mathematics, physics and science for public understanding. GCSE courses in mathematics and science are also offered and a free-standing mathematics qualification is available as an alternative to the GCSE. A national vocational qualification (NVQ) course for laboratory technicians is run as part of the college adult programme. AS-level and GCE A-level courses in environmental science and geology were not included in the inspection. Approximately 900 students are enrolled on science and mathematics courses.

## **Achievement and standards**

39. Pass and retention rates are very high on most AS-level and GCE A-level courses. The pass rate was 100% on GCE A-level chemistry, further mathematics, human biology and physics in 2004. For GCE A-level chemistry and further mathematics, pass rates have been at 100% for the past three years.

40. The proportion of students gaining the higher grades of A or B is high on most AS-level and GCE A-level courses. However, the pass rate in AS-level human biology is low and the proportion of students gaining higher grades is well below the national average. A comparison of student performance with their prior achievement indicates that students perform better than would be expected in AS-level mathematics and physics and below what would be expected in AS-level human biology. Retention rates on most courses are high, often well above national averages.

41. The standard of students' written work in science is high and students are able to work through extended calculations in both mathematics and science, showing the stages in their work. Students speak confidently and are able to express their ideas clearly, both in small groups and to the whole class.

## **A sample of retention and pass rates in science and mathematics, 2002 to 2004**

<b>Qualification</b>	<b>Level</b>	<b>Completion year:</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2004</b>
GCSE mathematics (A* to C)	2	No. of starts	49	58	66
		% retention	90	97	95
		% pass rate	36	29	46
AS-level human biology	3	No. of starts	58	52	63
		% retention	91	85	87
		% pass rate	81	68	73
AS-level mathematics	3	No. of starts	150	154	186
		% retention	91	96	92
		% pass rate	96	84	90
GCE A-level biology	3	No. of starts	50	55	75
		% retention	98	98	99
		% pass rate	86	93	93

GCE A-level chemistry	3	No. of starts	27	40	31
		% retention	100	98	100
		% pass rate	100	100	100
GCE A-level physics	3	No. of starts	31	44	27
		% retention	97	98	100
		% pass rate	93	98	100

Source: ISR (2002 and 2003), college (2004)

### **Quality of education and training**

42. Teaching and learning are very good. Subject team leaders have been involved with national pilots of new teaching materials and have introduced innovative approaches to teaching science and mathematics. In mathematics lessons, students use 'mini whiteboards' for quick calculations, sketching graphs or exploring different approaches to problems. They are encouraged to discuss and explain their ideas about mathematics. In both science and mathematics lessons, students with different learning styles and differing abilities work in different groups for discussion, exploration and practical activities to help their learning.

43. In the best lessons, teachers use a range of methods. In an AS-level mathematics lesson on transformations of functions, the teacher demonstrated reflections and one-way stretches using graph-plotting software; students worked in pairs discussing and sketching the transformations of different functions. They then worked in small groups on a card sorting activity, matching different functions to the sketch of the transformation. Students working more rapidly were able to progress to more difficult problems. All students were then involved in a plenary session drawing the ideas together. In the less effective lessons, students spend too long copying notes and teachers fail to challenge students and extend their knowledge through effective questioning.

44. All subjects have websites on the college intranet. These are at varying stages of development, but all allow access to worksheets, examination papers, and links to other relevant websites. Students taking the new AS-level and GCE A-level biology courses are able to use extensive resources, including interactive worksheets and homework assignments. Biology students use computers regularly in lessons. In science lessons, teachers make good use of data projectors to show powerpoint presentations, simulations, animations and pictures to improve students' learning.

45. The resources for teaching and learning are very good. Teaching staff are well qualified. All the science laboratories have been refurbished in recent years to a high standard. They are bright and form an attractive learning environment. Mathematics classrooms have excellent displays of student work and interesting subject-related poster displays.

46. Assignments are set regularly and are designed to offer a challenge to students of differing abilities. Mathematics homework assignments are all set with three levels of questions, with students individually directed to the questions they should attempt. Marking by staff is careful and supportive. However, feedback does not always make it clear what students need to do to improve their performance. Coursework assignments are carefully marked and moderators' reports show that coursework is marked at the appropriate level. Students who underachieve are directed to extra support outside lessons.

47. Annual visits are organised to industrial or other companies where students can see science used in real life situations. Students may also take part in 'master classes' or other enrichment activities at local universities. Many students progress from science and mathematics courses to study related subjects at university. For example, 16 of 23 students who had completed their study of GCE A-level physics at the college in 2004 went on to study courses in physics, mathematics or engineering at university.

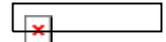
48. Support and guidance for students are very good. There is a well-developed programme to prepare students for HE or for employment. Teachers are sensitive to the needs of students with learning difficulties in their lessons. Learning support teachers give individual support to students in some GCSE science and mathematics lessons and teachers take measures such as minimising writing for dyslexic students, or giving bullet points rather than written notes. Completed worksheets may be accessed on subject websites.

49. Extensive help for students is available outside lesson time. Students attend well at support sessions and speak favourably of them. In one observed session, a student consulted her teacher for help with a powerpoint presentation on albinism, which was to be delivered in a biology lesson as part of the evidence for her communications key skills portfolio at level 3.

### ***Leadership and management***

50. The leadership and management of subject teams are very good. Curriculum leaders set a clear direction with a strong focus on improving teaching and learning. This has brought about significant improvement in the learning experiences of students. Self-assessment is detailed and leads to effective action planning. However, measures taken to improve poor pass rates in AS-level human biology have not yet proved effective. There is effective sharing of good teaching practice between subject teams. Achievement is analysed for gender differences but, although measures are taken to facilitate the success of all students, the impact of these measures is not determined.

### **Visual arts and design technology**



Overall provision in this area is **outstanding (grade 1)**

#### ***Strengths***

- very high retention and pass rates on most courses
  
- high proportion of students who achieve grades A or B
  
- excellent value added achievements on design technology courses
  
- much good teaching
  
- high standard of students' creative work
  
- very good facilities for art and fashion

- very good support for students.

### **Weaknesses**

- declining retention rates in AS-level fashion.

### **Scope of provision**

51. The curriculum area offers AS levels and GCE A levels in fashion, fine art, design technology, AS-level art history, AVCE art and design and GNVQ intermediate art and design. Approximately 500 students are studying on courses in visual arts and design technology.

### **Achievement and standards**

52. Pass and retention rates are very high. Pass rates in GCE A-level fashion and GCE A-level design technology have been 100% for the last three years. In GCE A-level art, they have been 100% for the last two years. A high proportion of students achieve grades A or B on all courses except in AS-level art history. Retention rates on AS-level fashion courses have declined in the three years to 2004 and are now low. A comparison of student performance with their prior achievement indicates that students have consistently performed better than would be expected in AS-level and GCE A-level design technology.

53. Standards of work are very high. Fine art students paint and draw with conviction and evaluate work in progress. Imaginative use is made of a range of sources. For example, one student was using a quote from Keats to produce a stitched and painted canvas with overlaid text, while another was over-painting images of birthright and nationality into an old history text book. Fashion students effectively combine primary research and technical skills to develop personal themes and produce ambitious work. One student had unpicked a Second World War uniform and re-made the fabric into a skirt with lapels at the knees and pockets at the hips. Design technology folders are comprehensive with research that develops into innovative products, for example, a baby alarm designed to complement the product range of a mobile phone company. Students have a good knowledge of design, manufacture and marketing. AVCE students are confident at portfolio reviews and are able to apply their work experiences to discussions. Sketchbooks from GNVQ intermediate students are vibrant with colour and texture and show increasing confidence in drawing.

### **A sample of retention and pass rates in visual and performing arts, 2002 to 2004**

<b>Qualification</b>	<b>Level</b>	<b>Completion year:</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2004</b>
GNVQ intermediate art and design	2	No. of starts	18	16	19
		% retention	78	100	89
		% pass rate	86	81	82
AS-level art and design	3	No. of starts	161	167	112
		% retention	88	87	91
		% pass rate	95	90	100
GCE A-level art and design	3	No. of starts	105	60	67
		% retention	97	93	100

		% pass rate	98	100	100
GCE A-level design and technology	3	No. of starts	30	37	46
		% retention	90	97	96
		% pass rate	100	100	100
GCE A-level fashion	3	No. of starts	34	37	29
		% retention	97	100	97
		% pass rate	100	100	100
AVCE double award in art and design	3	No. of starts	32	25	38
		% retention	72	80	82
		% pass rate	74	95	97

Source: ISR (2002 and 2003), college (2004)

### **Quality of education and training**

54. Teaching and learning are very good. The best lessons are tightly structured; teachers move the work on at a fast pace and take care to ensure that they meet the wide range of student needs. Detailed context sheets for lessons identify student abilities and preferred learning styles and these are used very well to plan lessons and schemes of work. In fine art and fashion, students develop personal ideas and produce ambitious work. Students evaluate work in progress and plan for future work with increasing confidence. In fashion, students' technical, creative and historical skills are developed simultaneously to good effect. In one lesson, press cuttings and exhibition reviews were evaluated in relation to the technical pattern cutting which was in progress. As the lesson progressed, students made frequent reference to their sketchbooks which were full of primary research drawings and developments.

55. A minority of lessons, however, lack an appropriate structure and teaching does not respond to students' individual needs. Students become confused when expected to carry out multiple activities and sketchbook research is not used during design activities. Technical support is not always used effectively either within or at the end of lessons.

56. Teachers are very well qualified and use their own practice to enhance students' learning. Professional development is good and experiences from staff development activities are used to extend students' learning.

57. Facilities for art and fashion are very good. The four studios in the new art block have excellent natural light, a well-used exhibition area in the foyer and good storage for students' portfolios. ILT is used, when appropriate, to help learning and departmental websites are well developed. However, there is insufficient ILT and limited data projection in the new art block. Classrooms for design technology and art history are small for the size of classes and this makes group work difficult. There is restricted room for drawing activities that may follow computer work in design technology rooms.

58. Assessment and marking procedures are thorough. Assignments are marked quickly and clear feedback is given to students on how to improve their work. Students review each others' portfolios guided by helpful departmental handouts before they are finally assessed by staff.

59. Curriculum enrichment opportunities are very good. A project on Spain and its culture was complemented by a visit to Madrid and gallery research in London. Regular study visits are made to Europe and students are encouraged to visit current exhibitions and galleries. Key skills are a central part of schemes of work and monitored in tutorials.

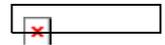
60. Support for students is very good. The initial assessment of students' needs is thorough and is used for lesson planning. Subject tutorial support is good and teachers hold regular lunchtime

workshops to help students to improve their practical and technical skills. Careers advice and guidance are very good. Progression to HE courses is very high.

### ***Leadership and management***

61. Leadership and management are very good. There is effective communication and a strong team spirit within the area. Self-assessment at course level is thorough. Teachers observe each other's lessons in addition to the college lesson observation programme and this has enabled the sharing of practical ideas to improve teaching and learning. Promotion of equal opportunities is good. Gender issues in recruitment are considered in detail in fashion, AVCE art and design and design technology. Female role models are used at open evenings for design technology to encourage girls to enrol. Cultural references are promoted in project work. For example, African art is studied alongside the cubist painters, and European themes are developed in projects and global promotion in design technology.

### **Performing arts and media**



Overall provision in this area is **outstanding (grade 1)**  
Contributory grade for drama and theatre studies is **good (grade 2)**

#### ***Strengths***

- high pass and retention rates
  
- high proportion of students who achieve grades A or B
  
- excellent value added achievements in GCE A-level media
  
- very creative and well-structured teaching
  
- high-quality specialist accommodation and resources
  
- excellent range of enrichment activities.

#### ***Weaknesses***

- significant decline in high grade achievements in GCE A-level drama and theatre studies.

### **Scope of provision**

62. The college offers AS-level and GCE A-level courses in drama and theatre studies, performance studies, film studies, media studies, music and AVCE single and double award in media. At the time of inspection, 252 students were enrolled on performing arts courses and 371 on media courses.

### **Achievement and standards**

63. Students achieve excellent results on most courses. Pass rates in media and performing arts are high and a significant proportion of students achieve A or B grades on most courses. Retention rates exceed the national average on most courses. Students on GCE A-level media courses consistently achieve better than expected in comparison with the GCSE scores on entry. Many students achieve lower grades than predicted in AS-level and GCE A-level drama and theatre studies. In 2004, the proportion of students who achieved high grades in GCE A-level drama and theatre studies declined significantly to well below the national average. The college has taken action to improve students' achievements in this area, but it is too soon to judge their impact.

64. The standard of students' oral work is excellent. Students participate actively in the majority of lessons. Debates are lively and energetic, with students expressing their views with conviction and clarity. Students are supportive of each other as they develop significant technical and analytical skills. They work well in groups and show imagination and flair in their approach to learning. Practical work is of an exceptionally high standard; students explore dramatic style and theatrical concepts with confidence and maturity. In music, students demonstrate good techniques in composition and performance skills. Media students are adept in using industry-standard equipment to achieve professional results in their work. Progression to HE is high. In an AS-level media lesson, students applied the narrative conventions of film editing to a sequence from *The Matrix* with enthusiasm, authority and insight.

### **A sample of retention and pass rates in performing arts and media, 2002 to 2004**

<b>Qualification</b>	<b>Level</b>	<b>Completion year:</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2004</b>
AS-level drama and theatre studies	3	No. of starts	51	60	61
		% retention	92	97	98
		% pass rate	91	98	93
AS-level film studies	3	No. of starts	42	42	74
		% retention	71	86	96
		% pass rate	100	100	99
AS-level media studies	3	No. of starts	100	104	105
		% retention	89	93	97
		% pass rate	97	95	99
AVCE (double award) media, communication and production	3	No. of starts	23	21	17
		% retention	74	71	94
		% pass rate	94	100	100
GCE A-level media studies	3	No. of starts	127	79	88
		% retention	92	100	94
		% pass rate	91	100	100
GCE A-level performing	3	No. of starts	41	37	34

arts	% retention	100	94	95
	% pass rate	100	100	100

Source: ISR (2002 and 2003), college (2004)

### **Quality of education and training**

65. The standard of teaching is high in most lessons. In the best lessons, teachers use innovative schemes of work and clear lesson plans which develop learning incrementally. They manage their lessons well and give students the opportunity to develop both technical and personal skills. Teachers use high-quality teaching and learning resources to support students' preferred ways of learning. Clarity of task and strong reference to assessment feature in the best lessons, where students are aware of what they have to do to be successful.

66. There are excellent working relationships between staff and students, creating a supportive and safe environment for students to explore and experiment with their ideas. In the best lessons, the pace of work is maintained to hold students' interest throughout. Introductions and warm-up activities are kept generally short, allowing students to move quickly into their own work. Students' attendance is high. They enjoy the majority of lessons and respect their teachers. Occasionally teaching does not fully engage the less confident students.

67. Resources are excellent and enhance the quality of teaching and learning. Students benefit from working in specialist accommodation with access to professional equipment. Teachers produce handouts and learning resources which are of a high quality. The college intranet offers good opportunities for students to study independently and extend their learning. Classrooms provide a strong sense of subject identity in each subject area. The learning resource centre contains a good range of books, videos and specialist journals. Technicians make a valuable contribution across the curriculum area.

68. Assessment is very good. There is good use of regular formative assessment. Students receive constructive and supportive verbal and written feedback on much of their practical and written work. In individual academic tutorials, students are informed of their progress and plans of action, which are monitored each term. Parents are kept informed of progress through reports and parents' evenings.

69. Many students participate in curriculum enrichment activities, which include residential visits, performances, exhibitions and concerts. Students participate in college productions and take an annual performance to the Edinburgh Festival. Their company, 'Braindead', has, over the years, acquired an excellent reputation for small-scale productions. This year a group of students successfully performed street theatre at the Hardy Festival. Links with industry and practitioners have opened opportunities for students. In music, students worked with professional composers, culminating in a performance of students' work. Visits to New York, the Galway Film Festival and the Dublin International Film festival have provided students with experiences of other media cultures.

70. Support and guidance are very good. All students undertake an initial assessment which identifies their individual support needs and their preferred learning styles. Teachers make good use of the outcomes of initial assessment to plan and teach their lessons. Students benefit greatly from the good subject support and academic tutoring they receive.

### **Leadership and management**

71. Leadership and management are very good. A strong team spirit encourages creativity, innovation and the sharing of good practice. Self-assessment reports are, on the whole, thorough. There is an active commitment to equality and diversity. Data relating to the achievements of different groups of students are used by course teams to plan provision. Retention rates for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are high in drama and theatre studies and there are active strategies to improve the pass rates for male students. Staff development is well planned and has a

strong focus on teaching and learning.

## Humanities



Overall provision in this area is **outstanding (grade 1)**

### **Strengths**

- very high pass and retention rates
  
- high achievement of grades A or B
  
- much challenging and inspiring teaching
  
- highly effective use of ILT
  
- good opportunities for subject enrichment
  
- very good subject support for students.

### **Weaknesses**

- students' lack of punctuality.

### **Scope of provision**

72. The college offers AS-level and GCE A-level courses in classical civilisation, geography, government and politics, history and philosophy. European studies is offered as an extension course at AS level. At the time of the inspection, 806 students were enrolled on courses in humanities.

### **Achievement and standards**

73. Student achievement is excellent on most courses. Pass rates on AS-level and GCE A-level courses are high and have generally improved over the last three years. In 2004, the pass rate on all GCE A-level courses was 100%, with the exception of history which was 99%. Retention rates are

also high on most courses. The proportion of students who achieve high grades is above the national average on most courses. All students achieve grades at least in line with those predicted on the basis of their GCSE results. In 2004, students in classical civilisation achieved significantly higher grades than those predicted.

74. Students' work is of a very high standard and demonstrates not only in-depth knowledge and understanding of the subjects they study, but also high levels of skill in analysis and evaluation. For example, history students were able to give well-reasoned answers as to why similar conditions in Britain and Germany in the 1930s did not lead both countries to fascism. They displayed not only good factual knowledge, but also a deeper understanding of the historical concepts of cause and consequence, continuity and change. Much of the students' written work is very good and indicates considerable reading and skilful personal research. For example, in classical civilisation, students demonstrated a sound knowledge of a complex classical text, using appropriate quotations within their essays to support their conclusions and deliberations.

75. Students' lack of punctuality has a detrimental effect on many lessons, with those few who arrive late disturbing the learning and enjoyment of others.

***A sample of retention and pass rates in humanities, 2002 to 2004***

<b>Qualification</b>	<b>Level</b>	<b>Completion year:</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2004</b>
AS-level classical civilisation	3	No. of starts	25	22	40
		% retention	96	91	98
		% pass rate	96	95	100
AS-level geography	3	No. of starts	84	99	95
		% retention	92	94	95
		% pass rate	96	96	96
AS-level government and politics	3	No. of starts	42	39	62
		% retention	98	95	98
		% pass rate	93	86	93
AS-level history	3	No. of starts	145	155	165
		% retention	87	91	95
		% pass rate	99	87	97
GCE A-level geography	3	No. of starts	67	54	70
		% retention	97	96	97
		% pass rate	97	100	100
GCE A-level history	3	No. of starts	80	98	98
		% retention	99	93	94
		% pass rate	96	99	99
GCE A-level philosophy	3	No. of starts	36	48	45
		% retention	97	98	91
		% pass rate	91	98	100

Source: ISR (2002 and 2003), college (2004)

***Quality of education and training***

76. The quality of teaching and learning in humanities is very good. Lessons are very well planned; teachers vary activities appropriately and use high-quality resources to engage and interest the students. Teachers place great emphasis on developing students' skills of reasoning and analysis by providing numerous opportunities for debate and discussion. For example, in a philosophy lesson, students developed their understanding of direct realism through thought-provoking discussion. The teacher gave effective guidance and stimulus when necessary, without being overly prescriptive, and in this way enabled the students to develop their own ideas. Students then tested their own and each others' ideas in an often free-flowing debate.

77. In many lessons, teachers use a varied range of methods to appeal to students' different individual learning styles and different levels of ability. For example, in a history lesson on the effects of the Great Depression in Britain, students were given a range of sources and stimuli, including Pathe films, photographs, maps, statistical data and contemporary statements. This led to all students being able to identify the obvious differences between the north and south, with the more able recognising similarities of experience and avoiding the dangers of over generalisation.

78. Very effective use is made of ILT in many lessons and in follow-up work outside the classroom. For example, in a politics lesson, students were able to access information from the intranet and view newsreels to improve their understanding of European divisions in the post-Thatcherite Conservative Party. In geography, data projectors were used to good effect to illustrate maps and landscapes, enabling students to visually appreciate environmental change, and extending both their perceptions and understanding of the topic being studied. Students make very good use of subject intranet sites and the Internet to undertake personal study and research.

79. Staff are very well qualified and trained with up-to-date knowledge of their subject. Most classrooms are well resourced, pleasant and have a strong subject identity. However, accommodation is too small for some of the larger classes in humanities.

80. The system for recording and monitoring students' progress is effective and thorough. Students' work in the main is assessed and marked to a very high standard, and teachers give constructive feedback that enables them to improve their work and progress. There are a few examples of less effectively marked work which relies heavily on feedback through mark sheets and tick boxes, giving students little direction on how to improve their work. In a minority of cases, student action plans lack specific targets and offer insufficient guidance to help students to develop and progress.

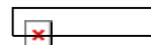
81. Students benefit from a very wide range of enrichment activities. There are numerous study and field trips both national and international and a full programme of conferences and visiting speakers. These activities are designed to complement the various course syllabuses and student participation is high.

82. Students benefit from very good subject support. Teachers and tutors are readily accessible and are highly responsive to students' individual needs. The college provides additional subject workshops to support students who are at risk of failing and to offer extended study for the more able. Students make excellent use of these workshops.

### ***Leadership and management***

83. Leadership and management are very good. Schemes of work are updated regularly to ensure that new ideas are applied to teaching and learning activities. Minutes of meetings, student reviews and progression data are well recorded and monitored. Highly effective mechanisms are in place for sharing good practice and staff work collaboratively across subject areas. Staff in history share resources and ideas with local schools and other colleges. Communication within departmental teams is good. Equality of opportunity is actively promoted, being a main item on meeting agendas and included in schemes of work and departmental self-assessment reports. All departments have produced statements and policies promoting equal opportunities which are effective in monitoring actions to address weaknesses or areas for improvement. Realistic targets are set and met, and they have a genuine impact on teaching, learning and achievement. However, a minority of department self-assessment reports are insufficiently evaluative.

## English



Overall provision in this area is **outstanding (grade 1)**

### **Strengths**

- very high pass and retention rates
  
- high achievement of grades A or B
  
- very good teaching
  
- excellent range of subject enrichment activities
  
- very good subject support for students
  
- good curriculum management.

### **Weaknesses**

- little use of ILT to support learning.

### **Scope of provision**

84. The college offers courses in AS-level and GCE A-level English language and English literature, AS-level English language and literature and GCSE level English. It also offers a level 2 course in basic communication skills. Currently, there are 606 full-time students enrolled on English courses.

### **Achievement and standards**

85. Pass rates are excellent on advanced level and GCSE courses. A high proportion of students achieve A or B grades on the majority of courses. Pass rates and the proportion of students achieving high grades are particularly impressive in GCE A-level English language, English literature and AS-level English literature. Learning goals are challenging and most students achieve their predicted grades, or higher, based on their average GCSE score. In 2004, students achieved

significantly higher grades in GCE A-level English language than those predicted on the basis of their prior achievement. Pass rates in GCSE English at grades A\* to C are excellent and while retention rates have been below the national average for two years, the retention rate in 2004 was high.

86. Students are able to work independently and the standard of their individual coursework is high. The quality of students' work in lessons is excellent. They are articulate, confident in discussing complex concepts, demonstrate perceptiveness, sensitivity and insight and are developing skills of critical analysis. For example, an AS-level literature lesson adeptly explored morality plays and Renaissance humanism prior to starting work on Marlowe's *Dr Faustus*. They also had notes in their files on Roland Barthes' *Death of the Novel*, which involved them in thinking of concepts which students are often only exposed to at university. Student attendance in English is good, though students are not punctual in a few lessons.

***A sample of retention and pass rates in English, 2002 to 2004***

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2002	2003	2004
GCSE English language (A* to C)	2	No. of starts	57	39	38
		% retention	67	69	87
		% pass rate	61	78	61
AS-level English language	3	No. of starts	102	99	106
		% retention	95	92	92
		% pass rate	98	99	92
AS-level English literature	3	No. of starts	156	175	199
		% retention	90	95	93
		% pass rate	100	98	99
AS-level English language and literature	3	No. of starts	30	33	39
		% retention	97	94	97
		% pass rate	93	77	100
GCE A-level English language	3	No. of starts	79	88	81
		% retention	96	97	96
		% pass rate	100	98	100
GCE A-level English literature	3	No. of starts	145	129	151
		% retention	98	97	98
		% pass rate	100	100	99

Source: ISR (2002 and 2003), college (2004)

***Quality of education and training***

87. Teaching and learning are very good. Lessons are well planned and have clear objectives that are mostly well communicated and understood by students. Schemes of work are detailed and contain many imaginative activities. Teachers are adventurous in their choice of literature texts and regularly choose works upon which little critical study has been written. In the best lessons, students discuss texts closely and speculate about the meanings and nuances of language. They also enjoy stimulating discussion. For example, in a lesson on Carol Ann Duffy's poem *Mrs Midas*, students were guided skilfully through a series of activities which enabled them to respond with sensitivity to the character of Mrs Midas and her relationship with her husband. In another lesson, students were able to apply techniques of data analysis to their own language investigation projects. Students work

very productively in lessons. Only occasionally are students seen chatting socially when group work is organised ineffectively.

88. Teachers are well qualified and participate in regular professional development activities which ensure that they are fully aware of specification requirements and that their own subject expertise is improved. They promote good working relationships which foster effective learning. They care about their students and the quality of support which students receive from their teachers is very good.

89. There is a thorough assessment policy to which all staff adhere. Students are aware of the standard they are achieving, have opportunities for evaluating their own work, and know what to do in order to make improvements. They have action plans which identify areas for development. Targets are specific and give students very clear goals. Students work hard in class and produce coursework of a high standard. Coursework assignments offer students variety and challenge, enabling them to demonstrate their skills at the highest levels.

90. There is little use of ILT. It is used in lessons for powerpoint presentations and teachers recommend useful websites to students. However, it is not used interactively to promote students' learning. The department recognises its potential and appropriate plans are in place to extend the English website on the college's intranet. Students have access to very good paper-based learning resources. The library and excellent resource booklets support students' independent study.

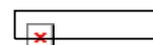
91. There is an appropriate range of courses for students. The department has re-introduced a level 2 basic communication skills course as it was felt that GCSE was not suitable for all students below level 3. Students participate in a wide variety of enrichment activities including theatre trips and visits to conferences, poetry competitions and a visit to First World War battlefields. Well-known poets have visited the college to meet with students and discuss their work.

92. There is very good subject support for students. However, lesson planning does not always take into account the support available from additional support teachers. Teachers know their students well and give them good individual support for their coursework assignments. In a few instances, records of subject tutorials are incomplete.

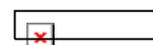
### ***Leadership and management***

93. Leadership and management are very good. The curriculum is well managed and high-quality course materials, written by the teachers, are revised on a regular basis. Strategic targets and objectives are understood by staff. Demanding targets for retention and pass rates are set and met. There is a well-established quality assurance system which is understood by staff. Staff make good use of the excellent management information that is available to them. For example, there is good information on students receiving learning support which subject teachers use to plan their teaching and learning methods. The staff appraisal system is supportive and teachers are set developmental targets. The college has an equal opportunities policy which the department promotes through its choice of texts in English literature and the topics it teaches in English language. Teachers share good practice on an informal basis.

## **Part D: College data**



**Table 1: Enrolments by level of study and age 2003/04**



Level	16-18 %	19+ %
1	0	10
2	4	4
3	96	6
4/5	0	0
Other	0	80
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: provided by the college in 2004

**Table 2: Enrolments by curriculum area and age 2003/2004**

Curriculum area	16-18 No.	19+ No.	Total Enrolments (%)
Science and mathematics	930	24	17
Land-based provision	0	0	0
Construction	0	0	0
Engineering, technology and manufacture	106	0	2
Business administration, management and professional	307	0	5
Information and communication technology	222	265	9
Retailing, customer service and transportation	0	0	0
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	236	0	4
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	0	0	0
Health, social care and public services	38	24	1
Visual and performing arts and media	1,005	0	18
Humanities	1,509	0	27
English, languages and communication	776	50	15
Foundation programmes	0	0	0
Unknown AOL	0	127	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,129</b>	<b>490</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: provided by the college in 2004

**Table 3: Retention and achievement**

Level (Long Courses)	Retention and pass rate	Completion year					
		16-18			19+		
		2002	2003	2004	2002	2003	2004
1	Starters excluding transfers	10	31	20	0	0	0
	Retention rate %	50	94	100	*	*	*
	National average %	75	83	**	*	*	*
	Pass rate %	0	86	100	*	*	*
	National average %	75	72	**	*	*	*
2	Starters excluding transfers	204	184	180	27	0	0
	Retention rate %	78	87	90	100	*	*
	National average %	81	81	**	70	*	*
	Pass rate %	89	89	94	70	*	*
	National average %	84	86	**	70	*	*
3	Starters excluding transfers	4,154	4,357	4,750	10	0	0
	Retention rate %	89	92	93	90	*	*
	National average %	89	90	**	72	*	*
	Pass rate %	94	92	94	89	*	*
	National average %	87	88	**	73	*	*

*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:

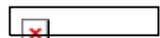
1. National averages: *Benchmarking Data 2002 to 2003: Retention and Achievement Rates in Further Education Colleges in England*, Learning and Skills Council, September 2004.

2. College rates for 2001/02 to 2002/03: *College ISR*.

\* no courses offered

\*\* no benchmarks available

**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)	83	17	0	65
Level 2 (intermediate)	83	0	17	6
Level 1 (foundation)				
Other sessions				
<b>Totals</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>71</b>

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