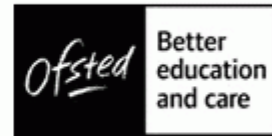




ADULT LEARNING  
INSPECTORATE



## The Sixth Form College, Solihull

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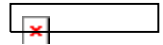
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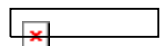
**Basic information about the college**



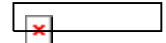
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Name of college:	The Sixth Form College, Solihull
Type of college:	Sixth Form College
Principal:	Colleen Chater
Address of college:	Widney Manor Road Solihull West Midlands B91 3WR
Telephone number:	0121 704 2581
Fax number:	0121 711 1598
Chair of governors:	Sheila Brookes
Unique reference number:	130482
Name of reporting inspector:	Philippa Francis HMI
Dates of inspection:	25-29 April 2005

**Part A: Summary**



## Information about the college



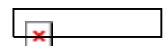
The Sixth Form College, Solihull was formed in 1974 and is one of the largest in the country. It provides education for 16 to 19 year olds predominantly from Solihull but also, and increasingly, from South Birmingham and the surrounding areas. The college is based on a 12 hectare site close to the city centre and all main forms of transport. Solihull has a population of 199,600 and a low unemployment rate of 2.4%.

In 2004/05, the college enrolled 2,436 full-time students and 20 part-time students. All but 18 students are aged 16 to 18. Over 90% of enrolments are at advanced level with the remainder at intermediate and 2% at foundation level. The college makes no specific provision for adults. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is 34%, compared to a figure of 5.4% in Solihull. The number of students from widening participation postcodes has increased over recent years to 28%. Male students slightly outnumber female students.

The college has provision in 10 of the 14 Learning and Skills Council (LSC) areas of learning. The main curriculum provision is at advanced level and includes, predominantly, advanced subsidiary level (AS level) and general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level). In addition, general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) subjects are offered in mathematics and English. Vocational courses offered at intermediate and advanced levels include general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs), advanced vocational certificates of education (AVCEs) and Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) nationals. A small amount of the college's enrichment provision is at level 1. The majority of students are enrolled on courses leading to qualifications in science and mathematics, humanities, business and the arts.

The college's mission statement is 'to provide high quality teaching and learning for all our students in a structured, supportive and well resourced environment, to meet the individual needs of those students by offering a wide range of learning opportunities and activities and to act as a bridge between pre-sixteen education and the educational and vocational opportunities beyond'.

## How effective is the college?



The majority of students complete their courses and pass rates at advanced level are better than national averages. Teaching and learning are generally good or better. Inspectors judged the provision to be outstanding in two curriculum areas, good in five and satisfactory in one. The college's key strengths and areas that should be improved are listed below.

### **Key strengths**

- high retention rates
  
- high pass rates at advanced level
  
- good teaching and learning

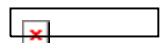
- high-quality learning materials
- high levels of progression to higher education (HE)
- productive work within the Solihull collegiates
- good support for students
- good leadership and management
- thorough, self-critical self-assessment.

***What should be improved***

- performance of students compared to their prior attainment in some subjects
- punctuality of some students
- quality of art studios and science laboratories
- A\* to C pass rates on GCSE English and mathematics courses.

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**

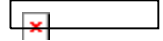


The table below shows overall judgements about provision in subjects and courses that were inspected. Judgements are based primarily on the quality of teaching, training and learning and how well students achieve. Not all subjects and courses were inspected. Inspectors make overall judgements on curriculum 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	<b>Good.</b> Retention rates are high on most courses, but pass rates on some courses and progress compared to prior attainment are lower than national averages. Effective technical support and good specialist resources support good teaching. Aspects of laboratory accommodation are unsatisfactory. Curriculum leadership and management are good.
Mathematics	<b>Satisfactory.</b> Retention rates are high on advanced level courses, but students do not achieve their full potential. GCSE mathematics grade A* to C pass rates have been consistently very low. Imaginative learning materials facilitate a range of learning activities, but there is a lack of challenge in some lessons. Thorough self-assessment has led to successful initiatives to improve teaching and achievement.
Business and economics	<b>Good.</b> Retention and pass rates on most courses are high, although in AS-level economics and AS-level accounting, pass rates in 2004 were unsatisfactory. Teaching and learning make good use of real business contexts, but teaching is insufficiently individualised. Students develop good personal and learning skills. The curriculum is managed well.
Sports, leisure and tourism	<b>Outstanding.</b> Pass rates are very high and many students achieve high grades. Retention rates are low on a small number of courses. Teaching is very effective. Students benefit from a comprehensive range of additional activities. Curriculum management is very effective and the commitment to quality improvement is strong.
Visual arts and media	<b>Good.</b> Pass and retention rates are high. Teaching and learning are very good in media studies and good specialist information and communications technology (ICT) resources support learning. Drawing skills are underdeveloped and GCE A-level art studios are inadequate. Progression to degree courses from the national diploma in fine art is very good. Students underperform compared to their prior attainment in GCE A2 and AS-level art and GNVQ intermediate media.
Humanities	<b>Outstanding.</b> Teaching is very effective on all courses and leads to exceptionally good work by students and outstanding achievements. Resources for teaching and learning are very good, especially the excellent intranet-based materials. The monitoring of students' progress is very good. Management of the area is outstanding.
Social sciences	<b>Good.</b> Achievement in sociology is outstanding and is good in government and politics. Pass rates are low on AS-level psychology and the retention rate in AS-level government and politics has declined. There are good teaching and learning methods and assessment practices sustained by highly effective curriculum management. The commitment to equal opportunities and diversity issues is strong.
English	<b>Good.</b> Pass and retention rates are high on advanced level courses. Teaching and learning are good and ICT is used effectively to enhance learning. Students benefit from a wide range of enrichment activities. Grade A* to C pass rates are low at GCSE level and

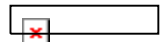
	students underperform in AS-level English language and GCE A-level and AS-level English language and literature in relation to their prior attainment.
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### How well is the college led and managed?



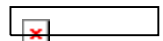
Leadership and management are good. Governors and staff fully support the mission and strategic objectives of the college. Governance is outstanding and the college provides good value for money. Planning is methodical and rigorous. Managers are consultative and accessible. Staff feel valued and communication is very effective. The college works productively with other education and training providers within the Solihull collegiates. Links with industry and commerce are not well established. Standards of teaching and learning are in line with other sixth form colleges. Curriculum leadership and management are good. Retention rates are high and pass rates at advanced level are better than in other sixth form colleges. In 2003/04, some students did not perform as well as predicted based upon their entry qualifications. Support and guidance have improved since the last inspection and are good. The teaching of key skills at level 3 is still not effective. The quality assurance framework is very effective and applied assiduously. Inspectors agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report. An extensive and rigorous lesson observation scheme is in place. The college provides good value for money.

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



The college's response to educational and social inclusion is good. Equality of opportunity is promoted well. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is considerably larger than within the local community. The number of students from wards with high widening participation factors has increased to over a quarter of the student population. Progression to HE courses is good for all students, but particularly so for those from minority ethnic groups. Effective policies and action plans meet the requirements of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 (SENDA) and the Race Relations (amendment) Act 2000. These are implemented well. Access within the college is good for students with restricted mobility. The college has a broad curriculum including a wide range of academic courses at level 3 and a smaller, but appropriate, number of courses leading to vocational qualifications at levels 2 and 3.

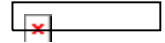
### How well are students and trainees guided and supported?



Support and guidance for students are good. Students are well informed about courses available through a wide range of promotional materials and events. They benefit from independent individualised guidance when deciding which courses to choose. The college has well-established links with local schools and is actively involved in many effective partnerships which increase educational opportunities for prospective students. Induction programmes are managed well and include effective initial assessment. The management and implementation of learning support services are good. Students who take up additional learning support generally do better than their previous achievement would suggest. Individual tutorials provide good support and guidance, but

range of guidance and welfare services covering careers and progression to HE advice, counselling, financial assistance, and health and welfare advice. These services are of high quality, accessible and well regarded by students.

### **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***

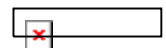
- the learning resource centre
  
- help with progression to HE
  
- friendly and welcoming atmosphere
  
- enrichment activities
  
- the adult environment
  
- approachability of the teachers
  
- the diversity of the student population
  
- good sports facilities.

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

- overcrowded social areas

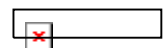
- o too few and insecure lockers
  
- o some aspects of tutorials
  
- o timetabling
  
- o car parking arrangements.

**Other information**

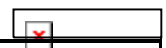


The college inspection report will normally be published 12 working weeks after the formal feedback of the inspection findings to the college. Once published, the college has two months in which to prepare its post-inspection action plan and submit it to the local LSC. The college's action plan must 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**



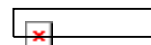
Aspect and learner type	Graded good or better (Grades 1 to 3) %	Graded satisfactory (Grade 4) %	Graded less than satisfactory (Grades 5 to 7) %
Teaching 16-18	76	22	2
Learning 16-18	73	25	2

*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. Data on students' achievements, drawn from the individualised student records for 2001/02 and 2002/03, were provided by the LSC. Data provided by the college were used for 2003/04. The separate reports on areas of learning in Part C give more details about achievements and standards on particular courses.

### **16 to 18 year olds**

2. Retention rates are high at all levels. At level 3 in 2004, all GCE A-level subjects had retention rates of over 90% and, in many subjects, rates were well above this. At AS level, rates vary, but most are over 90% and none below 80%. On AVCE courses, rates also vary; in health and social care and business, rates are lower than in other subjects. Retention rates on level 1 and level 2 courses improved significantly in 2004 to well above the national average.

3. Pass rates on the overwhelming majority of advanced courses are high. In 2004, three quarters of GCE A-level subjects had pass rates above the national average for sixth form colleges. Performance in GCE A levels in sociology, history and subjects in sports, leisure and tourism is consistently very high. Overall pass rates on AVCE courses also exceed national averages. There is more variation at AS level, but the overall pass rate matches the national average. On level 2 courses, the overall pass rate is well below the national average. Whilst pass rates on GNVQ intermediate courses have improved over the last three years and are now above national averages, GCSE English and mathematics pass rates are below national averages, and have been for the last three years. Pass rates for key skills in ICT, communication and application of number have improved and exceed national averages. The remaining level 1 and level 2 programmes are offered as enrichment opportunities for full-time students. Some of these have low pass rates as students choose not to take the full assessment in these areas.

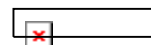
4. For several years, the college has used national measures of added value to assess how well students perform compared to their prior attainment. Up to 2003, overall, students have generally achieved grades at AS level and GCE A level in line with, or a little better than, their prior attainment. In 2004, there was an overall decline in performance according to this measure. A significant number of students on some AS-level and GCE A-level courses underperformed.

5. Performance varies between AS-level and GCE A-level subjects. Students studying business, history, sociology, geography and chemistry consistently achieve higher grades than are predicted by their GCSE grades on entry. In other subjects, including art and design, psychology, mathematics, computing and geology, students do not achieve as well as their entry grades predict.

6. The college is effective in helping young people from a wide range of backgrounds to progress to HE. In 2004, three quarters of students who studied for GCE A levels progressed to university. Almost two thirds of students who had studied for a vocational qualification progressed to HE. Students from minority ethnic backgrounds and those students who live in disadvantaged areas in the community also made very good progress to HE.

7. Students produce a high standard of work overall. Students studying humanities, sports, leisure and tourism and sociology produce written work of a very high standard. Overall, inspectors judged that students' work was good or better in nearly two thirds of the lessons observed. Most students are confident when speaking about their work and work well together in groups. In most areas, students use computers well to enhance their work. Students' critical thinking and analytical skills are well developed. Attendance during the inspection averaged 86% in the lessons observed, which is slightly above the average for sixth form colleges. In a small number of lessons, students arrived late and disturbed those who had started their lesson on time.

## Quality of education and training



8. Inspectors graded teaching, learning and attainment in 112 lessons. Over three quarters of teaching and learning were graded as good or better with 22% of lessons graded as satisfactory and 2% graded as unsatisfactory. This profile is in line with teaching and learning grades in colleges of a similar type inspected in 2003/04. Teaching at level 3 is more effective than at level 2 and is most effective in GCE A-level lessons. Teaching in humanities and sport, leisure and tourism is very good. In mathematics and business studies and economics, a larger than average proportion of teaching observed was graded as only satisfactory. In mathematics and English, the standard of work observed in lessons was mostly satisfactory.

9. In the best lessons, teaching is interesting, innovative and makes good use of high-quality learning materials. Teachers plan lessons very thoroughly and review their work regularly. Students develop high levels of analytical skill and most can apply their knowledge effectively. Group work is used very effectively in a substantial number of lessons to develop personal and learning skills. The use of ICT varies. In a number of areas it is used effectively and innovatively, such as in humanities. In a few other areas, such as business, too little use is made of ICT to develop aspects of students' work. In less effective lessons, teaching and learning methods do not take account of the individual learning needs of a few students, especially the more able, and contain too few demanding activities. Teachers opt for a routine teaching style and fail to develop ideas that arise from students' contributions.

10. Teaching staff are well qualified and almost all have a teaching qualification. Over a third hold higher degrees and there are staff in most departments who are experienced examiners in their subject. The overall arrangements for staff development are good with an appropriate emphasis upon improving teaching and learning.

11. The college grounds and buildings are maintained well and provide a clean and welcoming environment. There is a comprehensive accommodation strategy with appropriate links to curriculum development and very efficient space utilization. Classrooms are furnished appropriately and there is a planned maintenance programme for all college buildings.

12. Accommodation and resources for learning are generally satisfactory and are good in some curriculum areas. High-quality workbooks are used in several areas, particularly for science students. Specialist equipment is generally satisfactory and especially good in science and visual arts and media. Technical support in visual arts and media and science is good.

13. A small amount of accommodation is unsatisfactory. The art studios are too small for the group sizes that use them. Classroom accommodation for sports studies students is unsatisfactory and the design and layout of science laboratories restrict the choice of teaching and learning methods. Health and safety procedures are effective with comprehensive risk assessment carried out. Access for students with restricted mobility is good.

14. The learning resources centre provides a pleasant place to learn. There is a good choice of text and media resources and opening hours meet students' needs. The college has a modern computer network and an appropriate number of computers. Use of the college's intranet by students and staff is well developed in several curriculum areas, such as humanities, and it is increasing in others.

15. Assessment and monitoring of students progress are effective. Minimum target grades, based on prior attainment, are set at the start of the first year and often renegotiated in line with progress. With second year students, target grades are reviewed effectively using AS-level grades. However, minimum target grades are not used effectively with mathematics students. Personal and subject tutors work closely with students to set additional short-term goals to help students to meet expectations.

16. Subject teachers produce a progress review report on students twice each term. Actions identified for improvement are often insufficiently individualized and do not relate effectively to each student's current performance. Parents receive an attendance report on their child every two months and a progress review twice a year. Parents' evenings are held twice yearly and are well attended.

17. Students' work is marked accurately and returned promptly. Feedback given to students is good, especially in social sciences. Students value the detailed and constructive feedback they receive from their teachers, which helps them to improve their work. Reporting and review of students' progress are particularly thorough in humanities and social sciences. In mathematics, assessment is not used sufficiently to monitor students' progress.

18. Internal moderation of assessed coursework is satisfactory. Moderation is adequate and generally accurate. The requirements of external bodies are met although some marking is considered too generous and requires adjustment. The college has a well-developed homework policy which requires subject teachers to set regular homework. Homework activities are often interesting and challenging. However, in some subjects, students do not always complete homework by the deadlines set and subject teachers do not always enforce completion.

19. In the current academic year, students who enrol at the college without an intermediate qualification in English or mathematics take either a GCSE or a basic skills award depending on their prior attainment. Prior to 2004/05, key skills qualifications were offered at level 2, but following a review of pass rates and the suitability of qualifications, these were replaced by basic skills awards. All students can work towards a key skill qualification at level 3. In most curriculum areas, however, this is not promoted or monitored effectively.

20. The college offers a wide range of courses that meets the needs of school leavers who aspire to HE. The curriculum is reviewed effectively on a regular basis to ensure it continues to meet these needs. There are 39 subjects offered at AS level and GCE A level. Vocational courses at advanced level are offered in nine subject areas. Vocational courses in four subject areas at intermediate level prepare students for progression to advanced study. Recently, elements of HE courses, in collaboration with local universities, have been introduced to prepare students for the demands of HE. Programmes of work for individual students are planned carefully, often with the involvement of the college careers adviser, to ensure that students are taking the best route to their career objective.

21. A wide range of over 40 enrichment and personal development activities is offered to students. These activities include participating in the college's theatre production, work in the community, sport and music as well as study-specific workshops. Well-planned programmes of visits enrich students' experience of their courses. Attendance at enrichment activities is lower than for other courses at the college.

22. There are well-established links with partner schools in Solihull and relationships are developing with schools further afield. For example, the college's spring concert included musicians from local secondary and primary schools. Links with industry are developing. Through the local Education Business Partnership, 12 business teachers spent a day at a large regional company to improve their awareness of current business practice.

23. A detailed prospectus and an informative and easy to use website provide full information for potential students, including for those with a visual impairment. In addition, taster days, open days and open evenings are arranged at appropriate intervals. All students are advised effectively about course choice linked to a potential career path and any change of priorities early in the term is dealt with promptly and efficiently.

24. All students are tested on entry to determine any additional learning needs. The results are used effectively to provide the necessary support. Teachers refer students if problems arise during the course and a few students refer themselves for support. Teachers encourage students to take up support. Results from external tests indicate that students who receive learning support gain better results than their previous performance would indicate. Trained second year student mentors are an

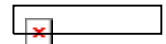
effective innovation in supporting students in their first year.

25. Students have ready access to a wide range of specialist staff in dealing with personal issues such as counselling, finance, welfare and health, including mental health. Contact details are shown on the students' intranet. Individual interviews and guidance are offered by the college-based careers advisers as well as the Connexions service. Students value the helpful, informative and prompt advice they receive. Helpful progression advice is available through an annual HE fair and an employer event.

26. Students are allocated a personal tutor whom they meet weekly as part of a group and individually, at most, at four-weekly intervals. These individual meetings are particularly valued by students. The tutorial process is effectively quality assured through an observation programme and reviews of record keeping. In group tutorials, centrally prepared learning materials are used by tutors with variable success. In many cases, materials are not adapted sufficiently to appeal to students. Students' attendance is checked at monthly intervals and a summary is sent to parents at two-monthly intervals. Persistent absence triggers prompt action.

27. The college has been slow to adapt its policies to the specific requirements of the Safeguarding Children in Education guidance. A revised policy for child protection has not yet been approved by the governing body and this is delaying further staff training.

## Leadership and management



28. Leadership and management are good. The governors, principal and senior managers have created a positive ethos in which students' success has a very high priority. The college caters effectively for a diverse group of students. Over one third of the students are from minority ethnic backgrounds, many of whom travel to the college from Birmingham. Approximately 28% of the students come from wards with a high widening participation factor. Retention rates are high and pass rates for students on advanced level courses are better than the national average. In 2003/04, some students did not perform as well as predictions based upon their entry qualifications. Teaching is generally good and, in a number of curriculum areas, very good.

29. The mission is aimed at students aged 16 to 19 aspiring to study on level 3 courses in Solihull and South Birmingham. The college works productively with the local authority, the LSC, schools and other providers of education and training locally on a collegiate basis. Governors, managers and staff support the mission and the strategic objectives of the college. Planning is methodical and rigorous. The college works collaboratively with a number of schools, for example, in helping one school to provide a GCSE course in travel and tourism course. In addition, college staff are leading on programmes for the gifted and talented, and to develop critical thinking as part of the South Solihull Collegiate plan. Much work has been undertaken in preparing to teach a course leading to an International Baccalaureate qualification in conjunction with partner schools. There are extensive links with HE institutions. Links with industry and commerce are developing, but are currently not strong. Unusually for a sixth form college, an advanced apprenticeship is planned in conjunction with a local hospital. The operational plan for 2004/05 identifies the development of links with major local companies as a key task.

30. Senior managers are very ready to meet staff and discuss any matters that arise. Teachers and support staff feel valued. The management structure, lines of responsibility and accountability are clear and well understood. There is a strong team spirit throughout the college. Senior and middle managers carefully consider equity of workloads. Communication is very effective. Management information for the college as a whole is accurate, timely and used well by senior managers. There have been major changes to the data collection systems in use over the last three years. This has resulted in separate student databases being established, but these are not trusted completely or used effectively by middle managers.

31. Curriculum leadership and management are good. Middle managers are enthusiastic in their pursuit of improvements and successfully create an atmosphere where teamwork and collaboration flourish. The curriculum planning is responsive to the needs of students. Teachers work purposefully and diligently to ensure that their students are successful. Curriculum team meetings are focused appropriately on teaching and learning, students' views, attendance, and retention and pass rates. Targets for retention and pass rates are applied consistently, but some teams feel that they have had little influence over the targets set. Guidance and support for students have improved since the last inspection in 2000/01. However, the teaching of key skills, which was a weakness then, is still not effective, particularly for students who would benefit from studying a key skill at level 3.

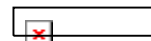
32. The quality assurance framework is excellent. Staff and external customers such as the LSC value it. It is applied assiduously and has led to thorough subject and college self-assessment reports. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment reports. The self-assessment arrangement is the cornerstone of the quality assurance system and has been used at the college in some form since 1990. Each department takes the process very seriously and feels a strong ownership of the outcomes and action plans that result. Much very successful work has been undertaken to establish an atmosphere within the college that allows and encourages a critical approach to the evaluation of each section's performance. Students' retention and pass rates, and their performance compared to predictions based upon their entry qualifications, are used extensively in the evaluation of programmes. The results of questionnaires and meetings with students in different forums are used well to inform the departmental and college-wide judgements. However, the results from these investigations are not always fed back to students effectively. There is an extensive and rigorous internal lesson observation scheme. This is used very effectively to identify weaknesses and as a method of sharing and celebrating good practice. A cross-college 'sharing good practice' team has been instrumental in raising the profile of this activity. Staff appraisal is well established and valued.

33. The college has a good range of policies related to equality of opportunity, race relations and the SENDA. There are good action plans that ensure the spirit, as well as the requirements, of the legislation is met. Most course teams audit their work to monitor how well equality and diversity improvements are implemented. Staff equality and diversity advisers have been appointed and used extensively to support different teams with this work. They have raised the profile of equality and diversity greatly. Staff are very much aware of the changing nature of the student population and are constantly considering ways in which their support and teaching methods should change to meet students' needs. The college fulfils its obligation to provide opportunities for worship of a Christian nature. In addition, support is provided for students of other faiths. For example, rooms are made available for contemplation and prayer.

34. Governance is outstanding. The college benefits from the wide range of expertise brought by governors. The board has a strong focus on students' achievements and experiences. Members of the board frequently shadow either students or staff and gather first-hand knowledge of college life. In addition, they are linked formally to different aspects of college activity. They understand well the complexity of course provision. Governors are knowledgeable about those courses that are highly successful and those that need closer scrutiny. Induction for new members is effective and valued. Skill audits and extensive training of governors are undertaken.

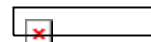
35. Financial management is very good. The college has met its overall funding targets for the last three years and is designated finance category A. A course-costing model has been used effectively for about five years. This gives clear indications to managers of the courses that are subsidised by others and allows them to make informed decisions on the relative values of running such courses. Capital projects have been managed well and have led to a pleasant modern site. Staff utilisation is monitored carefully. The average class size during inspection was high when compared to the national average for sixth form colleges. The college provides good value for money.

## **Part C: Curriculum and occupational areas**



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## Science



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

### **Strengths**

- high retention rates on most courses
- high standards of work in chemistry
- good teaching
- very good technical support and specialist resources
- good curriculum leadership and management.

### **Weaknesses**

- low pass rates on GCE A-level physics and AS-level physics and chemistry courses
- unsatisfactory progress compared to prior attainment on GCE A-level biology and all AS-level courses
- unsatisfactory aspects of laboratory accommodation.

### **Scope of provision**

36. The college offers courses at AS level and GCE A level in biology, chemistry and physics. Vocational science courses are offered at intermediate GNVQ and advanced AVCE levels. There are 793 students studying at least one science subject. The number of students opting for vocational courses has grown steadily over recent years and currently 45 are enrolled on AVCE courses and

21 on intermediate GNVQ courses.

### **Achievement and standards**

37. Retention rates are high and above national averages on most courses. On GCE A-level courses almost all students have completed their courses for the last three years. On AVCE courses, retention rates have improved steadily and are now close to the national average. Both retention and pass rates on the GNVQ intermediate science course are high. The number of students with high grade passes, however, is low.

38. Pass rates are low on GCE A-level and AS-level physics and AS-level chemistry courses. Pass rates on all other courses are close to national averages. Compared to prior attainment, unsatisfactory progress is made in GCE A-level biology and all AS-level courses. Students in chemistry show a high standard of work in lessons and homework. For example, in an AS-level chemistry lesson, students explained with confidence and clarity how and why increasing temperature would affect equilibrium position in either endothermic or exothermic reactions.

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

<b>Qualification</b>	<b>Level</b>	<b>Completion year:</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2004</b>
AVCE (double award) in science	3	No. of starts	19	29	26
		% retention	53	69	77
		% pass rate	90	85	85
AS-level chemistry	3	No. of starts	198	185	185
		% retention	95	92	92
		% pass rate	89	78	73
AS-level physics	3	No. of starts	137	119	113
		% retention	93	91	93
		% pass rate	71	68	73
GCE A-level biology	3	No. of starts	145	155	132
		% retention	99	99	95
		% pass rate	91	98	93
GCE A-level chemistry	3	No. of starts	113	150	123
		% retention	100	97	98
		% pass rate	92	95	93
GCE A-level physics	3	No. of starts	82	86	62
		% retention	99	99	100
		% pass rate	100	98	84

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

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

39. Teaching and learning are generally good and some is very good. In most lessons, teachers use a variety of activities effectively and often involve students in appropriate practical work. Theory lessons are expertly taught by well-informed staff. In a very good chemistry revision lesson, students revised the structure, type and name of compounds using a well-designed and informative summary sheet. This was followed by a skilful review of key points and a demonstration of the support

available on the college's intranet. In a few lessons, teachers fail to ensure that their teaching methods meet the needs of all students. For example, in a biology lesson, a few more able students finished the task set quickly and then waited for something to do. The late arrival of a few students at the start of the day has an adverse effect on learning.

40. Specialist teaching resources are very good. Workbooks are of a consistently high standard. They usually contain a mixture of general background information, key learning points, structured questions and extension work which sometimes includes web addresses for further reading. Diagrams and illustrations improve the readability and attractiveness of booklets. Each subject area is developing an intranet site containing presentations, animations and other learning resources accessible by students and staff. A mobile set of wireless-connected laptop computers is used extensively to allow in-class access to both the Internet and intranet. Whilst laboratories are clean and tidy, they are uninviting, dated and have restricted space which hinders the use of some teaching methods. A good stock of practical equipment enables students to work in small groups. Very good technician support ensures equipment is ready when required.

41. Assessment and monitoring of students' progress are good. Students' work is marked accurately, using appropriate assessment criteria, and feedback is encouraging and beneficial. Staff use comparisons with minimum target grades to monitor individual progress, which students find helpful.

42. Courses meet the needs of students satisfactorily. Students studying mathematics and physics are offered the opportunity of joining the Engineering Education Scheme, run by the Association of Engineers. In 2004/05, a small group of students were set real problems facing two large locally based international companies. Each group visited their company to work on the design brief. With the support of young professional engineers, the students formulated solutions and modelled prototypes.

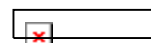
43. Guidance and support for students are good. Students value individual support in tutorials and the subject-specific additional support which is available, such as drop-in workshops.

44. In a practical chemistry lesson, a learning support assistant worked alongside a student with a hearing impairment to relay important verbal communication. At the end of the practical, the teacher met with the student to evaluate the effectiveness of the arrangements and, as a result, made an appropriate modification to future plans.

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

45. Curriculum leadership and management are good. Quality assurance procedures are comprehensive and result in improvements in teaching. Staff feel accountable to, yet valued and supported by, managers at all levels. Self-assessment is rigorous. National benchmarking data and other management information are used to make judgements and inspectors considered that, in the latest report, all major strengths and weaknesses were identified. The subject self-assessment reports are of a high standard and the resultant team action plans address weaknesses systematically. Subject teams work well together, planning collaboratively and sharing resources, and team meetings are often focused on teaching and learning rather than administration.

### **Mathematics**



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

### ***Strengths***



- high retention rates on advanced courses
  
- high-quality resources to promote learning
  
- good initiatives to improve provision.

### ***Weaknesses***

- very low grade A\* to C pass rates in GCSE mathematics
  
- unsatisfactory students' progress relative to prior attainment
  
- insufficiently challenging teaching in a minority of lessons.

### ***Scope of provision***

46. The college offers mathematics courses at intermediate and advanced levels. At advanced level, 82 students are enrolled on AS-level statistics and 277 on AS-level mathematics, the latter being combined with mechanics or statistics options. At GCE A level, 29 students are studying statistics and 136 are studying mathematics. There are 27 students studying further mathematics.

47. Students on an AS-level programme, but without a grade C at GCSE mathematics, take a level 2 mathematics course in addition to their four AS-level subjects. The one-year GCSE retake course is now open only to those with a prior grade D and currently has 155 students, whilst 161 students this year enrolled on a level 2 adult numeracy course.

### ***Achievement and standards***

48. Retention rates are high on advanced level courses. Pass rates are at, or above, national averages. However, too many students make unsatisfactory progress relative to prior attainment and few manage to gain high grade results. Pass rates in GCSE mathematics have been consistently very low, with very low numbers of students achieving their goal of an A\* to C grade. In 2004/05, pass rates on the adult numeracy course are high.

49. Students develop competent mathematical skills, but are more limited in their application of these skills. For example, in statistics, students can carry out appropriate calculations, but are less able to discuss them with insight. At GCSE level, the confidence of some students is low and their ability to apply knowledge independently is weak. Further mathematics students demonstrate very sound algebraic technique and rigorous mathematical methodology. Students generally develop good communication and teamwork skills. Attendance is satisfactory or better on advanced courses, but poor on level 2 courses. Progression from advanced courses to HE is good.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2002	2003	2004
GCSE mathematics	2	No. of starts	186	89	52
		% retention	71	63	85
		% pass rate	20	32	25
AS-level mathematics	3	No. of starts	259	303	251
		% retention	92	92	94
		% pass rate	70	67	73
AS-level statistics	3	No. of starts	93	59	57
		% retention	86	93	95
		% pass rate	49	75	61
GCE A-level mathematics	3	No. of starts	109	123	138
		% retention	96	95	98
		% pass rate	83	97	93
GCE A-level statistics	3	No. of starts	55	34	29
		% retention	100	97	100
		% pass rate	85	91	97

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

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

50. The majority of teaching observed was graded as good and the remainder as satisfactory. High-quality materials are used effectively to maintain students' interest and satisfy different learning styles. Practical activities in statistics and mechanics help students to bridge the gap between theory and the real world. In one lesson, students played a dice game and then constructed a statistical model to compare and contrast their results. Card-based games are used effectively to generate discussion and enthusiasm whilst reinforcing and consolidating learning. In one lesson, students used domino cards to build a logical sequence using their knowledge of transformation geometry to connect one shape to the next.

51. Some teachers manage group work particularly well, changing the composition of groups for different tasks and maximising opportunities for students to help each other. Mini-whiteboards are used widely in whole-class teaching, where students write their answers or thoughts on the board and hold it up for the teacher to see. This allows the teacher to monitor individual students' understanding very effectively. Students frequently mark the work of each other or of specially created exemplars, which effectively clarifies schemes of marking and makes explicit common errors and pitfalls.

52. A minority of teaching is uninspiring, focusing on teaching narrow techniques at the expense of wider understanding. There is a lack of challenge to students' learning in some lessons; all students do exactly the same work at the same time and there is an inadequate range of questions in individual exercise work. Computers are used well to illuminate concepts through electronic projection facilities. In one lesson, graphical software was used to illustrate the evaluation of area under a curve using approximate numerical methods. GCSE lessons are scheduled once a fortnight in an ICT room, but advanced students have little opportunity to use computers on their own in their work.

53. Resources are good. Accommodation is of a high standard and very well decorated with posters and displays of students' work. Some rooms, however, are too small for large groups and some can be overly warm. Several rooms have information technology (IT) projection facilities and one has an

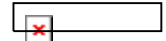
interactive whiteboard, but this is currently used mainly as a projection screen. There are useful intranet-based resources such as high-quality revision materials and worked solutions, and some valuable interactive learning software for GCSE. The library has an appropriate stock of books. Staff are well qualified in their subject and have teaching qualifications. There is appropriate and effective ongoing staff development.

54. Homework is regularly set and helpful, and returned speedily with comments and marks. Poor performance in homework and tests can lead to invitations to selected students to attend regular workshops, where their attendance is monitored and followed up. The workshops are well used also as a drop-in resource for extra help and are much appreciated by those students who use them. Each advanced level student is assigned a target minimum grade based on their prior attainment at GCSE. However, these are not used in any meaningful way to monitor for underachievement in relation to potential. Targets for improved performance are set by teachers when writing reports to parents, but these are not negotiated or sufficiently specific.

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

55. Curriculum leadership and management are satisfactory. Whilst GCSE mathematics grade A\* to C pass rates have remained low for several years, the department has now reshaped its level 2 provision and pass rates for adult numeracy are high in 2005. GCSE performance and attendance remain unsatisfactory. Self-assessment is rigorous and self-critical. The identification of strengths and weaknesses in teaching has led to the development of new learning materials, informed and supported by staff development. Effective teamwork has helped the department share good practice and change teaching styles to better meet the needs of students. The department's commitment to equal opportunities embraces variety in learning activities to meet all preferred learning styles, and support for individuals identified with specific learning needs. However, no analysis of results by gender or ethnicity takes place at course team level and there are no explicit attempts to break down gender or ethnic groupings in lessons.

### **Business and economics**



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

#### ***Strengths***

- high retention and pass rates on most courses
  
- good use of real business contexts in teaching and learning
  
- good development of students' personal and learning skills
  
- well-managed curriculum.

### **Weaknesses**

- unsatisfactory pass rates on AS-level economics and accounting in 2003/04
- insufficiently individualised teaching.

### **Scope of provision**

56. Provision includes AS level and GCE A level in business studies, economics and accounting. Vocational programmes are offered at level 2 with the GNVQ intermediate in business and at level 3 with an AVCE in business. The business studies department also contributes to the cross-college enrichment programme offering book keeping at level 1. There are currently 713 students on courses in the business and economics departments.

### **Achievement and standards**

57. Retention and pass rates on most courses are high. Retention and pass rates on business and economics at both AS level and GCE A level have been consistently above the national average in the last three years. All retained students on the AVCE in business were successful in both 2003 and 2004. The number of students who achieved high grades on the GCE A-level business course was above the national average in each of the last three years and performance on AS-level business improved last year when over a third of students achieved a high grade. Pass rates for AS levels in accounting and economics in 2004 were unsatisfactory. On AS-level accounting only just over half of those who completed the course achieved a pass grade, compared with nearly two thirds nationally.

58. The standard of students' work is high. Students develop good personal and learning skills and demonstrate an ability to carry out effective research for assignment and class work. They develop good teamwork skills. Group work is a feature of many lessons and students apply themselves well to tasks set, working effectively to achieve objectives within the timescale allocated. They conduct useful discussions, analyse issues presented to them and identify appropriate solutions. Students on vocational courses produce work of a high standard for assessment and have well-developed IT skills. Attendance at lessons is good. A few lessons are interrupted by students arriving late.

### **A sample of retention and pass rates in business and economy, 2002 to 2004**

<b>Qualification</b>	<b>Level</b>	<b>Completion year:</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2004</b>
GNVQ intermediate business	2	No. of starts	30	31	31
		% retention	70	97	84
		% pass rate	43	90	88
AS-level business	3	No. of starts	271	244	253
		% retention	93	93	91
		% pass rate	83	94	93
AS-level economics	3	No. of starts	92	104	102
		% retention	93	94	93
		% pass rate	84	82	76

GCE A-level business	3	No. of starts	160	157	173
		% retention	97	99	100
		% pass rate	99	100	98
GCE A-level economics	3	No. of starts	79	68	67
		% retention	100	100	99
		% pass rate	92	100	98
AVCE business	3	No. of starts	67	71	50
		% retention	58	68	64
		% pass rate	82	100	100

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

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

59. Most teaching is good or better. Lessons are well planned and effectively managed. Good use is made of directed questioning to check understanding and extend learning throughout lessons. In the best lessons, teachers use a wide range of teaching methods to maintain students' interest and develop learning. In many lessons, there is very effective use of real business contexts which enhance learning and enable students to apply up-to-date information in their assignment and examination work. Lessons incorporate news items that relate to the topic. In an economics lesson, where ICT was used very effectively, a link to a website for up-to-date statistics on world poverty and third world debt enabled the teacher to give very clear information.

60. Teachers provide good learning materials. Group work in lessons is generally productive and encourages students to work together and help each other in learning. In a few lessons, there is too much emphasis on group work rather than enabling students to work individually. Although all students are engaged in learning, there is a lack of challenge for the more able students. In a few lessons, the length of time allocated to a task is too long and some students finish before others and have to wait for the next part of the activity to begin.

61. Accommodation and resources are satisfactory. Staff are well qualified and experienced in the subjects they teach. They take advantage of the good opportunities for continuing professional development. Library resources are good with an extensive book stock and a good range of periodicals. Computing resources are of a high standard with appropriate software. The curriculum area materials on the college's intranet are underdeveloped and not well used by students. Few classrooms are equipped for the use of ICT in lessons.

62. Assessment and monitoring of students' progress are good. Homework and assignment work are set and marked thoroughly with useful comments that help students to improve. Assignments for vocational students are well organised with clear criteria for assessment and targets set for the achievement of each element of the assignment. GCE A-level and AS-level students are asked to set individual targets, but these are not used effectively. Parents are kept well informed of the progress of students and are contacted when issues of underperformance arise.

63. Links with business are good on vocational courses with a period of work experience for AVCE students and visits to local business organisations to gather information for assignments. There are fewer links for GCE A-level courses. Teachers visit partner schools to raise awareness of the college's provision and conduct subject taster sessions for school pupils. Accountancy is a recent addition to the portfolio of courses following a careful review of the curriculum.

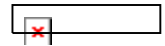
64. Students receive good support on personal issues. Subject teachers are available to give individual support and provide revision lessons for those who wish to participate. The quality of tutorials varies. For vocational students, tutorials are well structured and useful. Some GCE A-level students find the group tutorial element of little value. Individual tutorials are used to monitor

students' progress effectively. Subject progress reports are produced regularly with targets for improvement. These are produced online and comments are not clearly personalised for each individual student.

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

65. Leadership and management are good. Collaboration and communication are effective. The large proportion of students from minority ethnic groups on both academic and vocational courses demonstrates inclusiveness. Quality assurance arrangements are good and well implemented. Results of the regular student surveys are analysed and used in the self-assessment process. The self-assessment process is rigorous and includes the results of internal lesson observations. Support is given promptly to teachers who need it. Subject and faculty leaders analyse recruitment, retention and pass rate data regularly, and clearly identify actions to address issues. Actions for improvement are monitored regularly to ensure that progress is made.

### **Sports, leisure and tourism**



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

#### ***Strengths***

- very high pass rates
  
- good achievement of high grade passes
  
- very effective teaching and learning
  
- comprehensive range of additional activities
  
- very effective curriculum management.

#### ***Weaknesses***

- unsatisfactory accommodation for theory teaching in sport.

#### ***Scope of provision***

66. A wide range of courses is offered at advanced level including AS-level sports, games and

recreation, GCE A-level physical education, national certificate in sport, and AVCEs in travel and tourism and leisure and recreation. A GNVQ in leisure and tourism is offered at intermediate level. Students are able to take the community sports leaders award (CSLA) and the Duke of Edinburgh's award as part of the college's extensive enrichment programme. There are currently 241 students enrolled on courses.

### ***Achievement and standards***

67. Pass rates have improved consistently and are very high. All students on AVCE courses and GNVQ intermediate leisure and tourism have passed in the last two years. In 2004, AS-level sport, games and recreation pass rates improved to 100%, well above the national average. Students on this course achieve significantly better than their previous performance would indicate. High grade pass rates have improved significantly and, on the majority of courses, these rates are currently well above national averages. However, pass rates on the CSLA have been significantly below the national average for the past three years as many students do not complete all elements of the qualification. Retention rates on most courses for the past three years are at, or just above, national averages. The retention rate on the national certificate in sport was below the national average in 2004. In-year retention rates for this course show considerable improvement at 73%. In a few lessons, a number of students are late which disrupts learning for a short period.

68. Students have effective skills in research, comparative analysis and the use of IT. Students' written work is well presented and often includes detailed self-evaluation. A comprehensive assignment on fitness testing in sport produced work of a high standard with the students using advanced IT skills. The students could contrast fitness requirements for different sports effectively. Students participate in a number of successful sports teams and performance squads, including hockey, rugby, basketball, netball and football. The netball team have been winners of the West Midlands regional tournament for the past three years. The college has recently developed an 11-a-side girls' football team and a ladies cricket team in collaboration with Blossomfield Cricket club.

### ***A sample of retention and pass rates in sports, leisure and tourism, 2002 to 2004***

<b>Qualification</b>	<b>Level</b>	<b>Completion year:</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2004</b>
GNVQ intermediate leisure and tourism	2	No. of starts	21	20	16
		% retention	81	80	81
		% pass rate	94	100	100
AS-level sports, games and recreation	3	No. of starts	102	84	78
		% retention	85	89	87
		% pass rate	97	95	100
GCE A-level physical education	3	No. of starts	48	68	59
		% retention	98	97	98
		% pass rate	100	98	100
AVCE (double award) in leisure and recreation	3	No. of starts	18	23	17
		% retention	89	52	100
		% pass rate	100	100	100

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

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

69. Teaching and learning are of a very high standard. Most lessons contain a wide variety of well-planned and effectively implemented activities to engage and motivate students.

70. In a very good sports lesson, the teacher used visual recall and 'phone-a-friend' techniques to check that students could relate centre of mass, base of support and line of gravity to different scenarios. The students responded well to questioning and clearly enjoyed the lesson. Information and learning technology (ILT) is often used by students in researching and presenting assignments. In a very few lessons, ineffective questioning by teachers results in more able students' learning not being challenged sufficiently and wider understanding of key issues is not checked.

71. Staff hold appropriate first degrees and teaching qualifications. Some have postgraduate qualifications. New staff are expected to take appropriate teaching qualifications at the earliest opportunity and are provided with good support. Staff have good access to a wide range of development opportunities to meet the changing needs of students and the curriculum.

72. Most accommodation is very good. There are very good indoor and outdoor facilities for practical sport, including a well-equipped modern fitness suite. All the college's students benefit from the use of the multi-purpose sports hall, tennis courts and outdoor pitches. These facilities enable the college to offer an extensive range of sporting activities. Many of the rooms have good resources for teaching and learning. The leisure and tourism teaching rooms contain a good stock of up-to-date guides, brochures and textbooks. Theory rooms for sport are unsatisfactory and lack such facilities as display screens and multi-media projectors.

73. Assessment practice is good. Assignment briefs include clear grading criteria and students' marked work contains detailed feedback as to how students can improve their work. Spelling and grammatical errors are corrected systematically. Students' progress is monitored effectively through regular, well-planned one-to-one tutorials and termly progress reviews. Attendance, punctuality and progress against predicted grades are reviewed systematically.

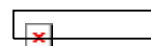
74. Effective links with partner schools and HE institutions have been established and a number of collaborative ventures with the wider community, such as sport development initiatives in cricket for minority ethnic groups, are ongoing. A wide range of enrichment activities helps to enhance students' learning and improve their personal development. In response to an identified need to broaden provision at intermediate level, the college has planned the introduction of a sport course at this level for the approaching academic year.

75. Support and guidance for students are good. Productive relationships exist between staff and students. While group tutorials vary in quality, one-to-one tutorials provide very good personal support. Careers advice is good, providing valuable information on progression and employment opportunities for students.

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

76. Leadership and management are very good. Communication is productive and there is a good team ethos. Staff and managers have a strong commitment to improving the quality of provision in this curriculum area. Quality assurance procedures are very effective and have had a positive impact on students' experiences at the college. These procedures include staff and student liaison meetings, team action planning and an equality audit. More effective ways of monitoring the performance of enrichment courses have recently been developed. Self-assessment is rigorous and action planning is highly effective. A thorough lesson observation scheme linked to appraisal has improved teaching and learning. Inspectors agreed with the profile of lesson observation grades and the judgements in the self-assessment report. Strategies to promote and monitor equality of opportunity are well established and effective.

### **Visual arts and media**





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

### **Strengths**

- high pass and retention rates
  
- very good teaching and learning in media studies
  
- high-quality specialist ICT resources to support learning
  
- very good progression from the national diploma in fine art direct to degree courses.

### **Weaknesses**

- underperformance compared to prior attainment in AS-level and GCE A2 art and GNVQ intermediate media
  
- underdeveloped drawing, research and design development skills
  
- inadequate art studios for GCE A-level students.

### **Scope of provision**

77. Course provision for art students is offered at advanced level and includes AS-level and GCE A-level art, AS-level textiles and the national diploma in fine art. Media courses are GNVQ media at intermediate level, AS-level and GCE A-level media studies and AVCE media studies. There are currently 440 enrolments on media courses and 218 enrolments on art courses.

### **Achievement and standards**

78. Pass and retention rates are high on many courses and above national averages. All retained students on the national diploma in fine art, GNVQ intermediate media and AVCE media and almost all on GCE A-level art and design and GCE A-level media were successful in 2004. Retention rates are low on GNVQ intermediate in media. Many students gain high grade passes in AS-level media, AVCE media and AVCE art and design. However, the percentage that gain high grade passes on AS-level and GCE A-level art and GNVQ intermediate media is low. In media studies, students achieve better results than their predicted grades based on GCSE scores suggest but, in art and design, students underperform. Progression to HE is good and especially so for national diploma fine art students, all of whom received offers for degree courses last year.

79. Students use ICT effectively. In visual arts, students explore digital images confidently, often combined with printmaking and, in media, students produce interesting short films based on topics such as hip hop fashion related to their cultural backgrounds. The standard of students' work in media lessons is very high. Students are articulate and able to discuss gender and moral issues with sensitivity and respect for each other's opinions. Drawing skills in art are underdeveloped, particularly in first year portfolios and sketchbooks. National diploma fine art students use a variety of two-dimensional and three-dimensional materials, but they lack the necessary drawing skills to develop personal research. Project work in AS-level textiles, AS-level art and GCE A-level art is limited by students' insufficient drawing skills. Copied images and photographs are used for research with often too little exploration of colour, texture or form.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2002	2003	2004
AS-level media	3	No. of starts	225	226	198
		% retention	88	95	92
		% pass rate	91	98	98
AVCE media	3	No. of starts	44	57	58
		% retention	70	67	71
		% pass rate	100	100	100
GCE A-level art and design	3	No. of starts	94	116	117
		% retention	100	97	100
		% pass rate	98	96	99
GCE A-level media	3	No. of starts	168	149	160
		% retention	97	97	98
		% pass rate	97	100	99

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

***Quality of education and training***

80. Teaching is very good in media studies. Lessons are challenging with a series of well-organised tasks and a high level of participation by students. Course materials are of a high standard. Opportunities to explore cultural, social and moral issues are frequently made good use of. A lesson on magazines and gender sensitively explored stereotyping and sexism in the media. Group work is managed well and focused questions elicit detailed answers from students who use appropriate terminology. In one media lesson, a student clearly explained to the group the amount of music that could be stored on a portable digital player and compared it to five lorry loads of music recordings on wax cylinders.

81. In visual arts, schemes of work and lesson plans do not clearly identify appropriate teaching strategies to cope with the wide ability range. Students are enthusiastic about their work, but are not encouraged to extend their research beyond their first idea. In one art lesson, students were selecting pictures to glue into sketchbooks rather than experimenting with the textile technique demonstrated. Research for designs was limited to readily available catalogues and magazines with little evaluation of the images.

82. Teachers are well qualified. Many teachers have participated in professional updating, some have higher degrees and others act as external examiners. Availability and effectiveness of technician support are good. Specialist ICT resources are of high quality and support learning. ICT equipment is good in fine art with industry-standard computers and software. In media studies, there are sufficient computers, digital cameras and edit suites. However, resources in media classrooms

are basic with no digital players and limited digital projection facilities. Studios are inadequate for GCE A-level art with insufficient space for students to work on paintings with the sketchbooks open at the same time. This limits the scale and ambition of work. There is little storage and housekeeping is poor. Extraction is insufficient for the wax melting pot.

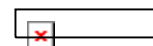
83. Assessment and monitoring of progress are good. Feedback on assessed work is good in media studies with most written work returned within two weeks. Internal moderation with appropriate sampling is carried out within subject teams. However, a minority of marking in fine art and GCE A-level art is over generous. Detailed progress reports are sent to parents twice a year. There is a good range of enrichment activities within the curriculum. Visits are made to local and national museums, galleries and exhibitions, and media centres.

84. Student support is good. The interview and induction process are welcoming. Assessment for additional learning support is carried out at induction. Results are fed back to staff, but details do not appear in lesson plans. Both technical support and literacy support in class are good. Students value individual tutorials and the Friday workshop in media but consider group tutorials to be too long. Progression advice to HE is good, but advice for employment is less effective.

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

85. Curriculum leadership and management are good. Staff teams meet regularly with concise minutes copied to senior management. The self-assessment report is completed rigorously by staff at course level with their head of subject. Student questionnaires are analysed and used effectively to inform the report. Action plans are agreed with the faculty head and senior management, and are monitored carefully during the year. The self-assessment report is detailed and inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses which were identified, though the lesson observation grades awarded by inspectors differed from those in the report. Equal opportunities and inclusiveness are good. Students use their diverse cultural backgrounds productively in film, radio and fine art project work.

## **Humanities**



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

### ***Strengths***

- outstanding retention and pass rates at AS level and GCE A level on most courses
- exceptionally good work by students
- very good teaching and learning
- very high-quality intranet resources that support learning

- o effective reporting and review of students' progress
- o outstanding curriculum management.

**Weaknesses**

- o no key weaknesses.

**Scope of provision**

86. The college provides AS-level and GCE A-level courses in history, geography, classical civilisation and religious studies. Students can choose one of four options in history covering ancient, mediaeval, Tudor and modern periods. There are currently 757 enrolments. Numbers are very high in history with 375 students, of whom 246 are enrolled on the modern course. Geography has high numbers with 222 enrolments and 103 students are taking religious studies.

**Achievement and standards**

87. Achievement at AS level and GCE A level is outstanding including the attainment of high grade results in most subjects. Most subjects have matched or exceeded very high national averages. Performance, when compared to prior attainment, is very good for the past three years in GCE A-level history and geography, but some students underperform in ancient history and classical civilisation. Retention rates are very high for all subjects and are outstanding where recruitment has been high such as in history and geography. Attendance is generally good, but punctuality is poor in a minority of lessons.

88. The standard of students' work is exceptionally high. Written work in all subject areas is thorough, accurate, detailed and constructed competently. The general level of understanding displayed is very high. Some of the work in lessons displays clear and very advanced knowledge and an incisiveness that indicates a mature and reflective approach. Work in history shows fluency, understanding and subtlety. Oral work is equally good. Students are confident in their responses and in their use and interpretation of material. Discussions are often of a very high standard with keen analysis of complex theories. In a religious studies lesson, students explored the link between religion and morality. The work involved exploring personal feelings, beliefs and ideas. The students' discussion demonstrated mental agility, deep thought and the ability to express ideas clearly and succinctly.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2002	2003	2004
AS-level geography	3	No. of starts	176	167	132
		% retention	90	93	95
		% pass rate	92	96	93
AS-level history	3	No. of starts	271	246	270
		% retention	90	96	94
		% pass rate	92	94	89

AS-level religious studies	3	No. of starts	45	36	42
		% retention	91	86	95
		% pass rate	95	94	98
GCE A-level geography	3	No. of starts	136	122	127
		% retention	100	98	100
		% pass rate	99	100	100
GCE A-level history	3	No. of starts	145	167	166
		% retention	97	99	96
		% pass rate	99	99	99

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

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

89. Teaching and learning are very good in all humanities subjects. Lessons are innovative, well planned and structured clearly. Teachers set good learning activities which develop an enquiring mind in many lessons. In a Tudor history lesson, students took on the roles of the peasantry, the gentry and the nobility to explore the level of threats to the Tudor regime. This encouraged students to apply prior knowledge in an empathic manner whilst analysing and assessing the power of different groups. Students enjoy the varied teaching methods that elicit academic endeavour as well as reinforcement and consolidation of previous learning. They exude confidence as they are given a responsibility for their own learning. In a modern history lesson, students were faced with an exercise which led them to identify alternatives to appeasement in the 1930s. Students used skills of analysis, debate and discussion highly effectively to consider various options culminating in a letter writing exercise to Neville Chamberlain in which students were asked to indicate whether they supported or opposed appeasement. There is effective work in pairs and groups, involving the understanding of source material. A geography lesson incorporated students' marking of each others' work and assessment of common mistakes in answers to examination questions. The work included a labelling exercise to explain how water moves through a hydrological system. The lesson as a revision session was outstanding. It was conducted at a gentle and encouraging pace so that the learning of all students was consolidated.

90. Resources used in humanities are very good. These include outstanding intranet-based materials for all subjects, used extensively by students for extension work, coursework and investigative research. The geography material available to students is excellent. The library is very well stocked. Rooms are well equipped with display projectors and these are used constructively in many lessons. Displays in the rooms contain numerous examples of students' work and other relevant posters. Many of the rooms are big enough for the size of classes though, in a few cases, table layouts make it difficult to adapt for some learning activities.

91. Reporting and reviewing of students' progress are very good. Students and parents are provided with detailed analysis on a regular basis. Monitoring against a minimum grade target works well and students are aware of minimum expectations. They are clear on their own progress and how to take action to improve any form of underachievement. Students' work is set regularly and assessed thoroughly. It is returned promptly with sufficient comments and guidance on areas that need improvement.

92. The range of humanities subjects on offer to students is very good. It includes a choice of four different history options as well as an opportunity to study classical civilisation. Enhancement of the curriculum offer is satisfactory with field trips available in geography and conferences in history. On classical civilisation and ancient history courses, students participate regularly in educational visits to the British Museum.

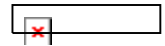
93. Staff help students willingly with their individual support needs. Aspects of the tutorial

programme are satisfactory with group work being particularly helpful to students at key times of the year. Individual tutorials are effective. Cross-college services are good and students especially value the careers and HE service and the availability of the college counsellor. Individual curriculum and personal support is seen by students as a positive feature of the college.

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

94. Leadership and management are outstanding. The quality assurance system is very good and all aspects of this are highly effective. Communication is very effective ensuring staff are kept informed and involved. Actions required following meetings are monitored very thoroughly. Self-assessment is realistic and exceptionally self-critical. Staff feel involved in the organisation and that their contribution and ideas are valued. Sharing of good practice is paramount with teaching and learning at the forefront of activity. Managers provide high-quality and effective leadership. Promotion of equal opportunities and diversity throughout the curriculum is good.

### **Social sciences**



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

#### ***Strengths***

- outstanding achievements in sociology
  
- good achievements in GCE A-level government and politics
  
- successful teaching and learning strategies
  
- very effective assessment practices
  
- good curriculum management.

#### ***Weaknesses***

- low and declining pass rates on AS-level psychology
  
- decline in retention rates on AS-level government and politics course.

### **Scope of provision**

95. Provision is all at advanced level and includes a range of AS-level and GCE A-level courses in social science subjects. A total of 929 students are enrolled on AS-level and GCE A-level government and politics, psychology and sociology courses. Of these, numbers enrolled on government and politics, psychology and sociology are 67, 578 and 284, respectively.

### **Achievement and standards**

96. Pass and retention rates at GCE A level are high. Achievement of high grade results on the GCE A-level government and politics course and the GCE A-level sociology course is consistently high and well above national averages. In 2004, over half of students on these courses achieved high grade results. Retention and pass rates at AS level vary and some have fallen below the national average. Retention rates for AS-level government and politics are satisfactory although in the last academic year they fell to below the national average. Retention rates have improved to above the national average for psychology and are consistently above the national average for sociology. Pass rates for AS-level sociology have been above the national average consistently but, in psychology, they have declined and are below the national average. In sociology, many students have, for some years, been achieving higher grades than those predicted on the basis of their GCSE scores.

97. Students show a very positive attitude to their work. The standard of students' work is high, in politics and government and sociology, it is very high. In many lessons, there is productive discussion with students using concepts, theories and research accurately. They also demonstrate good oral skills of critical analysis and evaluation based on sound evidence. In government and politics, discussions are very good and students have the confidence to explore and experiment with ideas. In one lesson on federalism, students offered a range of case studies from the United States of America and the European Union to explore the actual and possible impact of federalism on state and national governance. They debated with enthusiasm. Assignments and essays in government and politics, sociology and psychology are well researched and carefully structured; they demonstrate good critical, analytical and evaluative skills and good scientific report writing skills.

### **A sample of retention and pass rates in social sciences, 2002 to 2004**

<b>Qualification</b>	<b>Level</b>	<b>Completion year:</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2004</b>
AS-level government and politics	3	No. of starts	67	51	56
		% retention	93	88	84
		% pass rate	87	89	87
AS-level psychology	3	No. of starts	359	391	419
		% retention	87	90	91
		% pass rate	86	84	78
AS-level sociology	3	No. of starts	157	189	196
		% retention	89	91	88
		% pass rate	90	91	91
GCE A-level government and politics	3	No. of starts	30	47	30
		% retention	97	98	97
		% pass rate	100	96	100
GCE A-level psychology	3	No. of starts	194	229	237
		% retention	99	98	95
		% pass rate	93	97	96

GCE A-level sociology	3	No. of starts	92	106	134
		% retention	100	97	97
		% pass rate	98	98	99

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

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

98. Most teaching is good; a small amount is very good or outstanding. Students make good progress. Teachers have very high expectations of students. They plan lessons very effectively to enable students to meet those expectations. They use a very wide range of activities to motivate students. In the most successful lessons, teachers challenge and inspire students to enjoy learning as well as to achieve success in examinations. In one lesson, students were asked to take on the roles of cabinet ministers, negotiating their budgets with the chancellor of the exchequer. They participated thoughtfully and enthusiastically.

99. Staff are very well qualified and knowledgeable about their subjects and all hold teaching qualifications. Teachers produce a wide range of imaginative learning resources that are used effectively to develop classroom activities, or to help assignment work and revision. Staff have developed a good range of intranet resources mainly to help students in private study. The library has a very good stock of appropriate texts and journals which students can use to develop their research skills. Classrooms are adequate, but very few have computers or are linked to the college's intranet and this limits the use of a wider range of teaching and learning methods to meet a broader range of students' needs.

100. Good assessment practices inform students about their progress and how they might improve and develop their learning and aspire to higher grades. Assessment information is analysed carefully to identify the performance of different groups of students and to identify those who need additional support. It is used effectively to plan ways in which courses could be improved. Good standardisation practices ensure that assessment is rigorous and fair. There is a very good consistency across all subject teams in the thorough way in which work is marked. Spelling, punctuation and grammar are corrected, good work is praised and very helpful advice is given on how to improve weaker aspects of tests and written assignments.

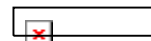
101. The range of subjects at AS level and GCE A level is adequate. There is a limited subject enrichment programme to broaden and enhance teaching and learning. Support for students is effective. Students value the support that is provided by their subject teachers outside of class time on academic and HE choices. Information on students' progress, attendance and punctuality is monitored thoroughly and used to put into place support programmes for students who are underachieving or who aspire to improve their grades. There is effective communication between specialist support services, teaching staff and tutors to ensure that all students have the support they need to complete their course successfully.

### **Leadership and management**

102. Curriculum leadership and management are very good. Good practice is shared successfully through strong and effective teamwork. There is rigorous and effective self-assessment and improvement planning. Actions designed to improve the weaknesses on AS-level courses are having an impact and in-year retention and pass rates have improved in 2005. All staff share a very strong commitment to improving all aspects of teaching and learning and the promotion of equal opportunities and anti-discriminatory practices.

## **English**





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

### ***Strengths***

- high pass and retention rates on advanced level courses
  
- good teaching and learning
  
- good use of ILT to enhance learning
  
- wide range of subject enrichment activities
  
- effective collaborative working among course teams.

### ***Weaknesses***

- low A\* to C pass rates on the GCSE course
  
- underperformance on AS-level English language, and GCE A-level and AS-level English language and literature in relation to students' prior achievements.

### ***Scope of provision***

103. The college offers courses in AS-level and GCE A-level English language, English literature, and English language and literature and GCSE level English. A level 2 Open College Network (OCN) course in basic communication skills is also offered. There are 539 students enrolled on advanced level English courses and 156 on intermediate level English courses.

### ***Achievement and standards***

104. Pass and retention rates are high on all advanced level courses and retention rates are high on intermediate courses. The proportion of high grade results in AS-level English literature is high. However, high grade results are below the national average in AS-level English language and AS-level and GCE A-level English language and literature. Most students achieve their predicted grades in AS-level and GCE A-level English literature, but a significant number of students underperform in AS-level English language and AS-level and GCE A-level English language and literature.

105. GCSE English pass rates at A\* to C grades, although improved in 2003/04, remain below the

national average. In 2003/04, 175 students took a level 2 key skills in communications course and pass rates were high, at 65%, compared with a low national average of 24%.

106. Students are able to work independently and the standard of their coursework is high. They are articulate in lessons and develop good skills of critical analysis. The most able students produce coursework which allows them to demonstrate higher level skills. For example, an English literature student chose the demanding novel by Marquez, *A Hundred Years of Solitude*, to study for coursework. The standard of students' oral work in class is high and they are confident discussing complex concepts. For example, students talked about Lovelace's poem *To Althea, From Prison* and explored concepts of physical imprisonment and mental freedom with maturity and insight. The quality of students' written work in their files varies and while some are well organised containing good written work, others are very disorganised. Students' attendance in English is slightly below the college's average. Many students who have studied English literature go on to do HE courses related to English; however, few students who have studied English language or English language and literature study English in HE.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2002	2003	2004
GCSE English language	2	No. of starts	126	109	119
		% retention	63	79	89
		% pass rate	43	47	*
AS-level English language	3	No. of starts	115	78	92
		% retention	93	92	92
		% pass rate	89	89	95
AS-level English literature	3	No. of starts	130	141	148
		% retention	88	89	91
		% pass rate	92	98	99
AS-level English language and literature	3	No. of starts	162	118	86
		% retention	86	95	98
		% pass rate	91	94	100
GCE A-level English literature	3	No. of starts	82	81	103
		% retention	96	100	98
		% pass rate	95	100	100
GCE A-level English language and literature	3	No. of starts	78	96	86
		% retention	100	97	98
		% pass rate	95	100	100

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

***Quality of education and training***

107. Teaching and learning are good. Lessons are well planned and have clear objectives that are understood by students. Schemes of work are detailed and contain many imaginative activities. Students are stimulated and challenged by their work. In the best lessons, students discuss texts closely and speculate about the meanings and nuances of language. They also enjoy interesting discussions. Students work generally very productively. ILT is used effectively in classrooms by teachers including recommending useful websites and resources on the college's intranet. Much work has been done on the development of the English site on the college's intranet, which contains

many useful materials and imaginative exercises.

108. Teachers are well qualified and participate in regular professional development activities. Of the team members, 4 out of 13 are currently examiners for AS level or GCSE. Students use high-quality paper-based resources. Accommodation is generally good. Rooms have a clear subject identity and are decorated with attractive displays. Computer facilities are good and students use them regularly. The learning centre has a very good stock of books to support English courses.

109. The assessment policy is thorough and complied with. Students are aware of the standard they are achieving and know what to do in order to make improvements. They have action plans which identify areas for development. Students work hard in lessons and produce coursework of a high standard. Coursework assignments offer students variety and challenge, enabling them to demonstrate their skills at the highest levels. There are effective systems for internal moderation, although external moderators occasionally comment on the generosity of marking in literature. In English language and English language and literature, coursework moderation is consistent and accurate.

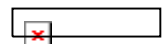
110. There is a good range of courses for students. Pre-course guidance is generally good. The department has recognised that many students were not fully aware of the demands of the English language and English language and literature courses. They have improved the ways in which they give information to students at open evenings. The department runs an effective induction which introduces students to the main skill and topic areas of the course. Students have the opportunity to participate in a good variety of enrichment activities including theatre trips, a creative writing course and an online student literary magazine.

111. Support for students is good. Pastoral support is particularly effective. Additional individual support is available for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Revision lessons are organised for students doing resit examinations.

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

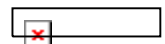
112. Curriculum leadership and management are good. Course teams work well together to share good practice, plan schemes of work and revise teaching materials. All staff are well supported and part-time staff are integrated effectively into the team. A well-established quality assurance system is well understood by staff. The self-assessment report is thorough and the development plan addresses all issues identified. However, the underperformance of students on some courses is understated. The views of first year students are formally collected, but only a small amount of feedback is received informally from intermediate students and second year students. Plans to redress this omission are in hand. The college has an equal opportunities policy which is promoted through choice of texts in English literature and topic choice in English language. The team acknowledges that the monitoring of achievements by ethnicity and gender is underdeveloped and plans to rectify this.

### **Part D: College data**



**Table 1: Enrolments by level of study and age**

Level	16-18 %	19+ %
1	2	17



2	7	13
3	91	70
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: provided by the college in summer 2005

**Table 2: Enrolments by curriculum area and age 2003/04**

Curriculum area	16-18 No.	19+ No.	Total Enrolments (%)
Science and mathematics	2,059	18	26
Land-based provision	0	0	0
Construction	0	0	0
Engineering, technology and manufacture	141	1	2
Business administration, management and professional	796	4	10
Information and communication technology	430	2	5
Retailing, customer service and transportation	0	0	0
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	311	4	4
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	0	0	0
Health, social care and public services	130	1	2
Visual and performing arts and media	874	5	11
Humanities	2,045	8	26
English, languages and communication	940	6	12
Foundation programmes	145	3	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>7,871</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: provided by the college in summer 2005

**Table 3: Retention and achievement**

<b>Level (Long)</b>	<b>Retention and pass</b>	<b>Completion year</b>		

Courses)	rate	16-18		
		2002	2003	2004
1	Starters excluding transfers	*	23	52
	Retention rate %	*	78	94
	National average %	75	83	n/a
	Pass rate %	*	72	57
	National average %	75	72	n/a
2	Starters excluding transfers	1,441	388	377
	Retention rate %	87	80	90
	National average %	81	81	n/a
	Pass rate %	84	78	62
	National average %	84	86	n/a
3	Starters excluding transfers	7,038	7,184	7,093
	Retention rate %	92	92	93
	National average %	89	90	n/a
	Pass rate %	88	91	90
	National average %	87	88	n/a
4/5	Starters excluding transfers	*	1,045	1,158
	Retention rate %	*	100	100
	National average %	94	94	n/a
	Pass rate %	*	**	**
	National average %	79	76	76

Note: summary of retention and achievement for the last three years by age and level of course, compared against national averages for all sixth form colleges.

Sources of information:

1. National averages: Benchmarking Data 2001 to 2003: Retention and Achievement Rates in Further Education Colleges in England, Learning and Skills Council, September 2004.

2. College rates for 2003 to 2004: College ISR.

\* numbers too low to provide a valid calculation

\*\* data unreliable

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

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Courses	Teaching judged to be:			No of sessions observed
	Good or better %	Satisfactory %	Less than satisfactory %	
Level 3 (advanced)	76	22	2	102
Level 2 (intermediate)	70	30	0	10
<b>Totals</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>112</b>

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