



Holy Cross College

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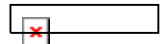
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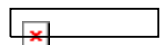
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Basic information about the college



Name of college:	Holy Cross
Type of college:	Roman Catholic Sixth Form College
Principal:	M J O'Hare
Address of college:	Manchester Road Bury Lancashire BL9 9BB
Telephone number:	0161 762 4500
Fax number:	0161 762 4501
Chair of governors:	Mrs A Fox
Unique reference number:	130499
Name of reporting inspector:	G Capewell
Dates of inspection:	26-30 November 2001

Part A: Summary



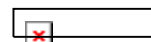
Information about the college



Holy Cross College is a Roman Catholic sixth form college occupying a single site in Bury, Greater Manchester. It was established in 1979 in a building that was formerly the Bury Convent Grammar School. The college is run under the trusteeship of the Daughters of the Cross, an order of sisters which owns the property. The college has two main Catholic partner high schools, but also attracts students from many other schools in the area who seek education within a Christian context. Post-16 education in Bury is provided by the college, a large tertiary college and two independent grammar schools. Two sixth form colleges, two further education (FE) colleges and another tertiary college are within seven miles of the town centre.

The college maintains good links with outside agencies. For example, it is a member of a sixth form college consortium formed with four other colleges. At the time of the inspection, 1,378 students were enrolled at the college, 1,201 of them were aged 16 to 18 and studying on full-time programmes. There is a growing higher education (HE) programme developed in association with Liverpool Hope University College. The college's mission is to 'provide a high quality education with a community based on gospel principles.' The college aims to develop each person spiritually, morally and intellectually, and it welcomes students and staff of all faiths.

How effective is the college?



The quality of provision in English and media was judged to be outstanding. In all other curriculum areas, the quality was judged to be good. Retention and pass rates are high in most curriculum areas. Students are well supported personally and academically. Leadership and management are good, and there is a strong commitment by governors and senior managers to the college's mission and Catholic ethos. There is a lack of clarity about curriculum development for provision other than at level 3. The college's key strengths and the areas that should be improved are listed below.

Key strengths

- strong commitment to the college's mission by staff and students
- high retention and pass rates
- effective teaching
- high standards of work in lessons
- excellent information technology (IT) resources

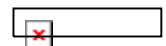
- good support for students
- effective management information systems.

What should be improved

- provide a clear strategy for curriculum development below level 3 and for adult students
- develop methods of teaching and learning in some areas to cater more effectively for the needs of students with differing abilities
- develop more student and staff links with the world of work
- continue to develop the college's accommodation strategy
- review the enrichment programme to ensure that more students can participate.

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

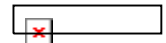


The table below shows overall judgements about provision in subjects and courses that were inspected. Judgements are based primarily on the quality of teaching, training and learning and how well students achieve. Not all subjects and courses were inspected. Inspectors make overall judgements on curriculum 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	Good. Retention and pass rates are high. There is much good teaching. Leadership and management are effective. Assessment is regular and rigorous. The proportion of high grades on some courses is low and too many students do not achieve the grades predicted for

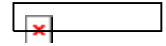
	them.
Mathematics	Good. Teaching is good. The department is well managed. General Certificate of Education Advanced-level (GCE A-level) pass rates have risen to meet the national average. Further mathematics pass rates are high. The proportion of students progressing from GCE Advanced Subsidiary (AS) to GCE A-level courses is low. IT is not used sufficiently.
Business studies	Good. Business courses have high retention rates and most have high pass rates. Lessons are carefully planned and taught effectively. Students' progress is monitored thoroughly and extra help is readily available to those who need it. Not enough attention is paid to current business practice, including the use of business applications software.
Computing and IT	Good. Retention and pass rates are high. Students work with good IT resources. Courses are well managed. There is some teaching that fails to cater for the differing learning needs of students.
Visual and performing arts and physical education	Good. Retention and pass rates are high. Teaching is effective. Students' performance is monitored rigorously. Support for students is good. Opportunities for students are restricted by poor facilities in visual arts and physical education (PE). Course teams are well managed.
Psychology and sociology	Good. Teaching is good, sometimes outstanding. Retention rates are high. Pass rates in GCE A-level sociology are above the national average. Classrooms are well equipped and learners are supported effectively. Too many students fail to achieve the grades predicted for them.
Humanities, languages and religious studies	Good. Pass rates in most GCE A-level subjects are high. There is much effective teaching and learning, although the differing learning needs of students are not always met in lessons. Curriculum teams are well managed. There is inadequate emphasis on development planning.
English and media	Outstanding. Pass rates are consistently above the national average and retention rates are high. The quality of teaching is good, and some is outstanding. Students follow imaginative and well-planned teaching programmes. The curriculum area is very well managed and resourced. There are no major weaknesses.

How well is the college led and managed?



Leadership and management are good. There is a strong commitment to the college's mission throughout the college, and the corporation and college staff are focused clearly on raising levels of achievement. The college has a good management information system which is used effectively in planning and for quality assurance. There is an effective equal opportunities policy and equality of opportunity is promoted successfully. Effective quality assurance procedures have helped to raise levels of achievement and the information gained from quality assurance is used in drawing up the staff development plan. The college does not have a clear strategy for curriculum development below level 3. Operational planning at subject level does not always address identified weaknesses adequately.

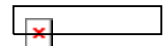
To what extent is the college educationally and socially inclusive?



The college's approach to equal opportunities and inclusion is good. Students are assessed on entry and individual learning targets are agreed in discussion between tutor and student. Students' progress is closely monitored through regular review and use of centrally recorded assessment data. Subject teachers provide effective additional support for learners and there are additional support sessions in basic skills. Students are encouraged to work on their own and they have good library and IT facilities to support them in this. Many teachers, in their lessons, vary activities and resources to take account of students' preferred methods of working and to meet the learning needs of students with differing abilities. In some lessons, however, there is insufficient activity that stretches the more able students or which caters for those who find the work difficult. Some accommodation is inaccessible to wheelchair users.

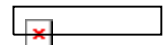
The college draws its students from a wide area and range of backgrounds. The proportion of minority ethnic students matches that within the local community. The curriculum at levels 1 and 2 has been diminishing, and although efforts have been made to reverse this pattern with the co-operation of partner schools, some Catholic students are being excluded from a faith-based education by the limited provision at these levels.

How well are students and trainees guided and supported?



Guidance and support for students are good, and are consistent with the college's mission and the student charter. Pre-entry information and advice is detailed and objective, and many students choose the college because of its ethos and level of academic success. There is comprehensive screening on entry. Learning support is effective, although not all students in need of help take advantage of the services available. The college has an effective model of pastoral tutoring, and there is a well-used and helpful central pastoral log. Careers guidance is good and there are excellent careers resources. Pressure on the pastoral programme from other activities, however, means that there is little careers education within the programme. The college strikes a good balance between providing structures for students and encouraging student autonomy. Tutors do not always use prepared materials effectively.

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

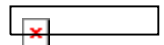
- positive work ethic
- good support from subject teachers

- friendly, trusting and supportive community
- good facilities for learning
- management listens and responds to students
- high academic reputation.

What they feel could be improved

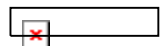
- overcrowding in the refectory and library at peak times
- electronic registration arrangements
- sports facilities
- availability of enrichment activities.

Other information



The college has two months to prepare an action plan in response to the report. It must show what action the college will take to bring about improvements in response to issues raised in the report. The governors must agree the plan and send copies of it to the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED).

Part B: The college as a whole



Summary of grades awarded to teaching and learning by inspectors

Aspect & learner type	Graded good or better (Grades 1 to 3) %	Graded satisfactory (Grade 4) %	Graded less than satisfactory (Grades 5 to 7) %
Teaching 16-18	79.9	17.4	2.7
19+ and WBL*	100.0	0.0	0.0
Learning 16-18	81.8	15.5	2.7
19+ and WBL*	100.0	0.0	0.0

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

* work-based learning

Achievement and standards

1. The majority of the college's provision is for full-time students aged 16 to 19 on level 3 courses. Apart from two Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE) courses, level 3 students study GCE A and AS-level subjects. Retention rates on the level 1 provision have been high, but pass rates have been low. There are very few students studying on level 2 courses. A vocational course in business at intermediate level and three General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) subjects are currently running. The pass rate in GCSE English has been high for the last two years, but in mathematics, it is in line with the national average. In key skills tests, the pass rates in IT have been high, averaging 75%, but results in application of number tests have been less good, broadly reflecting the national trend.

2. Retention rates at all levels are high. The college's overall in-year figure has ranked it amongst the top 10% of colleges for the last three years. The retention rate for level 3 courses rose markedly between 2000 and 2001, from 86% to 92%. In 2001, approximately two thirds of the courses had retention rates of over 90%, and very few of them had rates less than 80%.

3. The GCE A-level pass rate is above the national average and has been rising over the last three years. In 2001, the average points score for each student was 20.0, which is well above the Local Education Authority (LEA) average of 16.7 and the national average of 17.8, placing the college in the top 20 colleges in the country. Performance has improved considerably over the last 5 years, with the points score rising from 15.2 to 20.0 since 1996. Some pass rates were outstanding in 2001. For example, approximately 55% of all courses at level 3 had pass rates of 90% or better, and a quarter of these courses had pass rates of 100%. Students in visual and performing arts, business, English, media and religious studies subjects have achieved consistently well over the last three years.

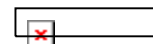
4. The college makes strenuous attempts to measure how well students perform in relation to their qualifications on entry. Two nationally recognised systems for measuring added value are used, as well as an internally devised one. Although the findings from these different systems are occasionally out of step, there is a good level of consistency overall. Value added measures indicate that there are a number of courses where the students are underachieving despite the high

pass rates in examinations. On a number of courses, the proportion of higher grades, A to C, is below the national average for sixth form colleges, for example, on GCE A-level history, politics, sociology and French courses.

5. Students generally perform well in lessons. Most full-time students are confident, keen and interested. They frequently display good oral skills. They enter into discussions willingly and are able to use specialist terms and language well. Visual and performing arts and science students have practical skills that are better than that expected for the level of course and stage of study. Work in English and media lessons is very good. Students handle new concepts and analytical approaches well and have a sound grasp of the texts they are studying.

6. Teachers have high expectations of students in respect of attendance. Absences are followed up and the on-line student progress log is used to keep personal tutors informed of problems over attendance. Levels of attendance and punctuality are high across most of the college. The average attendance rate at lessons and tutorials during the inspection was 88%. Attendance was highest in history and politics, at 95%.

Quality of education and training



7. Teaching, learning and attainment were graded by inspectors in 150 sessions. Teaching was good and learning effective across all levels and age ranges. In the lessons observed, 80% of the teaching was good or better, and only 2.7% was unsatisfactory. The highest proportion of good teaching was in English and media, where 95% of teaching was judged to be good, very good or outstanding, and none of it unsatisfactory.

8. Teachers are knowledgeable about their subject and their teaching is lively and enthusiastic. This helps to foster good relationships, promote confidence and trust, and encourage students to work hard. In all curriculum areas, teachers have responded well to the challenge of implementing Curriculum 2000, and have been helped in this by an effective staff development programme. Parental satisfaction with the quality of teaching is high. All the parents who were asked said that they would make the same decision again in choosing Holy Cross as the college for their son or daughter.

9. The majority of lessons are well planned and allow for different methods of learning. In a business studies lesson, for example, resources were good, the range of activities included individual and paired work, and a video was used to prompt answers to questions posed by the teacher. In some curriculum areas, for example, computing and IT, and in humanities, languages and religious studies, teaching does not always meet the needs of students with differing abilities.

10. Clear and detailed schemes of work help staff and students to understand college and awarding body requirements, as well as to be aware of key assessment dates. Opportunities for key skills development are highlighted in schemes of work. In some subjects, key skills are developed effectively. For example, in science, students were given the opportunity to make presentations on chemical bonding, or to use their IT skills in developing information sheets on aspects of astronomy.

11. Students receive good support from their subject teachers. There are extra lessons for students identified as likely to benefit from additional help. Students who have taken advantage of these have made good progress and are appreciative of the help. Not all students who are invited to attend, however, choose to do so. Attendance at some of these additional lessons is low. The written materials and intranet-based resources provided by teachers are good and help students to work effectively on their own. Some intranet sites, such as the biology site, are particularly successful in attracting students to use them.

12. Full-time teachers are well qualified. Over 98% have a teaching qualification and a degree in the subject which they teach. The college employs a small number of part-time teachers. Of these, 73% have a degree and a recognised teaching qualification. The staff development programme is good. The college provides its own effective staff development activities in addition to external training courses. A number of staff are external examiners for their subject areas, which helps students and other staff to be better aware of examination requirements.

13. Since the last inspection, the college has made a major financial commitment to upgrading its accommodation. Two new buildings have been added that provide good teaching and study accommodation. The library, IT suites and teaching accommodation have been relocated to the new buildings. The college is gradually improving access for those learners with restricted mobility. The newly built accommodation has ramped entrances and lifts to upper floors. The college plans to upgrade the main older building to provide ramps and lift access to upper floors in its final stage of refurbishment. Part of the final refurbishment includes relocating the reception area to the front of the building, upgrading the science labs and art department, and providing seating and landscaping to external areas. A small proportion of the accommodation is poor. In PE, classrooms are too small, restricting the activities which can take place. Some equipment is dated and in need of replacement. The music room is in the ground floor of a house, circa 1900, that is still partly used by the Order of the Daughters of the Cross. These areas are not included in the final stage of the college refurbishment.

14. Investment in IT has been high. The ratio of computers to learners is 1:7.2. All staff and students have access to the Internet, the college intranet and e-mail. Staff now benefit from individual access to the college information systems. Students make good use of the computer facilities. In most curriculum areas, IT is being used widely and effectively to support learning. This is not the case in business studies and mathematics.

15. There are good study facilities for students. The library provides a good range of books, videos and periodicals for loan and reference. In the English section, there is an unusually good fiction section. The library also provides a video room, computer workstations and a silent study area. Library staff liaise with curriculum area staff to ensure that learning resources are up to date and sufficient. In English, all classrooms are well equipped and some have computer projection facilities. The students' study and social areas become overcrowded at peak times.

16. The college has developed an effective electronic system to record and monitor students' progress and attendance. Teachers enter attendance and achievement records on a monthly basis, and students keep a useful record of their own progress in their student planner. At entry, students undertake a key skills assessment and a learning style review. They are 'banded' according to their GCSE results and are set learning targets. At review, progress is measured against these targets and this provides useful information to students and staff on the standards students are attaining.

17. There is an effective assessment and homework policy. Assessment is regular and carried out fairly and accurately. In business studies, science, art and English, work is set regularly and marked rigorously. Students' work is returned promptly, and teachers provide detailed and helpful written comments, showing students how they can improve their work. In PE and, in some cases, humanities, written feedback to students is minimal. In psychology, some borderline work from students was not commented on thoroughly enough. There was insufficient justification of the grades awarded and not enough indication of what students needed to do to get better grades. In a number of cases, across the college, teachers did not correct spelling or grammatical errors.

18. On General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) and AVCE business studies courses, there are well-established internal verification procedures. Teachers hold appropriate internal verifier awards. Sound justification is offered for internal verification decisions. In English, humanities, and arts and media, teachers use moderators' and chief examiners' reports for planning and monitoring their courses.

19. The college encourages parental involvement. All parents of new students are invited to an introductory evening, where college policies and staff roles and responsibilities are explained. Attendance at the twice-yearly parents' evenings is good. Parents' views are sought by means of a

questionnaire that is given out during these events. Any parents who cannot attend the evening are contacted by telephone to discuss their child's progress. Detailed information is recorded in students' planners and most parents check these regularly.

20. The college serves the post-16 educational needs of young people from the Catholic partner high schools. It also draws students from other schools in the area. The contact with high schools is strong. There are open days, information evenings and personal interviews for each pupil who applies to the college.

21. The college provides a good range of GCE AS/A-level subjects for full-time students aged 16 to 18. There are 28 different GCE AS/A-level subjects. The strong links with local partner schools enable the college to identify changing trends in the popularity of subjects. New GCE AS-level subjects are then planned and offered to meet the changing demands. For example, GCE AS-level courses in graphics and law were introduced in 2001. The proportion of students on full-time level 3 courses has been increasing over the last three years, even though one of the college's strategic aims is to recruit more students to other levels. There are few courses running at level 2. Attempts to recruit students to the GNVQ intermediate in health and social care have been unsuccessful.

22. The proportion of students progressing to HE is high in most subjects and most follow degree courses related to their subjects of study at college. Many students successfully gain entry to highly competitive degree courses.

23. The college offers a rich choice of enrichment activities that are advertised through email and bulletins. There are musical activities such as choirs, a wind band and a string group, sporting activities and a variety of other interesting activities. There are few yearlong programmes that students can select at the outset of their course. Although the college attempts to meet all demands, some students cannot take part in these activities because of clashes with their normal timetable.

24. There is a well-attended weekly act of collective worship at which participants display a strong sense of community. All staff and students attend college-wide religious celebrations on four occasions in the year. These are well prepared and care is taken to include contributions from staff and students. Religious education staff and the chaplaincy offer regular opportunities for prayer and reflection. Religious education has a prominent place in students' programmes. The programme is broad and designed to cater for all students. It is well taught and well managed and students value it. The popular GCE A-level religious studies programme is also well taught. Evaluation and review of some of the activities directly related to the college's Catholic ethos and mission are not sufficiently rigorous. For example, there is not enough attempt to identify the effectiveness of assemblies and the religious education programme in meeting the specific needs of Catholic students.

25. Guidance and support are good and are consistent with the college's mission statement and student charter. Work in this area is managed effectively and staff with specific responsibilities for careers, learning support, registry and other aspects of provision, make a major contribution to student's well-being and progress. The chaplain works effectively with his team. There is a group of 10 personal tutors who have responsibility for students' pastoral care, and who call on specialist support when necessary.

26. Students considering entry to the college receive detailed and objective guidance. A strength of the system is that all staff, and some existing students, are involved in the marketing of courses and admissions procedures. Applicants are aware of the range of opportunities at the college and many make a conscious decision to apply because of the college's ethos and reputation for academic success. Students attend a useful 'taster' day. The enrolment procedures that follow are efficient. On entry, all students are assessed for communication and number skills. Learning support is provided for students needing specific help. Currently, about 130 students attend additional support sessions. The learning support centre is well resourced and the support provided is well targeted and effective. Many students also receive good subject support in class and in specially arranged sessions. Not all students who need extra help, however, take advantage of what is offered.

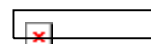
27. Personal tutors meet their groups each week and conduct formal reviews of each student's progress twice a year. Tutors use the college's management information system effectively to monitor attendance, attainment against targets and matters of concern. Subject staff also have access to the pastoral log, which contains much academic and personal information and which helps to ensure that teachers and tutors have an up-to-date picture of students' performance. The personal tutors run the pastoral programme, which is under pressure because of the time required for other activities. The programme includes careers opportunities for HE, study skills, health issues and general studies. Most of the sessions observed during the inspection were devoted to the general studies course, with teachers indicating the kind of examination questions that might arise and helping students to reflect on different types of knowledge. In a few lessons, tutors failed to make full use of the learning materials provided.

28. Careers guidance is very good and is highly regarded by students. The careers team is experienced and well qualified and resources are excellent. Students receive well-informed and impartial guidance, advice and counselling and are well supported. The local careers service is contracted to provide individual interviews and group sessions. Advice and guidance on HE are provided by careers staff. Candidates who apply to Oxford and Cambridge receive valuable help, including 'trial interviews.' Students make good use of the college intranet to seek advice and information about aspects of HE and employment. Students are encouraged to gain work experience, but only 65 students were involved last year. Special provision is made for students considering teaching as a career. In the limited time that is available for tutorial sessions, careers education and up-to-date information about the world of work receive little attention.

29. Students are well supported in their spiritual and moral development. The chaplaincy is increasing its provision, and staff and students are becoming more involved in its work. A small number of students each year attend a residential retreat. Staff and students promote the work of charities and there are small groups of students who work on behalf of the local and wider community. The college makes very good provision for students' welfare and students draw on a wide range of staff expertise. Students with financial problems are supported from access funds or education maintenance allowances, where available. The college is justly proud of its excellent retention record.

30. There is a good balance between providing students with clear structures for their work and developing their abilities to work autonomously. For example, first-year students are required to be present all day from 8.50am, whilst older students need not be on the premises when they do not have lessons. Most students agree that this approach helps them to settle into the college routine and make new friends. All students have a planner, in which targets and progress are noted and homework listed. Most students use their planners effectively and recognise the benefits. The student council performs a valuable role, representing the concerns of students to college managers, providing support for students and organising social and charitable events.

Leadership and management



31. Governors and senior managers promote the Catholic identity of the college effectively and this ethos is understood and valued by staff and students. Policy decisions are considered carefully so that they reflect the mission. The college has identified as a strategic objective for 2001/02 its wish to further strengthen the ethos and mission of the college.

32. The college has made significant progress since the last inspection. A clear strategic planning process has been established, which is linked to the self-assessment process. Management and pastoral structures have been reorganised to give increased emphasis to quality assurance and the college's strategic priorities. The senior management team has succeeded in developing a self-critical attitude within the college and there has been a significant improvement in levels of achievement. Provision is good or outstanding in all of the curriculum areas inspected. However,

there is still unevenness across the curriculum in the effectiveness of learning and students' attainments. Some students are still under achieving.

33. Changes to the management structure have strengthened the links between and promoted greater consistency in the quality of, academic and pastoral work. Detailed job descriptions emphasise the need for staff to focus upon raising standards. There are many examples of effective leadership by heads of subject. The college's management information system is excellent. The information it provides for teachers, tutors and managers is accessible, comprehensive, and is used effectively to monitor of students' progress and achievement. Communication within the college is good. Staff value the accessibility of senior managers.

34. Comprehensive, clear systems for quality assurance and self-assessment have been established. Teaching and support staff understand them and are fully involved. Self-assessment reports are subject to a validation process, and there are many examples of good practice. There is, however, insufficient rigour with which value added, lesson observation and feedback from students are used in some areas. Not all self-assessment reports and operating plans identify weaknesses effectively, or the actions required to deal with them. There are effective procedures for staff induction and for reviewing the professional development of support staff and teachers.

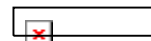
35. In consultation with staff, governors have reviewed the mission statement and established strategic priorities for 2001/02. Governors know the college well and work effectively with senior managers. The governing body is well informed about the college's academic and financial performance; it monitors both closely and seeks to promote higher levels of achievement. Governors play a valuable role in the validation of self-assessment reports. There is effective induction and training for governors. Attendance at governors' meetings is satisfactory. Governors have taken steps to evaluate their own performance and they recognise the need to develop this aspect of their work.

36. Staff and student induction programmes include an effective introduction to the college's Catholic mission. All are invited to take part in chaplaincy activities, assemblies and charity work. The college's commitment to equality of opportunity is reflected in its overall mission, and in its policies and procedures. Students and staff value the college's emphasis on equality. Their views on aspects of the college's work are sought regularly. Action is taken to address issues, and feedback is given to those concerned. All students, whatever their faith, have equal access to the college's facilities and services. Equality of opportunity issues form part of staff training and the students' tutorial programme. They are also introduced into lessons; for example, as part of a graphics topic, one student was working on an imaginative project using typography from different cultures. There is, however, no commitment to ensure that all students aged 16 to 18 take part in the college's programme of enrichment activities, and there is no monitoring of students' participation.

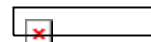
37. There is a lack of clarity in the college's strategic direction regarding provision other than level 3. The college has a stated strategic objective to develop the curriculum at all levels, but provision at levels 1 and 2, for students aged 16 to 18, has been reduced in recent years, and recruitment strategies to reverse falling enrolments have not succeeded. The college's development plan contains no reference to level 2 programmes. The college has attempted to widen participation by establishing an adult evening programme, and through its collaboration with Liverpool Hope University College. The adult evening provision, however, is small, and its future direction is not clear.

38. Financial management is good. The college's financial position is monitored effectively, costs are controlled and financial targets have been met. The capital project has been managed effectively. The college has assessed itself as financial health category A.

Part C: Curriculum and occupational areas



Science



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

Strengths

- high retention and pass rates
- much good teaching
- regular and rigorous assessment
- strong support for students
- effective leadership and management that has raised achievements.

Weaknesses

- failure of some students to achieve the grades predicted for them
- unsatisfactory health and safety arrangements in some classes.

Scope of provision

39. Provision in the sciences consists mainly of GCE A and AS-level courses in biology, chemistry and physics, and all students are aged 16 to 18. The courses attract a large number of students and 308 of the 697 students studying science take biology. There are currently 14 students enrolled on GCSE science. The college has taken steps to address the low number of female students and the declining number of students progressing from GCE AS level to GCE A level in physics, which include the introduction of a new course.

Achievement and standards

40. Retention rates on most courses are above national averages. In some cases, they are high. For example, in 2001, retention rates in GCE A-level biology and on the GCSE single science course were well above the national average. In 2001, pass rates were high in GCE A-level chemistry and physics, GCE AS-level biology and GCSE science. There was a significantly greater proportion of high grades in GCE A-level physics in 2001. However, the percentage of high grades in GCE A-level chemistry is declining and was significantly below the national average in 2001. The percentage of high grades in GCE AS-level physics was also low. Some GCE A-level students are failing to reach the grades predicted for them on the basis of their performance at GCSE.

41. The number of students progressing to the second year of GCE A-level physics fell significantly in 2001, while the number of GCE A-level biology students entering the second year continued to increase. Students' practical skills are good. They use equipment confidently and with dexterity. Some students have achieved success in enrichment activities. For example, three students received gold 'crest' awards for their research and practical work in science. Written work, at its best, shows that students have developed good analytical and research skills and can express themselves maturely. Displays of students' work from the biology field trip were good. Most students have developed the mathematical skills necessary for their numerical work in the sciences. In physics, students manipulated formulae confidently. In chemistry, however, some were unable to carry out the calculations on reaction rates. A high proportion of students progresses to science-related degree courses in HE.

A sample of retention and pass rates in science, 1999 to 2001

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
GCSE science	2	No. of starts	39	9	8
		% retention	92	78	100
		% pass rate	47	43	100
GCE A-level biology	3	No. of starts	95	124	138
		% retention	86	90	90
		% pass rate	63	93	88
GCE A-level chemistry	3	No. of starts	79	103	98
		% retention	88	87	86
		% pass rate	97	93	93
GCE A-level physics	3	No. of starts	60	85	78
		% retention	90	85	81
		% pass rate	86	67	95

Source: ISR (1999 and 2000), college (2001).

Quality of education and training

42. Much of the teaching was good. The most effective lessons contained a suitable range of activities and took account of students' preferred methods of learning. For example, the teacher's inputs on the topic of enzymes were interspersed with brief tasks for individuals and groups some involving the use of music and visual images or drawing on analogies and real-life examples. Students responded well to the tasks and were clearly developing their understanding of the topic. In a GCSE science revision lesson, students' interest was sustained through effective group activities aimed at building their confidence. In most lessons, teachers were enthusiastic and approachable and the students well motivated. In less effective lessons, some students took no part in discussions, tasks given in class or for homework were not demanding enough for the more able students, or teachers' poor time management meant that weaker students were not making

sufficient progress. Although there are thorough risk assessments for all experiments, teachers sometimes failed to check that safety precautions were being properly implemented. For example, not all students were wearing safety glasses in potentially hazardous situations.

43. Opportunities are provided for students to develop their key skills in science lessons. In one very effective lesson, physics students were developing their IT and communication skills by producing an information sheet on Hubble's constant, using the Internet to capture data and images. Teachers provide a good range of learning resources, which help to encourage students to work on their own. For example, there are very good self-assessment tests, linked to past examination papers and mark schemes which are available in written form and on the science intranet. Teachers also share resources effectively through the use of the intranet. In biology, there are hyperlinks to key documents, such as lesson plans and work schemes.

44. Teachers are well qualified and suitably experienced. Technicians provide effective support to staff and students and one of them has now progressed to become an instructor. The college is installing a lift to the science accommodation, which is currently inaccessible to wheelchair users. Some laboratories are too small for the larger classes and present a risk to safe working. There is a good range of equipment and enough items of equipment to ensure that all students can work effectively to develop their practical skills. Chemistry students can make use of an infra red spectrophotometer. Some physics equipment is outdated.

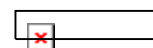
45. Regular and rigorous assessments, and good additional support for those who need it, help to ensure that students make effective progress. Students' performance against targets is discussed at regular progress review meetings. Work in all of the sciences is marked fairly and returned promptly. In chemistry and biology, students receive detailed comments on their work that give them a clear indication of how to improve their performance. In chemistry, teachers' comments include performance targets, information on where relevant resources can be found, and indications of which support workshops would be of most benefit. The comments made by physics teachers are sometimes less helpful, but the teachers offer students good opportunities to discuss their work and, where appropriate, encourage them to attend support sessions, including masterclasses for the more able.

46. There are opportunities for students to participate in some enrichment activities. For example, most students in biology take part in the annual field trip and more able students also participate in the biology Olympiad, in which they have had some success. Physics students do well in terms of external awards and the University of Salford engineering project. At present, there are no adults studying sciences.

Leadership and management

47. Leadership and management in the sciences are good. Managers understand their role in raising standards. Self-assessment and action planning are thorough and effective and have led to improvements. Students' views are collected and analysed systematically and, where appropriate, action is taken to address students' concerns. Subject managers receive timely and accurate data for planning and quality assurance purposes. Teaching and technical staff in the sciences feel valued and well supported by managers. Lesson observations are carried out regularly and the outcomes of these are used in drawing up the self-assessment report. In conducting their lesson observations, however, staff do not give enough attention to learning. The grades awarded to lessons as part of the observation scheme were generally higher than the grades awarded by inspectors.

Mathematics



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

Strengths

- good examination results in GCE A-level further mathematics
- good teaching
- effective management.

Weaknesses

- low proportion of students progressing from GCE AS-level to year 2 GCE A-level mathematics
- insufficient use of IT.

Scope of provision

48. The college offers mathematics courses to full-time students aged 16 to 18. At GCE AS level, there are 176 students. At the end of the first year, GCE AS-level students take examinations in pure mathematics with either mechanics or statistics. Further mathematics students take the full GCE A level in mathematics at the end of the first year. There has been a significant decline in the number of students progressing to the second year of study in GCE A-level mathematics, following the introduction of the new GCE AS-level examinations. The GCSE repeat course has about 50 students. At the time of the inspection, GCSE lessons had been suspended, pending the results of the November examinations.

Achievement and standards

49. The pass rate for GCE A-level mathematics rose substantially in 2001, and is now at the national average. The proportion of students achieving higher grades, A to C, is also in line with the national average. Results in further mathematics are very good. All students have passed the GCE A-level examination for three consecutive years and, in 2001, 15 of the 26 students gained grade A. Although some further mathematics students resit modules in their second year, their GCE A-level results at the end of the first year are comparable with the results of those who have studied GCE A level over two years. A high proportion of students progress to HE, mainly to study mathematics courses or courses containing a substantial amount of mathematics. Pass rates in GCSE mathematics are in line with national averages.

50. Students are attentive and work effectively in lessons. No unsatisfactory class work was observed during the inspection. Homework is set regularly. Students' work is of a high standard. It is marked effectively and returned promptly. Levels of attendance and punctuality are high.

A sample of retention and pass rates in mathematics, 1999 to 2001

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
GCSE mathematics	2	No. of starts	94	83	57
		% retention	91	99	96
		% pass rate	34	56	49
GCE A-level mathematics	3	No. of starts	114	119	102
		% retention	88	90	80
		% pass rate	84	79	90
GCE A-level further mathematics	3	No. of starts	20	31	26
		% retention	85	74	77
		% pass rate	100	100	100

Source: ISR (1999 and 2000), college (2001).

Quality of education and training

51. Of the lessons observed, 81% were at least good and there were none which were unsatisfactory. Planning of teaching and learning is thorough, and there are weekly meetings at which matters relating to teaching and learning are discussed. There are detailed schemes of work, homework schedules, and banks of homework questions. Clear explanations of new topics, careful questioning of individual students to help develop their understanding and good supporting materials, all contribute to the good teaching. However, the centrally planned approach to teaching sometimes leads teachers to focus too much on the average student, and to neglect the more and less able. In a very effective lesson to introduce the concept of logarithms, students worked in small groups and developed a good understanding of the general principles. A different introductory lesson on logarithms was much less successful. The more able students were able to follow the teacher's explanations, but other students were not.

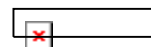
52. Teachers in mathematics are well qualified. They all have a mathematics degree and most have a teaching qualification. Their enthusiasm for their subject motivates students and encourages participation. Mathematics is well accommodated in modern well-designed rooms that are close to library and IT facilities. There is, however, insufficient use of IT. Classes do not use the IT suite and although teachers have identified appropriate opportunities, students are still not making use of the Internet in their work. Teachers are aware that this area needs developing and a start has been made on putting lesson notes and revision work on the college intranet.

53. Monitoring of students' progress is greatly helped by initial assessment of each student's potential, based on GCSE grades on entry. Assessment data relating to students' performance with homework and tests are recorded centrally and all staff have access to the data, enabling them to monitor individual students' progress effectively. Additional help, provided informally or through workshops, is available for those who need it. The college has established criteria for referring students in need of additional support, but these are not applied systematically.

Leadership and management

54. The mathematics department is well managed. Managers have worked hard to raise standards and to improve the standard of teaching and other aspects of the department's work. Past and present weaknesses are identified in the department's self-assessment report and plans to address them are realistic. Schemes of work and lesson plans are prepared carefully, lessons are observed on a regular basis and there are annual discussion forums with students to help identify areas for development. The GCE AS-level results for September 2000, although close to the national average, have been identified by the department as a cause for concern. The low numbers going on to take second year GCE A-level courses is a weakness which needs to be addressed.

Business studies



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

Strengths

- high retention rates
- high pass rates on GCE AS/A-level courses
- carefully planned lessons
- thorough monitoring of students' progress
- effective academic support for students outside lessons.

Weaknesses

- low pass rate on the GNVQ intermediate course
- insufficient focus on current business practice
- under use of information and communications technology (ICT) in teaching and learning.

Scope of provision

55. The college offers GNVQ intermediate, GCE A and AS-level, and AVCE courses in business. Economics is offered at GCE A and AS level. The courses are provided mainly for full-time students aged 16 to 18. There are currently 19 GNVQ intermediate business students, 45 AVCE students, 259 GCE AS and A-level business studies students and 68 economics students.

Achievement and standards

56. Retention and pass rates are high on all GCE AS and A-level courses. Pass rates in GCE A-level business studies have exceeded national averages for the last three years, and reached 99% in 2001. Pass rates for the GNVQ advanced course, though declining, have been above or at the national average in each of the last three years. GCE A-level economics pass rates have improved and are now above the national average. In 2001, there were high pass rates in GCE AS-level business and economics. The proportion of students achieving high grades, A to C, on GCE A-level business and GCE AS-level accounting is consistently high and rising. Most students achieve the grades predicted for them. The proportion of students gaining a high grade in GNVQ advanced has fallen over the last three years, and is now well below the national average. The pass rate for GNVQ intermediate has also declined. In 2001, it was below the national average.

57. A high proportion of students progress to HE. Of those who completed a GCE A-level business course in 2001, many went on to take a business-related degree course. A high proportion of the students who completed GCE AS-level business in 2001, progressed to study the subject at GCE A level. The standard of work in lessons is at least satisfactory or better. Students are attentive and make thoughtful contributions. For example, in a lesson on marketing, students confidently commented on the gender stereotypes common in old television advertisements. Students apply themselves well to the tasks they are set. In an economics lesson, students were able to make accurate use of the newly learned concepts of public, merit and demerit goods and services, in discussing government policy. Students' written work is of a high standard.

A sample of retention and pass rates in business studies, 1999 to 2001

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
GNVQ intermediate business	2	No. of starts	18	20	18
		% retention	67	70	94
		% pass rate	83	100	65
GCE A-level business studies	3	No. of starts	84	77	78
		% retention	87	82	88
		% pass rate	97	97	99
GCE A-level economics	3	No. of starts	31	22	31
		% retention	87	91	87
		% pass rate	84	70	93
GNVQ advanced business	3	No. of starts	21	15	16
		% retention	86	87	94
		% pass rate	88	92	80

Source: ISR (1999 and 2000), college (2001).

Quality of education and training

58. In 69% of the lessons observed, teaching was at least good. Lessons are carefully planned to build on and consolidate previous learning and to develop students' understanding. Teachers demonstrate good knowledge of their subject. In the best lessons, they organise work effectively, introducing activities which take account of students' preferred methods of learning. Lessons include small-group work, displays, presentations and case studies. Teachers ensure that activities are conducted at a suitably brisk pace. They explain new concepts clearly and set tasks to check students' understanding. They also provide careful prompting and guidance to students when they work individually or in small groups. Handouts and overhead projector slides are well presented and the content is good. Teachers encourage students to undertake wide reading and research. Follow-up work is planned to consolidate what has been learned in lessons and to develop additional skills.

In less effective lessons, work is not pitched at the right level for students or there are long periods in which students are expected to do little, other than listen to the teacher. In some cases, the tasks set for homework are not demanding enough for the more able students.

59. Teachers regularly compare the standard of students' work with what might be expected based on their previous qualifications. Under performance is noted, and the students concerned are invited to take advantage of extra help from teachers outside lesson time. Students who attend these additional sessions value them, but few take advantage of this opportunity.

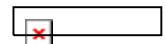
60. In most lessons, there is insufficient focus on current business practice. Teachers do not make use of students' experiences of business. There are few visiting speakers or industrial visits and few opportunities for students to relate the theory they have learned to the real world. There is not enough use of IT in lessons. Students make extensive use of the Internet for research work, but significant business applications of IT, such as cash flow forecasting and breakeven analysis, are not introduced in lessons. IT resources are some distance from the classrooms used for business, and this tends to restrict their use.

61. Students have regular assignments to complete. Their work is marked and returned promptly and teachers provide detailed and helpful written comments. There are effective procedures for internal verification on vocational courses, but little formal checking of the evenness of standards of marking on GCE AS and A-level courses. Teaching staff are appropriately qualified. Several hold assessor awards and all have a teaching qualification. Few have recent relevant commercial experience. Most classrooms used for business courses have good wall displays of relevant material. Students have ready access to computers when working on their own. The library holds an adequate stock of books and CD-ROMs on business subjects. The college intranet is a useful resource to guide students' research, particularly in economics.

Leadership and management

62. The curriculum area is well managed. Teachers work well as a team, sharing learning materials. They regularly review students' progress and the effectiveness of the courses they teach. New teachers receive good support from an experienced member of the team. Levels of achievement are rigorously compared with national averages during course reviews. Operating plans resulting from the curriculum area's self-assessment do not adequately address all of the weaknesses identified.

Computing and IT



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

Strengths

- high pass and retention rates
- good IT resources
- well-managed courses

- effective support for students.

Weaknesses

- some ineffective teaching
- failure to meet the learning needs of some students.

Scope of provision

63. The computing and IT provision includes GCE A level computing, IT, GCE AS-level computing and ICT. Evening classes in computer literacy and information technology (CLAIT), European computer driving licence (ECDL), integrated business technology (IBT 2), and basic computing are aimed specifically at adults. The courses attract about 360 aged 16 to 18. There are also 250 full-time students on IT key skills courses and 150 adults studying on part-time courses.

Achievement and standards

64. Pass and retention rates on full-time GCE A-level, GCE AS-level and most evening courses are high. In 2001, four GCE A-level computing students were amongst the top five achievers in the country for the relevant awarding body. Students' grades at GCE A level are at or above those expected on the basis of their previous qualifications. The pass rate on the CLAIT one-year course is below the national average and the self-assessment report has identified this.

65. Project work and class work are generally of a high standard and meet the requirements of awarding bodies. Students confidently use the Internet and a range of technologies including the college intranet, bulletin boards and the computer network.

A sample of retention and pass rates in computing and IT, 1999 to 2001

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
CLAIT 1 year	1	No. of starts	92	254	83
		% retention	96	92	94
		% pass rate	66	63	58
CLAIT short	1	No. of starts	87	65	75
		% retention	92	97	94
		% pass rate	55	42	76
IBT 1 year	2	No. of starts	*	54	36
		% retention	*	87	92
		% pass rate	*	58	88
GCE A-level computing	3	No. of starts	75	71	82

		% retention	88	79	85
		% pass rate	80	98	94
GCE A-level IT	3	No. of starts	19	20	32
		% retention	100	79	78
		% pass rate	100	100	100

Source: ISR (1999 and 2000), college (2001).

* course did not run

Quality of education and training

66. Teachers work well as a team in organising teaching and learning. Documentation is well co-ordinated and each course has a range of booklets covering theoretical and practical aspects of the course. Schemes of work are well structured. Practical work is effectively managed and students pursue their project work at their own pace, receiving help as needed. Some of the theory teaching delivered through lectures is ineffective. Teachers make good use of overhead transparencies to accompany their presentations. They use question and answer technique to check students' understanding. In some lessons, there is too little variation of activity to maintain the interests of the students, which results in able students finding the work undemanding whilst others struggle to understand the concepts. In most lessons, teachers make good use of practical examples to illustrate concepts. However, some aspects of the development of computer systems, for example, how to manage and document projects, are not given enough attention.

67. Teachers are well qualified, enthusiastic and approachable. However, the team lacks recent industrial experience and there has been little opportunity for staff to upgrade their technical and specialist skills. Although teachers have taken part in the college staff development programme, the emphasis has been on developing more general skills. Teachers are satisfied with their roles and turnover of staff is low. There is insufficient sharing of good practice across different subjects. Students have contact with external companies for their projects, both at GCE AS and A level. Other industrial links, however, are underdeveloped.

68. There are excellent computing resources. The college-wide computer network has impressive facilities, including the ability to transmit large amounts of information very quickly. The system can handle video, sound and high quality pictures. Materials to augment the notes given to students in computing lessons are placed on the network for the students to use. Some written handouts, however, are unimaginative, containing too much text. Reference materials or materials intended for students to work with on their own fail to accommodate different learning needs.

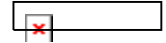
69. New students' needs are diagnosed and an individual learning plan is agreed between teacher and student. Students' progress is measured effectively against the targets set for them. Class tests are based on previous examination papers and students' performance in these tests is closely monitored. No formal homework is set. Generally the quality of work produced in class is of the required standard. Teachers make effective use of the college-wide database to track students' progress and to flag matters of concern.

70. Applicants are interviewed and offered places on appropriate computing or IT courses. A high proportion of level 3 students goes on to HE. Adult provision has recently been widened to include a well-structured and well-organised ECDL course. Students who are not performing satisfactorily are identified and receive additional help from the teacher. If this is not sufficient, however, the head of department sees individual students and discusses with them the support they need. Additional support includes after college sessions and working under the supervision of the head of department in lessons.

Leadership and management

71. The curriculum area is well managed and has effective procedures for responding to change. Work-schemes, lesson plans and assessment schedules have been produced, and staff have access to a bank of written resources. Students have been issued with helpful handbooks describing courses and requirements. Teachers have been slow to respond to feedback from students. In response to a recent questionnaire a low proportion of students agreed that teaching methods were suitably varied, yet no steps have been taken to ensure that this is taken into account in planning lessons.

Visual and performing arts and physical education



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

Strengths

- high retention and pass rates
- effective teaching
- rigorous monitoring of students' performance
- very good support for students
- effective leadership.

Weaknesses

- poor practical facilities and accommodation for visual arts and PE
- insufficient course provision at levels other than GCE AS/A level.

Scope of provision

72. Approximately 350 full-time students are currently studying GCE A level and AS level in art and design, textiles, graphics, drama and theatre studies, performance studies, music and PE. Students from across the college participate in the drama, dance, music and sports enrichment programme.

The department also offers the opportunity to gain the International Dance Teachers Association award at intermediate level. However, there is little provision at foundation and intermediate level to cater for students of lesser academic ability who may have the potential to succeed in the creative arts or sport. There are few opportunities for students to gain additional sporting or vocational qualifications.

Achievement and standards

73. There are high levels of achievement across all areas of the provision. Pass rates on GCE A-level courses are above national averages, some consistently so. In art, for example, there have been 100% pass rates for the last two years. In 2001, all students who completed GCE A-level PE, GCE AS-level art and design, and GCE AS-level theatre and drama studies courses, passed their examinations. Students also achieve high grades. In GCE AS-level theatre and drama studies, 95% of students completing the course gained A to C grades. The number of students who leave before finishing their courses is low, compared with the national averages.

74. The standard of work is high. Students attend regularly and make good progress. Written work is good and students show they are able to apply the theory they have learned to practical activities. In one lesson, students displayed a good grasp of the relevant theoretical concepts in critically analysing the effectiveness of the staging of their own play. Students are confident and articulate. They contribute to discussions, have a good understanding of the work they are doing, and can present well-reasoned arguments. In one art lesson, students were evaluating the work of other artists and comparing it with their own. They explained their ideas fluently and were appropriately critical of their own work. In art and design, textiles and graphics there is some innovative and vibrant work. Sketchbooks are generally well developed. In performing arts lessons, there were some polished performances in music, drama and dance. PE students, in their work, often took responsibility for organising group activities and supported each other effectively.

A sample of retention and pass rates in visual and performing arts and physical education, 1999 to 2001

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
GCE A-level art and design	3	No. of starts	45	59	46
		% retention	80	80	91
		% pass rate	97	100	100
GCE A-level music performance	3	No. of starts	15	9	*
		% retention	73	100	*
		% pass rate	90	100	*
GCE A-level theatre and dramatic arts	3	No. of starts	40	38	41
		% retention	83	92	93
		% pass rate	88	86	92
GCE A-level PE	3	No. of starts	47	52	41
		% retention	81	88	83
		% pass rate	92	89	100

Source: ISR (1999 and 2000), college (2001).

* course did not run

Quality of education and training

75. Most teaching is good and there are some examples of outstanding teaching. Theory and practical work are linked effectively and imaginatively. Performing arts students successfully explore complex concepts through practical improvisation. In PE, theory lessons are well planned and there is imaginative use of a range of learning aids and resources. In one anatomy and physiology lesson, the teacher used a pack of straws to demonstrate successfully the structure of skeletal muscle. Practical work in art and design shows that students have a strong awareness of theoretical contexts and an ability to analyse things critically. These abilities are less well developed in graphics.

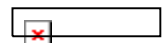
76. Students work hard, learn well and make good progress. Teachers are skilled in developing the potential of students with different levels of ability. Students rise to the challenges they are set. They work to individual performance targets and their progress is rigorously monitored and assessed. In visual and performing arts, good written feedback on coursework and homework provides students with a clear idea of their progress and how they can improve. In PE, however, teachers provide little written feedback to individuals. The emphasis is on verbal comments to the class as a whole. Students' progress in each subject is monitored carefully and records of progress are comprehensive. There are extra lessons for students who fall behind with work or who wish to have extra time and help in their subjects.

77. Students take part in a wide range of enrichment activities in art, music, drama, dance and sport. Many of these activities take the form of projects undertaken collaboratively with local schools and churches. Teaching staff are well qualified and they undertake regular staff development and training. The newly opened performance space and studio has provided students with a more professional experience and the opportunity to develop a wider range of skills. There are good facilities in IT for graphics students. However, practical facilities and accommodation in visual arts are poor. Lack of dedicated three-dimensional and textiles areas limits the work which students can undertake. There is not enough storage space in studios and working conditions are cramped. The activities hall used for PE is dilapidated and in need of refurbishment. It provides a multi-purpose facility for the college and is not always available for PE students. The college has no outdoor facilities for PE on site.

Leadership and management

78. Course teams are well managed and well led. Managers place a strong emphasis on students' achievement and the curriculum team gives great attention to detail in working to improve students' performance. Retention rates and pass rates have risen over the past three years. Equality of opportunity is sensitively explored within the curriculum. The three areas of visual arts, performing arts and PE produce accurate and rigorous self-assessment reports and detailed operating plans that are monitored effectively. Demanding targets are set and achieved. Weekly 'teaching and learning' meetings focus effectively on reviewing students' progress and developing teaching skills. There is much sharing of good practice within subject teams, but little collaboration between teachers of different subjects.

Psychology and sociology



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

Strengths

- high retention rates

- high pass rates in GCE A-level sociology
- effective and imaginative teaching
- well-resourced classrooms
- effective support for students.

Weaknesses

- failure of too many students to achieve their predicted grades.

Scope of provision

79. The college offers GCE AS and A-level courses in psychology and sociology. There are 248 GCE AS-level psychology students and 94 studying GCE AS-level sociology. In the second year at GCE A level, 124 students are studying psychology and 73 are studying sociology. Level 2 provision in psychology and sociology was withdrawn in response to issues raised at the last inspection. All students are aged 16 to 18.

Achievement and standards

80. Retention rates in psychology and sociology are above national averages, although the GCE A-level retention rate in sociology has been falling over the last three years. Pass rates in sociology are above national averages, and show a three-year rising trend. Pass rates in GCE A-level psychology match national averages.

81. The proportion of students achieving high grades, A to C, is low compared with national averages, although the proportion is rising in psychology. Many of the students fail to achieve their predicted grades.

A sample of retention and pass rates in psychology and sociology, 1999 to 2001

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
GCE A-level sociology	3	No. of starts	68	90	56
		% retention	88	84	80
		% pass rate	93	93	96
GCE A-level psychology	3	No. of starts	93	101	114
		% retention	83	84	91

		% pass rate	86	89	91
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Source: ISR (1999 and 2000), college (2001).

Quality of education and training

82. Teaching is good and learning effective. Some lessons are outstanding. Teaching methods are suitably varied and much of the work is imaginative. In a psychology lesson on the effects of disruption to biological rhythms, the teacher displayed a world map on an overhead projector and asked students to consider the effects of jet lag when travelling from New York to Paris and then from Vancouver to Berlin. This activity was followed up by group work in which students were required to examine case studies. Then a video was shown to help students consolidate what they had learned.

83. Lesson plans are comprehensive and well structured. Teachers make skilful and effective use of question and answer sessions to find out what students know and to help develop their understanding of the topic. In a sociology lesson about secularisation and new religious movements, the teacher chose appropriate questions to stretch both the most able students and less able students. In a minority of lessons, the pace of work was too slow, particularly during periods of group activity. In a different sociology lesson, the students were set an undemanding task which most of them completed well within the time allowed by the teacher. They were then left with nothing to do and quickly lost interest in the activity.

84. Classrooms are well equipped and teachers make good use of video and IT resources. In some lessons, students' work was disturbed by noise from adjacent rooms. Teachers are well qualified. Four members of the team are examiners in their subject. They make good use of this expertise, giving students valuable insights into the standards required for their examinations. All students are issued with up-to-date textbooks. There are also sets of books for classes, covering individual topics.

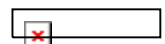
85. Students' work is marked and returned promptly, often in time for the next lesson. Teachers provide constructive comments on students' work, and grading is rigorous. There is, however, no formal system for the internal moderation of students' marked work.

86. Courses meet the needs and interests of the students who study them. However, there is no provision for students at level 2, or provision aimed specifically at adults. Students are guided and supported well and there is a heavy emphasis on success in examinations. Individual teachers give additional help to students by arranging teaching sessions for small groups at designated times. Attendance at these sessions, however, is low. Teachers make effective use of the pastoral log in responding to the needs of individual students.

Leadership and management

87. The area is managed effectively. Regular timetabled meetings are held in each subject and 'good practice' is discussed and shared at these meetings. The subject heads provide clear direction to course teams. This results in a consistent, well-structured approach to teaching and learning, from which students benefit. All staff contribute to the self-assessment process and give appropriate attention to retention and achievement rates in making judgements about the quality of provision.

Humanities, languages and religious studies



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

Strengths

- much good teaching
- high pass rates in GCE A-level geography, German, politics and religious studies
- high retention rates
- very good support for students
- effective management of curriculum teams.

Weaknesses

- low pass rates in history
- failure to meet the learning needs of all students in some lessons
- some ineffective operational planning.

Scope of provision

88. There are 649 students studying GCE A and AS-level courses in history, geography, law, politics, religious studies, French, German and Spanish. The introduction of GCE AS level in 2000 saw an increase in the number of students recruited. However, the number of modern languages students progressing from GCE AS level to GCE A level in modern languages has been low.

89. Almost all students are full time and aged 16 to 18. There is no separate provision of courses for part-time adult students and there are no language courses at levels 1 or 2 for non-specialists. Law was introduced at GCE AS level in 2001, in response to market demand. The curriculum area provides religious education for one period each week to all college students, as part of the college's mission.

Achievement and standards

90. Over the last three years, GCE A-level pass rates have been high in many of the humanities subjects. In geography, German, Spanish and religious studies, pass rates and percentages of students achieving high grades have been consistently above the national averages for sixth form colleges. In 2000, the pass rates at GCE A level were outstanding. Previously low pass rates in GCE A-level French rose in 2001, whilst pass rates in history have remained low. The first year of GCE AS level in 2001 produced some excellent results. The aggregated pass rate for all subjects was 93%, with 61% of candidates gaining A to C grades. Retention rates in all subjects have been well above national averages over the past three years.

91. Students' performance in lessons and their written work were of an appropriate standard. In most subjects, including those taken for the first time, students showed they were rapidly acquiring the requisite knowledge and skills.

A sample of retention and pass rates in humanities, languages and religious studies, 1999 to 2001

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
GCE A-level geography	3	No. of starts	74	75	80
		% retention	88	91	94
		% pass rate	98	100	93
GCE A-level history	3	No. of starts	62	80	84
		% retention	89	90	95
		% pass rate	80	77	78
GCE A-level government and politics	3	No. of starts	24	35	38
		% retention	92	86	92
		% pass rate	91	97	94
GCE A-level religious studies	3	No. of starts	17	32	31
		% retention	100	81	87
		% pass rate	100	96	100
GCE A-level modern foreign languages (French, German, Spanish)	3	No. of starts	59	77	61
		% retention	94	91	80
		% pass rate	92	95	93

Source: ISR (1999 and 2000), college (2001).

Quality of education and training

92. Most teaching is good or very good. Well-designed schemes of work and teaching programmes form an excellent framework for teaching and learning. Many of the schemes of work contain detailed information on key skills, modes of assessment, IT components, resources and learning methods. Lessons are well prepared, teaching methods are appropriate and learning resources are good.

93. Some of the teaching observed in history, politics and religious studies was exceptionally good, helping students to develop the knowledge, analytical skills and enthusiasm for further study. In a history lesson on the effects of the Treaty of Versailles, the failure to avoid the General Strike and the pros and cons of federalist and unitary governments, there was excellent group work, carefully organised to meet the needs of students of differing abilities. In a lesson in religious studies, the teacher gave a highly imaginative presentation of four complex interpretations of 'revelation' using a

variety of resources and students demonstrated their grasp of the issues in a good follow-up exercise. In geography, the quality and administration of the investigative coursework are very good and have been commended by external moderators.

94. Teachers are well qualified and dedicated to the interests of the students. They have trained and worked hard to ensure the effective implementation of Curriculum 2000. Their knowledge is up to date, their teaching methods are effective and they have assembled a good range of learning resources. Lessons in politics and law begin with the students reporting briefly on relevant news items for the day. Discussion of these items is good-humoured and helps to assert the relevance of the subject.

95. Most language teachers make extensive use of the target language. In the best lessons, they set the students demanding tasks, introduce learning materials which are relevant to everyday life and ensure that all the main language skills are practised. Grammatical points and new vocabulary are introduced naturally as part of classroom activities. However, the recording of vocabulary and phrases is not systematic enough, and the quality of students' reference notes varies. In some modern language lessons, teachers sometimes pay too little attention to the needs of students with differing abilities. There are foreign language assistants in all three languages and the work they do is linked to GCE A and AS-level topics.

96. In most lessons, students were attentive, eager to learn and willing to participate in discussion. In a few cases, teachers failed to exploit this fully. Students were expected to listen and take notes for an unreasonable length of time or to read long passages which could have been kept for them to read on their own. In most lessons, however, the choice of learning activities and the pace of the work ensured little time was wasted. Pressure on time to deliver the new GCE AS-level courses to the required specifications meant that teachers were pushed towards instruction and coaching in a significant minority of lessons. However, some balance was restored in subject support sessions and additional support sessions for students where students were able to discuss matters and ask questions. Teachers' good humour and willingness to share occasional anecdotes with students made many lessons easy and enjoyable.

97. The compulsory religious education programme is well received by students. The college has an open approach to religious issues and the views of learners are properly respected. In some sessions, however, theological aspects of the work were underdeveloped.

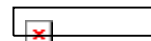
98. There are common assessment policies, which operate effectively. In most cases, work is set regularly and marked constructively and in detail. In some cases, teachers' comments on work are too cursory. Subject teachers and tutors monitor students' progress systematically. Targets and action plans arising from the biannual reviews of progress are entered in the students' planners for reference by students and staff.

Leadership and management

99. Leadership is good. Quality assurance procedures are well established and effective and cover all aspects of teaching, learning and achievement. Divisional managers play an important monitoring role, conducting lesson observations and analysing students' achievements. All subject teams meet monthly with the divisional manager.

100. Targets are set for pass and retention rates. Some of the weaknesses identified in the self-assessment reports are not sufficiently addressed in operational plans. For example, there has been a failure to address declining recruitment at GCE A level and the lack of level 2 and beginners courses in modern languages. Some 'actions' identified in operational plans are no more than descriptions of current practice.

English and media



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

Strengths

- high levels of achievement
- high standard of work by students
- imaginative and well-planned teaching programme
- excellent management structures and effective leadership.

Weaknesses

- there are no major weaknesses.

Scope of provision

101. The college offers a good range of provision for full-time students aged 16 to 18 in English language, literature and media. Courses are available at GCE AS and A level. There are 24 students enrolled on the GCSE English language re-take course. There are 474 students on the 3 English courses, 62 on the GCE A-level media course and 120 on the GCE AS-level media course. Each class has approximately 18 students. A high proportion of GCE A-level students progress to relevant degree courses, and a few go directly into employment.

Achievement and standards

102. Pass rates in English language and media are consistently well above the national average at GCE A level, GCE AS level and GCSE. Students do well in relation to the grades predicted for them on the basis of previous qualifications. Retention rates are also high. Performance in lessons and work in course files are of a high, and often very high, standard. GCE A-level English students performed well in group work, asking questions that were perceptive and giving lucid, entertaining talks on 'The Miller's Tale.' In a GCE A-level media lesson, students analysed the intended outcome of a soap opera episode, accurately identifying the camera techniques used to achieve certain dramatic effects. All students communicate confidently and work well together.

A sample of retention and pass rates in English and media, 1999 to 2001

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
GCSE English	2	No. of starts	62	32	24

language		% retention	94	88	88
		% pass rate	47	77	67
GCE A-level media studies	3	No. of starts	55	62	58
		% retention	84	81	86
		% pass rate	98	100	100
GCE A-level English language	3	No. of starts	51	70	78
		% retention	90	79	85
		% pass rate	98	96	96
GCE A-level English literature	3	No. of starts	130	130	120
		% retention	94	95	92
		% pass rate	98	96	96

Source: ISR (1999 and 2000), college (2001).

Quality of education and training

103. Teaching was graded good or better in 95% of lessons, and there were no unsatisfactory lessons. The teaching is interesting and authoritative, and learning resources are good. Teachers work in teams within their respective disciplines, and produce well-planned schemes of work. They are specialists in different aspects of the curriculum, regularly updating their knowledge through staff development initiatives, identified through the lesson observation system. They communicate their knowledge and enthusiasm to their students who, as a result, are highly motivated, read extensively and comment with authority on the topics in hand. In one class, students were introduced to political language through skilful use of a range of resources including video, overhead projector, handouts, a cards exercise and charts. The work was stimulating and they gained valuable insights into the nature of politics. In GCE A-level media, the teacher made use of a simple chart exercise to help students develop their ideas.

104. Students receive detailed and constructive feedback on their work, giving them a clear idea of their strengths and weaknesses. Coursework is assessed meticulously. Good use is made of the college's information services database, to monitor progress and to raise concerns where necessary. It is not always clear, however, how assessment outcomes affect planning and practice.

105. The department has recently moved into attractive, purpose-built accommodation, which is already acquiring its own identity with displays of students' work, poems and articles. Problems with acoustics and soundproofing caused disruption to the work of students in some lessons. The library is well stocked with suitable books and journals. The college has recently updated its editing suite, providing digital cameras, new camcorders and editing technology. All staff and second-year students have been trained to use the equipment. The course technician provides effective support and is a valued member of the team. He is part time, and is therefore not always available when students require help with project work.

106. All students have a useful period of induction to their course. Subject support is very good, whether in lessons, or on an individual basis out of lessons, or during lunchtime. A large number of students are successful in gaining entry to highly competitive degree courses each year.

Leadership and management

107. The department is organised into two course teams, under one divisional head. The teams work closely together, some teachers making inputs to both courses. Each team plans the course structure and the teaching and learning. Lesson plans are meticulous, identifying not only aims and desired learning outcomes, but also the appropriate methods of teaching and learning. The grading of lessons, carried out under the college's observation scheme, is realistic. Findings from lesson

observations are used in drawing up the staff development programme and in identifying and sharing good practice. All course books and records are of a high standard and the self-assessment report accurately identifies areas of weakness, with actions which need to be taken.

Part D: College data

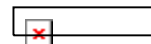
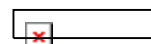


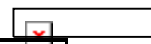
Table 1: Enrolments by level of study and age



Level	16-18 %	19+ %
1	0.0	34.6
2	24.5	15.2
3	61.5	0.0
4/5	0.0	0.0
Other	14.0	50.2
Total	100	100

Source: Provided by the college in spring 2001.

Table 2: Enrolments by curriculum area and age



Curriculum area	16-18 No.	19+ No.	Total Enrolments %
Science	2,608	112	33.3
Agriculture	0	0	0
Construction	0	0	0
Engineering	0	0	0
Business	308	91	4.9
Hotel and catering	0	0	0
Health and community care	73	0	0.9
Art and design	386	0	4.7
Humanities	4,560	7	55.9
Basic education	0	27	0.3
Total	7,935	237	100

Source: Provided by the college in spring 2001.

Table 3: Retention and achievement

Level (Long Courses)	Retention and pass rate	Completion year					
		16-18			19+		
		1997 / 98	1998 / 99	1999 / 2000	1997 / 98	1998 / 99	1999 / 2000
		1	Starters excluding transfers	24	114	181	1
	Retention rate (%)	92	94	93	*	*	90
	National average (%)	78	81	82	72	69	74
	Pass rate (%)	55	72	65	*	*	55
	National average (%)	69	71	77	67	75	76
2	Starters excluding transfers	276	813	98	0	0	53
	Retention rate (%)	81	92	82	*	*	87
	National average (%)	79	80	82	71	71	75
	Pass rate (%)	92	96	97	*	*	100
	National average (%)	84	85	82	75	77	77
3	Starters excluding transfers	2,172	1,944	2,212	11	0	0
	Retention rate (%)	87	85	86	73	*	*
	National average (%)	77	78	80	62	65	69
	Pass rate (%)	81	88	85	71	*	*
	National average (%)	86	85	85	69	71	74

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

Sources of information:

1. National averages: *Benchmarking Data (1997/98) to (1999/2000): Retention and Achievement Rates in Further Education Colleges in England, The Further Education Funding Council, September 2000.*

2. College rates for 1997/98 - 1998/99: *Benchmarking Data (1997/98) to (1999/2000): Retention and Achievement Rates, produced by the Further Education Funding Council, September 2000.*

3. College rates for 1999/2000 to: *provided by the college in spring 2001.*

* data not applicable

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

Courses	Teaching judged to be:			No of sessions observed
	Good or better %	Satisfactory %	Less than satisfactory %	
Level 3(advanced)	79.6	17.5	2.9	137
Level 2 (intermediate)	75.0	25.0	0.0	4
Level 1 (foundation)	100	0.0	0.0	2
Other sessions	85.7	14.3	0.0	7
Totals	80.0	17.3	2.7	150

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