



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE



Office for Standards
in Education

Queen Mary's College

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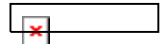
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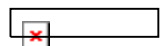
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Basic information about the college

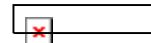


Name of college:	Queen Mary's College
Type of college:	Sixth Form College
Principal:	Stephen Sheedy
Address of college:	Cliddesden Road Basingstoke Hampshire RG21 3HF
Telephone number:	01256 417 500
Fax number:	01256 417 501
Chair of governors:	Cllr Don Allen
Unique reference number:	130700
Name of reporting inspector:	Harriet Harper HMI
Date of inspection:	10-14 March 2003

Part A: Summary



Information about the college

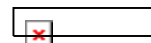


Queen Mary's College is a sixth form college in Basingstoke. It is the main provider of full-time general education courses in the area for students aged 16 to 18. The majority of students come from the Basingstoke and Deane area and from the Hart district. A local further education (FE) college is the main provider of vocational programmes. There are no state schools with sixth forms in the area. The majority of the students at the college are aged 16 to 18, with only 11% over 19 years of age. The number of students has increased considerably over the last three years, as has the proportion from areas of highest social deprivation. At the time of inspection, there were approximately 1,850 students aged 16 to 18 on full-time courses. Most of these students are studying for level 3 qualifications. About 20% of them are on courses leading to qualifications at levels 1 or 2. However, 73% of the adults are on courses at these levels. Most of the courses for adults take place in the evening at the college or are run as franchised programmes at four local schools. This provision is primarily in information technology (IT).

The college offers courses in nine of the 14 areas of learning funded by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The most substantial areas of work are in science, mathematics, humanities, English and modern foreign languages, information and communications technology (ICT), and visual and performing arts. Provision in business, leisure and sport is smaller. Health and social care courses, foundation programmes and courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have fewer enrolments and were not inspected.

The college's mission emphasises its commitment to attracting learners from a wide ability range and background. Particular focus over the last five years has been on the schools in the most deprived wards in the district. In all four schools, the proportion of Year 11 school leavers recruited has risen over the period. In the most deprived area, this proportion has risen from 26% to 37%, and in the next most deprived area, from 20% to 30%. The proportion of students at the college who are from minority ethnic groups is less than 5%, but is higher than the proportion of persons from such groups in the local population. Overall, students' achievements are high. In all curriculum areas, teaching is good and students learn effectively.

How effective is the college?



All curriculum areas inspected were judged to be good. Leadership and management of the college are outstanding. The college's key strengths and the areas that should be improved are listed below.

Key strengths

- very good teaching in all curriculum areas
- high pass rates on many courses
- outstanding leadership and management

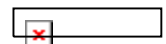
- well-qualified and enthusiastic staff
- very good guidance and support for students
- rigorous monitoring of students' progress
- broad range of level 3 courses.

What should be improved

- students' punctuality for lessons
- retention and pass rates on some courses
- use of information and learning technology (ILT) in some curriculum areas
- effectiveness of group tutorials.

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

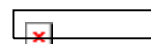


The table below shows overall judgements about provision in subjects and courses that were inspected. Judgements are based primarily on the quality of teaching, training and learning and how well students achieve. Not all subjects and courses were inspected. Inspectors make overall judgements on curriculum 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
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Science	Good. There is very good teaching by well-qualified staff. There is a broad range of academic General Certificate in Education Advanced Subsidiary (GCE AS) and Advanced-level (A-level) provision. ILT is used effectively and the accommodation and resources are good. Pass rates in some subjects are below the national average.
Mathematics	Good. Pass and retention rates on many courses are high. Teaching is very good and helps students to work effectively on their own. Students' progress is monitored closely. Teachers produce good learning resources. There is insufficient use of ILT in lessons.
Business, leisure, sport and tourism	Good. There is much good teaching and students learn effectively. Retention and pass rates on intermediate courses are high. Retention rates are low on Advanced Vocational Certificate in Education (AVCE) courses. Pass rates are high on GCE A-level economics and GCE AS courses. Sports facilities are excellent. There are no work placements for students on leisure and sports courses at levels 2 and 3.
Information and communications technology	Good. Leadership and management of ICT provision are effective. Teaching and support for students are good. There is a broad range of provision at level 3. Retention rates on many courses are high, but they are low on GCE AS IT and computer literacy and information technology (CLAIT) courses. Some lessons are disrupted by the late arrival of students.
Art, design and photography	Good. Retention and pass rates on GCE A-level art studies courses are high. Teaching is good. Students are well supported on all courses. Specialist facilities are good, although there is inadequate accommodation for students on AVCE art and design, and GCE AS textiles courses.
Performing arts and media	Good. Pass rates on most GCE AS and A-level courses are high. The range of courses at level 3 is wide, but few courses are offered at level 2. Teaching is good and students receive good help. Students benefit from being able to work in the college's professional theatre. There is some good accommodation for media, music and dance.
Humanities	Good. Teaching is good and students learn effectively. Retention and pass rates are high on most GCE A-level courses. Retention rates are low on some GCE AS courses. Students benefit from strong, individual support, pleasant accommodation and resources, and an extensive range of enrichment activities. Learning is disrupted in some lessons by the late arrival of students.
English and modern foreign languages	Good. There are high pass rates on GCE AS and A-level courses. Many students achieve high grades in GCE A-level English literature. Staff work well together and much of the teaching is lively, good and successfully innovative. Assessment of students' work is thorough. With the exception of the outdated and unreliable language laboratory, resources are good.

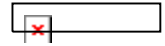
How well is the college led and managed?



Leadership and management of the college are outstanding. The college has carefully and meticulously addressed all the weaknesses identified in the last inspection report. In particular, it has established a rigorous quality assurance system and has focused intensely on improving the

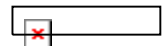
and widening participation. The college's management team provides strong leadership. Managers consult widely before making decisions. At all levels, managers give their staff clear directions. Governors play a significant role in the life of the college. They bring a range of professional skills to the institution and are involved in the monitoring of students' performance. Financial management is very good.

To what extent is the college educationally and socially inclusive?



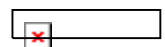
The college's response to education and social inclusion is good. With a major drive to widen and increase participation, the range of provision has expanded considerably over the last few years. The college meets the academic and social needs of learners aged 16 to 18. It provides discrete courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and has extended its provision for part-time adult learners.

How well are students and trainees guided and supported?



Students receive very good guidance and support at the college. Links with schools are well established and prospective students are given appropriate advice. The induction process is effective in introducing students to the college and enabling them to settle into their studies. Students' individual learning needs are identified and addressed promptly and sensitively. Very good support is provided through timetabled and drop-in one-to-one sessions in the skills centre. Learning assistants provide valuable support in the classroom for students on level 1 and 2 courses. There is a comprehensive tutorial system. Some group tutorials, however, are not planned or structured well and students do not gain a great deal from them. Students value the considerable individual help they get from tutors. They also appreciate the support and guidance provided through the centrally sited helpdesk.

Students' views of the college



Students' views about the college were taken into account and are summarised below.

What students like about the college

- very helpful teachers

- helpful support staff, particularly in the library

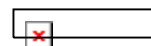
- sports facilities

- extra-curricular activities
- pleasant environment and friendly atmosphere
- being treated like adults
- initial advice and induction.

What they feel could be improved

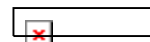
- group tutorials to make them more relevant
- over-priced, unattractive food in the college café
- temperature control in classrooms
- too few toilets.

Other information



The college inspection report will normally be published 12 working weeks after the formal feedback of the inspection findings to the college. Once published, the college has two months in which to prepare its post-inspection action plan and submit it to the local LSC. The college's action plan must show what action the college will take to bring about improvements in response to issues raised in the report. The governors should agree it before it is submitted to the local LSC. The local LSC is responsible for ensuring that, where inspectors have judged there to be unsatisfactory or poor provision in a curriculum area or in leadership and management, the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) receives the college's post-inspection action plan within the stipulated two months.

Part B: The college as a whole



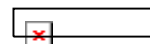
Summary of grades awarded to teaching and learning by inspectors

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	80	18	2
19+ *	88	12	0
Learning 16-18	78	20	2
19+ *	88	12	0

* this represents 8 of the 156 lessons observed

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

Achievement and standards



1. A wide range of subjects and courses are offered at the college at levels 1, 2 and 3. The range is particularly wide at level 3, with approximately 46 GCE AS/A-level subjects offered, as well as a number of AVCE and national diploma programmes. The number of students has increased considerably over the last three years. Timetables have been devised that allow students to select and study five GCE AS subjects or combinations of GCE AS subjects with General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) courses, or with General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) or GCE A-level courses. Approximately one third of the first-year students are studying five GCE AS subjects. They are encouraged to include a subject that contrasts with the other elements of their programme. Some students then drop a subject and the retention rates for programmes are then adversely affected. At the time of the inspection, the overall retention rate for students on GCE AS courses was high, at 86%.

16 to 18 year olds

2. Retention rates for students on level 1 courses have improved each year over the last three years to a very high rate of 93%, which is ten percentage points above the national average for sixth form colleges. In 2001, the overall retention rates for courses at levels 2 and 3 were 81% and 86% respectively, and in line with the national average. Current retention rates vary considerably. For example, the proportion of students who have left GCE A-level courses is only 5%, but approximately 25% of students have left GCSE and GNVQ foundation and intermediate courses. In 2001/02, there were some exceptionally high retention rates, such as those on GCE A-level government and politics, further mathematics and GNVQ intermediate in leisure and tourism courses, at 100%. On the other hand, retention rates on GCE AS film/video courses and on AVCE double award courses in leisure and recreation, and travel and tourism were under 60%, and well below the national average.

3. Pass rates at levels 1 and 3 have risen steadily over the last three years and are now at the national average. Pass rates at level 2 have declined and in 2002 were poor at 74%, which is nine percentage points below the national figure. In 2000, the average points score for students taking two or more GCE A-level subjects dropped, following the inclusion of students' AVCE results in the calculation. In 2002, however, the students' average points score rose from 16.9, the figure for the previous year calculated by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), to 20.9, a figure calculated by the college. In 2001, many students were extremely successful and achieved GCE AS and A-level grades higher than those predicted for them on the basis of their GCSE scores on entry. The proportion of students who obtained grades higher than those predicted for them in at least two subjects, was approximately 13%. In 2002, however, this proportion declined and most students achieved no more than their predicted grades.

4. Most students are confident and able to ask perceptive questions or enter into knowledgeable discussion with each other and their teachers. In some subjects, such as mathematics, students are developing their investigative skills effectively. In humanities and many other subjects, students produce some very good written work and are able to sustain an argument or develop a point of view well. Where students are asked to make presentations in lessons, they do so effectively. For example, students on philosophy courses gave some excellent presentations in class. Students' practical work is good. For example, some students on science courses produce work of a higher standard than that required at the particular stage of their programme. On art and design courses, students develop their sketchbooks and explore the use of different media well. In a number of areas, students are entered for local, regional or national competitions. For example, chemistry students have won the Sixth Form Chemist of the Year Award in 2001 and in 2002, and students on the media course won the Surrey Film/Video Festival Animation Award. Many students also represent the college in different sports at county and national level.

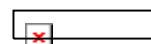
5. In a number of courses, some students fail to attend regularly or are late for lessons. In 2001/02, few students achieved certification in key skills. Many students failed to complete their portfolios of evidence of their acquisition of key skills and many absented themselves from the key skills examination. The pass rate for those students who sit the key skills examination, however, is high. The way key skills are taught has now been revised. Many students progress to higher education (HE) or employment. Approximately, 70% of students on GCE A-level or AVCE courses go on to HE or have a gap year, and 21% take up employment.

Adult learners

6. There are fewer students over 19 years of age, and nearly all of them attend evening classes. Retention rates for these students at levels 1, 2 and 3 are below those for students aged 16 to 18. The overall retention rate for students over the age of 19 on courses at level 1 is in line with the national average, but that for courses at levels 2 and 3 is 11 percentage points below it. In 2001/02, the overall retention rate for students over the age of 19 on GCE A-level courses was 79%, but on GCE AS and GCSE courses, it was under 55%.

7. Pass rates at levels 2 and 3 are high and above the national average. For example, pass rates for GCE A-level and GCSE courses are very high. Pass rates on level 1 courses are low, however, at 47%, which is 19 percentage points below the national average.

Quality of education and training



8. Teaching was good or better in 81% of the 156 lessons observed. Only 2% of teaching was unsatisfactory. In all curriculum areas, the teaching is good and students learn effectively. One or more outstanding sessions were observed in science, business, sports and leisure, ICT and English. Teaching was better on level 3 courses than on courses at levels 1 and 2. Only a few lessons on courses at levels 1 and 2, however, were observed.

9. Lessons are thoroughly planned. Teachers have good subject knowledge and convey enthusiasm in lessons. They use imaginative approaches to stimulate interest and to help students learn effectively. These approaches include exposition, discussion, questioning, videos, games, quizzes and innovative tasks. In one chemistry session, for example, activities included a brief paper-based exercise to review previous work, molecular model building by each student and presentations involved use of both the digital projector and carefully prepared slides on the overhead projector. In a mathematics lesson, students working in groups were given cards upon which mathematical functions had been written. They had to sort these cards out and arrange them in three different piles according to whether the stated functions were correct, incorrect or possibly valid. The tasks helped the students to develop their analytical skills and their ability to work together effectively. Students in an ICT lesson, on a GNVQ intermediate course, successfully used a variety of packages to design a set of assembly instructions for a child's toy.

10. In the less successful lessons, some students were not sufficiently challenged to think and use their skills to the full and they lost interest. In some cases, teachers fail to pay enough attention to individual students' needs. Lesson aims were not always clearly communicated to students and some learners remained unsure of what is expected of them. In a few lessons, teachers did not check students' understanding sufficiently. On some courses, lessons were disrupted by students who arrived late.

11. Teachers prepare very good learning resources for their students. The teacher of an evening GCE AS film studies lesson, for example, compiled a page of review notes every week giving information on the key points of the previous lesson and provided a narrative to accompany the handouts. These notes enabled students to revise or catch up on what they had missed. Students on graphic design courses and also those on a GCE A-level early modern history course are given excellent handouts. Students on mathematics courses value the helpful workbooks produced for them by teachers.

12. A new permanently staffed training centre for staff has led to a significant increase in the use of ILT and the college's intranet in the classroom. In science, business, economics and modern foreign languages, teachers and students make good use of ILT and the intranet. On computing, mathematics and some humanities courses, however, there is less use of ILT and the intranet.

13. Staff are well qualified. Priority is given to staff development to enable teachers to plan and implement the curriculum effectively, and help the college meet its strategic objectives. Part-time staff are deployed effectively.

14. The college is situated within an attractive campus and new college building projects have won architectural awards. Newly refurbished accommodation provides a very good learning environment. Laboratories and other specialist practical rooms are well equipped. Most classrooms are pleasant, but a few classes are taught in temporary accommodation that is less satisfactory. Students' work is displayed effectively in classrooms and public areas. There are impressive exhibitions of artwork around the college.

15. There is good provision of ILT resources in most classrooms. Computers are situated in a number of sites across the campus. However, some students experience difficulties gaining access to a computer if the machines are booked for teaching purposes. The library is housed in an attractive building with a mezzanine floor, where the book stock is located. Students value the help they receive from library staff.

16. The Central Studio Theatre at the college is used by visiting professional companies. Social and recreational facilities for students have been improved and now include the Café QM and an excellent new sports centre. Both the Central Studio Theatre and the sports centre are open to the general public and serve as an important means of strengthening links with the local community. Students make good use of the technical facilities for media and music. Almost all the accommodation is now accessible to students with restricted mobility. The only specialist room that is not accessible is the media studies studio.

17. Assessment is rigorous and fair, and accurate records of students' progress are maintained. At the start of their courses, students are set minimum target grades, on the basis of their GCSE scores, which they are encouraged to achieve or exceed in their final examination. Students' progress is formally reviewed at three census points in the first year and twice in the second year of courses. The extent to which students are making progress towards achieving their target minimum grade is used as a starting point for discussions with them. At these census points, teachers give each student a score for attendance, punctuality, effort, meeting deadlines and involvement in lessons as well as their academic progress. This review of students' progress is carried out very thoroughly. It forms the basis for reports on individual students. The parents or legal guardians of students under the age of 19 are then invited to evening meetings to discuss their child's progress.

18. Students at risk of dropping subjects, or who are not fulfilling their potential, are identified early. Their progress is discussed at weekly meetings of staff, the additional help they require is determined, and comprehensive action is taken to assist them. Details of the additional learning support provided are recorded. Students on most courses are clearly informed of the deadlines by which assignments must be completed. Some students on ICT courses, however, are not always sure what these deadlines are.

19. There are precise homework policies and guidelines. Homework is set regularly, marked and returned promptly. The marking is usually rigorous and teachers provide students with helpful comments on how they may improve their work. In some areas, the marking schemes are common to all the teachers of the subject and there is considerable moderation of each teacher's marking. A number of curriculum areas have devised helpful header sheets used to summarise the comments on each assignment and identify what students need to do to improve. On some courses, insufficient priority is given to planning of the students' workload. For example, students are not given clear deadlines for the return of homework. In science, the proportion of students returning homework by the agreed deadline was low in some subjects.

20. The college has successfully introduced Curriculum 2000. Students can take programmes of study tailored to their individual needs. These include a broad and diverse programme in year one, a good combination of general education and vocational courses, effective mix of study at levels 2 and 3, and curriculum enrichment activities chosen from a wide range of options. All students are required to develop key skills. There are a few gaps in specialist provision at level 2 in music, media and sports.

21. The college has strong links with local schools. At open days, prospective students are given impartial advice. The induction process is effective and thorough. Through close liaison between college staff and local schools, some prospective students have their learning support needs identified before starting their course. Learning support needs are identified and addressed with speed and sensitivity. Whilst the effectiveness of one-to-one learning support sessions is regularly assessed, strategies for evaluating support in the classroom are less well developed. Learning assistants provide very effective support, mainly for students on courses below level 3. The college, however, is currently unable to meet all the demand for additional learning support.

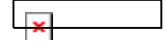
22. There is a comprehensive tutorial programme. All students have two group tutorials and one individual session with their tutor each week. Students receive a lot of individual support, which they value, much of which is informal and not always recorded. Before the group tutorial held on Tuesdays, tutors are provided with records of all students' attendance for the previous week and they take prompt action to check on those students who have been absent. In some instances, however, group tutorials are not planned carefully and students gain little from them.

23. Advice and help on personal problems are easily accessible initially through a centrally sited help desk. Students have access to professional counsellors and careers advisors. Particular emphasis is placed on helping students' progress to HE. Less attention is given to helping students find jobs.

24. The college is developing a basic skills action plan. This aims to remind all staff of the importance of basic skills and ensure that all students have the basic skills they need to achieve their learning goals. Staff also hope that through the implementation of the plan, the college will work with local organisations to help people in some parts of Basingstoke improve their literacy and

numeracy skills.

Leadership and management



25. Leadership and management of the college are outstanding. The college has been successful in meeting its financial targets, as well as targets for enrolment, and retention and pass rates. All provision, across the college, is good. Over the last three years, pass rates for level 3 courses have risen, the numbers of full-time students have increased and staff have been successful in widening participation.

26. Teaching has improved significantly since the last inspection. Across all curriculum areas, 81% of teaching was good or better. This proportion is higher than the national average for sixth form colleges and is 13 percentage points higher than in the last inspection. All teachers are observed teaching several times a year, and given detailed and constructive feedback on their performance. New staff receive good induction to the college and to their role. The training needs of all staff are identified carefully and met effectively.

27. Members of the college's management team provide strong leadership. They consult widely with staff before making management decisions. The self-assessment process is rigorous. All the weaknesses, identified in the last inspection report, have been carefully and meticulously addressed. The GNVQ teams, for example, have been reorganised and a co-ordinator has been appointed. Teaching staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities. College managers at all levels set a clear direction for their staff. All heads of department are closely involved in monitoring the quality of students' experiences in the classroom. Communication within the college is very good. Staff within departments work very well together on self-assessment reviews and agree, as a team, on priorities for further action and improvement. Target setting, performance management and appraisal are effective. Managers make good use of the well-developed management information system.

28. Promotion of equal opportunities, identified in the last inspection report as inadequate, is now carried out well. Staff receive appropriate training related to the promotion of equal opportunities. Examination results are scrutinised carefully with the aim of identifying whether students from one particular group or category perform better or less well than those from another. Curriculum reviews are analysed to ensure that issues relating to equal opportunities are addressed. A thorough analysis of students' performance, for example, revealed that young males on a number of courses were underachieving. A one-day training event was therefore organised for staff and this was followed up within the relevant departments. A system for providing specific support for the male students was established and many of them began to do better. Staff are committed to reaching out to, and meeting the needs of, young people in the community who have not done well at school and have become disenchanted with education. A particular drive to attract pupils from schools in the most deprived wards in the district has proved successful.

29. Following the successful implementation of Curriculum 2000, the college offers a broad and inclusive curriculum. A significant number of students, for example, are accepted onto level 3 courses with weak GCSE results. Most of them make very good progress and are provided with effective learning support. Students are able to combine a range of subjects and many follow challenging programmes. The college complies with the requirements of the recently amended Race Relations Act and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act.

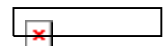
30. Governors play a significant role in the life of the college. They bring a range of professional skills to the institution. They are involved in the monitoring of students' performance and take part in quality assurance. Governors undertake regular training and new governors are assigned a mentor to help them become familiar with the demands of their role. The finance and premises committee, and the project board have made a noteworthy contribution to the recent building programme. They have been involved in ensuring that the projects have been completed on time and within budget.

The clerk to the governors and the chair of governors have set up efficient systems which ensure that members are well informed of developments and communication is good at all levels.

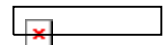
31. There are effective systems for the monitoring of the college's performance. The college's management team receives regular information on students' achievements, retention and pass rates. Subject teams receive regular reports on students' performance in order that they may identify those students who are at risk and need extra help. In the majority of cases, action to help such students is prompt and effective. Some issues, however, have not been addressed. For example, little action has been taken to raise the overall retention rate for students over the age of 19, particularly those on franchised programmes. On a number of courses, some students fail to attend regularly or are late for lessons.

32. Financial management is very good. Action to remedy the college's former weak financial position has proved extremely effective. The college now has a significant and healthy operational surplus. A capital building programme to improve facilities for students and the local community has been carried out successfully. Curriculum managers and other budget holders understand the methods for allocating resources across the college.

Part C: Curriculum and occupational areas



Science



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

Strengths

- broad range of GCE AS provision
- high retention rates on GCE A-level courses
- very good teaching
- good accommodation and resources
- much effective use of ILT.

Weaknesses

- low pass rates in some subjects
- insufficient follow-up of homework completion.

Scope of provision

33. A wide range of science subjects at GCE AS and A level, including biology, chemistry, physics, science, electronics and geology, are offered. Currently, there are over 120 students studying GCE AS physics and 170 taking GCE AS biology or human biology. Smaller numbers take GCE A-level science subjects. GCSE science (human physiology & health) is the only GCSE subject offered. GCE AS and A-level science is provided for those students who wish to study a science subject, but who do not want to specialise. This year, GCE AS geology is being offered for the first time. Most science students are full time, aged 16 to 18. There are adult students studying GCE AS human biology in the evening. There is no vocational provision.

Achievement and standards

34. Retention rates for GCE A-level science subjects are high. Pass rates for most science subjects are close to the national average for sixth form colleges. In 2001/02, the retention rates for GCE A-level biology, chemistry and physics were excellent, above 95%, and higher than they were in the previous year. Retention rates for most GCE AS subjects are in line with the national average.

35. Pass rates in GCE A-level physics, GCE AS level biology, chemistry and physics are at the national average. There are low pass rates for GCE A-level biology and chemistry. The pass rate for GCE AS human biology in 2001/02 fell well below the national average, having been above it in the previous year. The small numbers of students who take GCE A-level science obtain a grade higher than that predicted for them on the basis of their GCSE scores on entry. Students taking most other science subjects, obtain their predicted grades. All 14 of the students who finished the GCE A-level electronics course in 2001/02 passed. In the last two years, the proportion of students on the GCSE science course who obtained grade C or above has been below the national average, at 35% and 33%, respectively.

36. Students are attentive in lessons and work at a level appropriate for their courses. The standard of students' course and project work is high. Some students produce outstanding work and others reach the standard required at that particular stage of their course. Science students have achieved awards from national bodies in all years since 1997. For instance, in 2002, a student was awarded a commendation for coursework from the Institute of Physics.

A sample of retention and pass rates in science, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
GCE A-level biology and human biology	3	No. of starts	84	91	101
		% retention	80	76	96
		% pass rate	71	83	77
GCE A-level chemistry	3	No. of starts	63	56	52
		% retention	87	73	96

		% pass rate	80	78	80
GCE A-level physics	3	No. of starts	63	72	80
		% retention	83	85	98
		% pass rate	90	89	87
GCE AS biology	3	No. of starts	*	69	84
		% retention	*	90	85
		% pass rate	*	84	77
GCE AS chemistry	3	No. of starts	*	83	89
		% retention	*	93	85
		% pass rate	*	78	78
GCE AS physics	3	No. of starts	*	106	126
		% retention	*	94	90
		% pass rate	*	88	80
GCSE science	2	No. of starts	39	20	22
		% retention	87	80	82
		% pass rate	55	35	33

Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

* course did not run

Quality of education and training

37. There was much good and some outstanding teaching. Staff are confident and enthusiastic. They plan their lessons well and explain concepts clearly and effectively. Discussion, questioning and carefully chosen exercises develop students' scientific concepts and skills. In lessons, students participated willingly in learning tasks and teachers offered them help and encouragement. In the best lessons, the pace was challenging. Teachers gave the students imaginative tasks which excited and held their interest, and they questioned the students carefully to make sure they understood what they were doing.

38. Science students produce much excellent project work. In a physics lesson, students were engaged in individual open-ended laboratory investigations of their choice, ranging from crater formation, to dampened oscillations and electrical sparks. The teacher managed these investigations effectively and all the students found them interesting. Through their investigations, some students were able to engage in learning which went beyond the requirements of the examination syllabus. In a few lessons, students arrived late causing some disruption. Some lessons were not organised well and in these, the teacher failed to engage and hold the students' attention. In these lessons, the students were not given well-planned and demanding learning tasks, and the teacher failed to question them effectively or invite them to contribute to discussion. In some instances, the teacher failed to ensure that all the students could see demonstrations of scientific processes, or projected slides, clearly.

39. Students are given help and advice by the science staff outside normal lesson times. The science staff room has space where teachers can see individual students. Students greatly appreciate being able to call in at the staff room for help at any time. Much appropriate use is made of ILT in science teaching. For instance, electronics students use computer software to design and test systems before building them. There is an open access computer room used by science students which is also booked for ILT-based science lessons. Teaching materials, such as exercise sheets, guidance notes and textbooks, are carefully constructed and cover the examination syllabus

well. Some materials, such as chemistry tests and syllabus guidance, are available to students on the college intranet. Sets of questions and answers on biology topics, at three levels of difficulty, are also available.

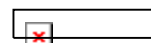
40. All staff are suitably qualified and many have industrial or research backgrounds. There are three well-qualified, experienced laboratory technicians providing effective support. Science lessons are taught in well-equipped laboratories that have been refurbished to a high standard. Most have video facilities and many have digital projectors. All have very good wall displays of relevant scientific information, a large part of which has been produced by students. There is plenty of space for the storage and preparation of resources and chemicals.

41. Much of the coursework which students carry out as part of the overall assessment for their target qualification is of a high standard in all science subjects. It is rigorously marked to the appropriate standard. Relevant homework is set, but in some groups a significant proportion is not handed in. Chemistry teachers have a good system for setting appropriate homework, marking it promptly and giving students feedback on how to improve their performance. They monitor students' progress regularly. Insufficient priority, however, is given to ensuring that all students do their homework. In some groups, a significant proportion of students fail to hand in their homework on time. Among them are some who are falling behind in their work.

Leadership and management

42. The science provision is well managed. Science courses fall within three departments: biology, chemistry and physics. All three have excellent course plans. However, there is a lack of a common approach within each department to setting deadlines for the completion of homework and on action to be taken when work is not handed in. Communication is good and staff in the departments work well together designing, producing and sharing resource materials. They also share expertise to develop their provision. There is a 'science centre' room which is used regularly to assist local primary school teachers with science education. Teachers and their pupils make day visits to the centre and are assisted with their teaching by the centre co-ordinator. This centre provides a useful service for the community.

Mathematics



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

Strengths

- high retention and pass rates on most courses
- much good teaching and effective learning
- very good monitoring of students' progress
- excellent workbooks

- strong curriculum leadership and team ethos.

Weaknesses

- insufficiently demanding tasks in some lessons for more-able students
- little use of ILT in the teaching of mathematics
- little reference to the relevance of mathematics outside the classroom.

Scope of provision

43. The college offers a good range of courses in mathematics from foundation to level 3, including GCE AS and A-level mathematics and further mathematics. GCSE mathematics is offered during the day and in the evening. City and Guilds 3750 numeracy courses are offered at four stages as an alternative for students who do not wish to pursue a GCSE course. At the time of the inspection, approximately 762 students were enrolled on mathematics courses.

Achievement and standards

44. The pass and retention rates for the GCE A-level further mathematics and stage 2 numeracy courses have been consistently higher than the national average for the last three years. In 2002, retention and pass rates on all courses were higher than the national average. Students on GCE AS and A-level courses are making progress towards achievement of the grades predicted for them on the basis of their GCSE scores. The proportion of students on GCSE mathematics courses who obtain grade C or above is small, but in line with the national average.

45. Students enjoy their studies and work well in groups. In one lesson, students formed small informal discussion groups without being asked to, in order to work on their exercises. They are keen to learn and most participate in lesson activities with enthusiasm. In the better lessons, students develop their evaluation skills. Many GCE A-level students progress to HE.

A sample of retention and pass rates in mathematics, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
City and Guilds 3750 numeracy stage 1, 1 year	1	No. of starts	*	65	72
		% retention	*	83	86
		% pass rate	*	89	79
City and Guilds 3750 numeracy stage 2, 1 year	1	No. of starts	72	51	53
		% retention	90	84	96
		% pass rate	74	81	82

GCSE mathematics 1 year	2	No. of starts	180	201	216
		% retention	84	82	78
		% pass rate	57	36	41
GCE A-level further mathematics 2 years	3	No. of starts	21	17	16
		% retention	95	97	100
		% pass rate	100	100	94
GCE A-level mathematics 2 years (1 year 2002)	3	No. of starts	146	146	140
		% retention	84	79	97
		% pass rate	73	82	93
GCE AS mathematics 1 year	3	No. of starts	*	266	270
		% retention	*	89	87
		% pass rate	*	60	83

Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

* course did not run

Quality of education and training

46. Most of the teaching is good or better. None is less than satisfactory. Most lessons begin with a warm-up test called 'starter for ten' consisting of general mathematical revision questions. This provides a useful check on students' progress. Teachers have a methodical approach when explaining basic mathematical concepts. In many lessons, teachers use techniques that encourage the students to think and to discover things for themselves. Questioning stimulates debate amongst students. In one lesson, students developed a mini debate on the concept of infinity relating to arithmetic progressions. In another lesson on differentiation of vectors, the teacher's clear and logical style led to the students making the final leap of discovery for themselves, which the students found thrilling.

47. Most teachers make considerable effort to involve all the students in the lesson and usually succeed in doing so. Often students are asked to come to the front and draw on the whiteboard to demonstrate a point. In one lesson, over half the students contributed to the lesson by successfully drawing various graphs in this way.

48. Regular checks on students' understanding are carried out during the lesson. Students' progress is carefully monitored throughout the year. Students are given written tests frequently. Their teachers look at the results of these carefully to find out what the students need to do in order to achieve the examination grades predicted for them. In regular review meetings between tutors and students, these results are discussed and an action plan is drawn up to help the students improved their performance.

49. In a few lessons, students made good use of computers and graphical calculators. In one lesson, students were able to annotate a graph drawing program displayed on a data projector by using a digital pen and pad that was passed around. In one numeracy lesson, students were using a computer program during a scaling exercise, but most did not know how to use the software properly. Sometimes the extra educational value of using graphical calculators is lost because the students use them as a shortcut for sketching graphs rather than to check their sketches for accuracy as requested. In many lessons, the teacher failed to point out ways in which the mathematical process being learnt could be used outside the classroom.

50. Some lessons are dull and lack variety. In these, the teacher talks a great deal when explaining the subject matter and then gives the students practice questions. In many of these lessons, the

more-able students are not stretched or given sufficiently demanding tasks. A few students find some of the lesson exercises trivial and are bored. In an attempt to introduce greater variety in teaching and learning methods, steps are being taken to extend the use of ILT in lessons.

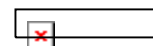
51. Students value the extra mathematics workshops which are run every lunchtime. Staff are also available outside of lesson time for students who ask for extra help. Staff in the mathematics department have recently written good workbooks for each course. The books are colour coded and contain condensed lesson notes, diagrams and exercises. The students find them very helpful.

52. Staff are all well qualified and enthusiastic teachers. Classrooms are modern and have a good sense of subject identity. There are some good posters on the walls showing possible careers for mathematicians. Many rooms have wall displays of students' work, which are sometimes referred to during lessons. Each room has a computer which is linked to the Internet. Graphical calculators and appropriate textbooks are available for all students. The library has a small stock of mathematics books.

Leadership and management

53. Management of the mathematics department is strong and effective. There is good team ethos amongst the teachers who try to ensure equitable sharing of the workload. For example, they work well together to produce new workbooks and help students who have specific problems. Teachers meet every week to discuss general items, exchange ideas about teaching and learning, and share good practice. All staff are involved in producing the self-assessment report. Action to rectify weaknesses identified through self-assessment is monitored carefully by the head of department and course leaders. The self-assessment process is rigorous. The report draws on findings relating to teaching and learning identified through the college's extensive lesson observation programme.

Business, leisure, sport and tourism



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

Strengths

- high retention and pass rates on GNVQ intermediate courses
- high pass rates in GCE A-level economics and GCE AS business studies
- high standards of students' work
- much good teaching and effective learning
- excellent sports resources

- well-managed curriculum teams.

Weaknesses

- low retention rates on AVCE courses
- no work placements for students on sport, leisure and tourism courses at levels 2 and 3.

Scope of provision

54. At the time of the inspection, there were 428 full-time learners on business-related courses and 317 full-time learners on sport, leisure and tourism courses. At level 2, the college offers GNVQ intermediate in business, GNVQ leisure and tourism, and GCSE accounting courses. Level 3 provision includes GCE AS and A levels in business studies, accounting, economics, and sport and physical education, as well as AVCE programmes in business, leisure and recreation, and travel and tourism. A small number of learners study at level 1 on a foundation GNVQ in leisure and tourism. The majority of students are aged 16 to 18. In the evenings, students aged 19 or over can attend courses in GCSE accounting, GCE AS and A-level business studies and a level 1 fitness programme.

Achievement and standards

55. Retention and pass rates on GNVQ intermediate business and intermediate leisure and tourism courses are high. Retention and pass rates on GCE AS and A-level programmes are consistently at, or above, the national average. For example, in 2002, the retention rate on the GCE A-level sport and physical education course was 90%, compared with the national average of 76%. In 2002, the pass rate for GCE A-level economics was outstanding, at 100%, and 78% of students on the course obtained higher grades. The pass rate for GCE AS accounting was high at 92%, and 7% of those on the course obtained higher grades. Retention rates on AVCE courses in business, leisure and recreation, and travel and tourism were low, at 63%, 60% and 55%, respectively.

56. Most students' work is of a high standard in theory and practical sessions. Students take pride in the presentation of their work and they make good progress. Students demonstrate the ability to grasp complex concepts and discuss them with confidence, particularly on level 3 courses. In one session, for example, students enthusiastically debated the issues surrounding a proposed takeover from the viewpoint of different stakeholders. Similarly, students on an AVCE leisure and recreation course expressed themselves clearly when discussing an event they were organising. In a GCE AS physical education lesson, students demonstrated their ability to put coaching theory into practice. Students on a fitness instructor certificate course at level 1 had planned a circuit and had produced exercise cards to a standard higher than that required for the qualification.

A sample of retention and pass rates in business, leisure, sport and tourism, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
GNVQ intermediate in leisure and tourism	2	No. of starts	20	19	16
		% retention	85	83	100

		% pass rate	82	93	87
AVCE (double award) in leisure and tourism	2	No. of starts	*	*	15
		% retention	*	*	60
		% pass rate	*	*	78
GCE A-level economics	3	No. of starts	20	31	23
		% retention	85	81	96
		% pass rate	94	76	100
GCE AS business studies	3	No. of starts	*	165	163
		% retention	*	91	83
		% pass rate	*	91	90
GCE A-level sport and physical education	3	No. of starts	64	51	49
		% retention	77	68	90
		% pass rate	93	79	86
AVCE (double award) in travel and tourism	3	No. of starts	*	*	11
		% retention	*	*	55
		% pass rate	*	*	83

Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

* course did not run

Quality of education and training

57. There is much good teaching and students learn effectively. Lesson planning is thorough and various teaching approaches are used. In one GCE A-level sport and physical education lesson, for example, the teacher explained Newton's laws of motion very clearly, using varying sized balls of different mass. The students went on to solve complex equations and were able to relate them to practical sporting activities and situations. In the most effective lessons, teachers ensure they meet the individual needs of all their students. For example, in a lesson on a GNVQ foundation course in leisure and tourism, the students were provided with additional learning support. One student with a severe hearing impairment received very good support and confirmed that that her confidence had improved enormously since attending the college.

58. Students benefit from good learning resources, prepared by teachers. ILT is used effectively by business studies and economics students, both in and out of class, but less so by accounting students. In some lessons, students are not given enough appropriate tasks which help them to improve their practical skills.

59. Trips and visits are used to good effect. They are planned carefully, are relevant to the courses and help the students relate theory to practice. Students on business courses benefit from well-organised work experience placements. However, there are no work placements for students on sport, leisure and tourism courses at levels 2 and 3.

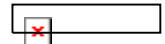
60. Assessment is rigorous. In practical sports sessions, students are given constructive feedback orally and in writing. They evaluate their own performance and that of other students regularly. Individual learning plans are used effectively to monitor progress and set targets. Assessment procedures comply with awarding body requirements and are clearly understood by students. Teachers provide students with written feedback on their work and show them how they can improve it. Attendance is good and is monitored closely.

61. The staff are very well qualified and most have a relevant industrial or commercial background. Students use the excellent sports and exercise facilities regularly for recreational purposes and in order to develop the skills they will need in the leisure industry. The learning resource centre is used frequently by the students and contains a good supply of textbooks and journals. Classrooms are well resourced with ILT facilities, including interactive whiteboards. The rooms are well maintained and contain good displays of students' work.

Leadership and management

62. Courses in business studies, economics, sports, leisure and tourism fall within four departments, managed by two heads of division. All programmes are managed well. Staff are highly motivated and work effectively in teams. Staff, and particularly those who are new, benefit from a comprehensive programme of staff development. Development plans indicate an expansion of the sports curriculum area to take advantage of the new sports facilities and courses in e-business to enhance student choice.

Information and communications technology



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

Strengths

- very good teaching
- good management and leadership
- high retention and pass rates on GCE A-level computing courses in 2002
- good support for students
- broad range of courses at level 3.

Weaknesses

- low retention rate on GCE AS IT and CLAIT courses
- insufficient use of ILT in lessons

- inappropriate furniture in practical computing rooms
- poor attendance at some lessons and lack of punctuality.

Scope of provision

63. At the time of inspection, there were approximately 1,900 students aged 16 to 18 on computing and IT-related courses, as well as around 700 adults. There is a broad range of courses at level 3. These include GCE AS and A-level courses in computing, GCE AS and A-level courses in IT, AVCE in ICT courses, and a recently introduced an IT practitioners course. Level 1 and 2 provision includes GNVQ intermediate in IT, CLAIT and CLAIT Plus courses. There are also a number of courses for adults, operating within the community as well as at the college. These courses include GCE AS in IT, European computer driving licence (ECDL), CLAIT, CLAIT Plus and short courses.

Achievement and standards

64. The pass rate for GCE A-level computing in 2002 was considerably higher than in the previous year, and well above the national average for sixth form colleges. Retention rates for GCE A-level computing, GCE A-level IT and short courses in 2002 are all above the national average. However, retention rates on GCE AS IT and CLAIT courses are below the national average.

65. The standard of students' practical work ranges from satisfactory to very high. The more able students demonstrate a deep understanding of the subject and are able to design and develop complex programs and projects. Second-year students use windows-based programming languages to develop websites and quality working computer systems for local clients. Many of the GCE A-level projects are carefully researched and presented well. Many students progress to HE to study computing-related subjects.

A sample of retention and pass rates in information and communications technology, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
City and Guilds 7261	1	No. of starts	45	237	214
		% retention	56	84	87
		% pass rate	76	48	59
GNVQ intermediate IT	2	No. of starts	*	21	28
		% retention	*	95	79
		% pass rate	*	60	64
GCE A-level computing	3	No. of starts	50	58	33
		% retention	89	71	91
		% pass rate	78	68	90
GCE A-level IT	3	No. of starts	38	71	41
		% retention	83	54	90
		% pass rate	77	85	86

GCE AS computing	3	No. of starts	*	80	134
		% retention	*	87	87
		% pass rate	*	78	70
GCE AS IT	3	No. of starts	*	114	122
		% retention	*	84	79
		% pass rate	*	70	60

Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

* course did not run

Quality of education and training

66. Most teaching is very good and none is unsatisfactory. Lessons are well planned and planning documents are shared amongst the teachers. When students are given assignments, they are given detailed information on how these will be assessed. In most lessons, teachers gave the students varied learning tasks which excited and held their interest, and helped them to explore and understand new concepts and processes successfully. In one practical lesson, students were carefully guided through the process of program testing. Before the end of the lesson, all students were able to design and execute efficient testing regimes for their programming project. Where possible, tutors encourage students to work together productively in small groups and develop their powers of critical thinking. In one lesson, students used the Internet effectively to research the effects of IT on society and were able to discuss their findings in a very critical and cogent manner.

67. Students learn to use a variety of software packages and are encouraged to utilise them appropriately. In the most successful lessons, teachers asked the students probing questions which made them think and use their skills to the full. They ensured that all students were fully stretched and gave them learning tasks that made them work to the best of their abilities. Where appropriate, they gave some students additional and more difficult activities. In a GNVQ intermediate lesson, students of very differing abilities successfully used a variety of packages to design a set of assembly instructions for a child's toy.

68. Teaching of adults in evening classes is good. At one of the franchise centres, a large number of adult students received inaccurate guidance and enrolled on a CLAIT course which proved to be unsuitable. Most transferred at a later stage to a lower and more appropriate course.

69. All the specialist computer rooms are equipped with sufficient, high-specification computers with industry-standard software. Equipment is reliable and is well maintained by trained technicians. All computers have an Internet connection and give access to the college's intranet, where a variety of learning resources is available. These include handouts, worksheets, presentations and material relating to the courses offered. Insufficient space on the computer network is allocated to students for their own use. There is little use of ILT in lessons. Two classrooms are equipped with data projectors. No scanners are available within practical ICT rooms for use in graphics lessons.

70. Access to an upstairs practical computer room is difficult for those with restricted mobility. None of the practical rooms used by ICT students is equipped with suitable, adjustable chairs. During lessons in one practical room, students are sometimes distracted by noise from outside.

71. Students' work is well marked and teachers correct both technical and grammatical errors. Teachers provide students with feedback on their work, but, in some instances, this is insufficiently detailed.

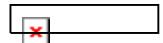
Leadership and management

72. The ICT curriculum area is well managed. Staff are well qualified and many have recent, relevant

industrial experience. All have a teaching qualification or are working towards one.

73. Many of the computing staff have been appointed since the last inspection and they work as an effective team. All are closely involved in self-assessment and planning, and they share good practice and resources. The course programmes are responsive to the needs of students and of local industry. Some level 3 courses have not proved suitable for some students, and retention and pass rates on these have been unsatisfactory. Recently, a national diploma course has been introduced to widen the range of level 3 courses, meet some students' needs more effectively, and respond to the demands of local employers for suitably skilled labour.

Art, design and photography



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

Strengths

- high pass and retention rates on art studies courses
- good teaching and effective learning
- good specialist accommodation and resources
- rigorous assessment and good feedback
- effective course planning.

Weaknesses

- low pass rates on some vocational courses
- inadequate accommodation for AVCE art and design, and GCE AS textiles courses.

Scope of provision

74. The college offers a range of GCE AS and A-level art studies courses, and specialist courses in

fine art, ceramics, graphic design, photography and textiles. There are also full-time courses leading to a GNVQ in art and design at intermediate level and an AVCE in art and design at level 3. A basic course in art is offered as part of the provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. There are curriculum enrichment courses in ceramics, graphic design, and painting and printing. A course in GCE AS photography and graphic design and a basic level City and Guilds course in photography are run in the evenings for adults. At the time of inspection, there were 466 students aged 16 to 18 enrolled on day courses, and most were on GCE A-level courses. There are 54 adults and a few students aged 16 to 18 on evening classes.

Achievement and standards

75. Students produce work of a high standard. Many do well in examinations. Pass rates on GCE AS courses rose from 63% in 2001 to 86% in 2002, close to the national average of 89%. GCE A-level pass rates have remained high over three years. There have been some low pass rates in vocational courses at levels 1 and 2. Retention rates are high on GCE A-level art studies and AVCE art and design courses, but below the national average on GNVQ intermediate and GCE AS courses. Retention rates for current courses are high.

76. Students display creativity in their well-structured sketchbooks and demonstrate their art and design skills effectively through imaginative project work. There is good, expressive exploration of media in all courses. In one graphics design lesson, students showed their ability to explore sensations in abstract ways using a list of words from natural and urban contexts. Students are set challenging targets to extend their knowledge and understanding. They use technical language confidently. One fine art student was able to discuss 'trompe l'oeil' effects. Another talked about colour theory in depth. Graphics and photography students work with confidence. They produce very creative work, and exploit the medium in depth.

A sample of retention and pass rates in art, design and photography, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
GNVQ intermediate art and design	2	No. of starts	14	11	10
		% retention	93	94	70
		% pass rate	38	30	100
GCE AS art studies fine art	3	No. of starts	*	203	307
		% retention	*	81	73
		% pass rate	*	63	86
GCE A-level art studies fine art	3	No. of starts	56	62	74
		% retention	83	75	95
		% pass rate	91	91	94
GCE A-level photography	3	No. of starts	41	57	*
		% retention	66	69	*
		% pass rate	85	97	*
GNVQ advanced art and design/ AVCE (2002)	3	No. of starts	9	10	12
		% retention	67	70	83
		% pass rate	100	83	80

Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

* course did not run

Quality of education and training

77. In 77% of lessons, teaching was good or better. In the best lessons, teaching is well planned and teachers give students excellent help and support. These lessons are structured carefully to provide students with the security to experiment. In the less successful lessons, there is too little checking of students' progress and teachers do not ask the students searching or challenging questions. Some lessons have not been planned carefully to ensure that all students are given tasks which match their individual abilities and extend their knowledge, skills and understanding. Most courses are well planned and meet awarding body requirements. Schemes of work are detailed and have a standardised format. Students are set imaginative and demanding assignments and the briefs for these are clear. Learning materials are good and are used well. Graphic design students, for example, are provided with excellent handouts which give them stimulating ideas on which to work. In a lesson on computer design, students were given detailed learning materials to work through by themselves, both in and outside lessons. Visits are arranged on a regular basis to museums and galleries in London and Paris.

78. Staff demonstrate extensive knowledge of their subjects. The valuable expertise of staff was particularly evident in a GCE A-level photography lesson, a printmaking session with GNVQ intermediate students and in a lesson with graphics students, who were learning to use specialist software. Technical support is good. The newly refurbished specialist accommodation for art and design is impressive. However, there is some inadequate accommodation used for textiles, AVCE and GNVQ courses. Students value the facilities in the ILT suite, which are available to them outside lessons. These include an interactive whiteboard and 20 computers, all with specialist design programs and peripheral equipment.

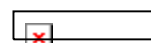
79. In its self-assessment report, the department identified its assessment procedures as a weakness. Effective action has been taken to improve these. Students are assessed regularly. The assessment process has been standardised. Students are set assessment objectives related to examination specifications and are awarded points for improvement. Teachers give students feedback at regular intervals on ways of improving their performance and students value the advice they receive. Students who are at risk of dropping out of the course are monitored well and given appropriate help. Students attend subject support lessons and directed study periods in which they are set work. These sessions are used as a means of helping students work responsibly by themselves.

80. Good support is provided for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities at entry level and at level 2. In the level 2 lessons, support staff provide valuable assistance for students with behavioural difficulties. In an entry level lesson, for example, a friendly atmosphere was created by the two learning assistants who worked effectively with the teacher to support the students and help them to develop their language skills.

Leadership and management

81. The department is well led. Quality assurance procedures for teaching and learning are effective. Courses are planned carefully. Information about courses for prospective students is clear and detailed. Finances are managed well and there has been appropriate investment in good facilities and learning materials. Staff meetings are well structured. At these, staff discuss ways of improving provision and take the necessary follow-up action. The self-assessment report is thorough. Staff are aware of the key strength and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. They work together to build on the strengths and rectify the weaknesses. Lesson observation is carried out extensively and staff are given useful feedback on ways of helping the students learn more effectively.

Performing arts and media



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

Strengths

- very high pass rates on most GCE AS and A-level courses
- much good teaching
- wide range of courses at level 3
- professional environment for performing arts students
- good resources for media, music and dance.

Weaknesses

- low pass rates on the GNVQ intermediate performing arts courses
- insufficient provision at level 2
- some poor accommodation for drama.

Scope of provision

82. There are 685 students on performing arts and media courses, most of whom are aged 16 to 18. The college has recently combined drama and dance with music to create a new performing arts department. There is a wide range of provision at level 3. There are courses in: dance, drama, film studies, media, music, music technology and performing arts. Media in particular is attracting very large numbers with 191 currently on the GCE AS and 98 on the GCE A-level courses. Dance has also grown substantially with 38 students on the GCE AS course.

83. The BTEC first diploma course in performing arts is the only provision at level 2. This replaced the GNVQ intermediate in performing arts course that had low retention and/or pass rates. In order to provide opportunities for students' progression, the need to develop level 2 courses has been identified. However, accommodation and resources are already under substantial pressure.

Achievement and standards

84. Retention rates on the majority of courses are around the national average. Retention rates on GCE A-level drama and theatre studies, and music courses have been 100%. In 2002, however, the retention rate on the GCE AS film studies course fell sharply to 58%, which is significantly below the national average.

85. Pass rates on GCE AS media, performing arts, dance and music courses have been consistently at, or above, the national average. In 2002, the pass rate on the GCE AS music course was 100%. In 2002, the pass rate on the GCE AS dance course was 12 percentage points above the national average. Pass rates were high in 2002. All students who completed GCE A-level courses in dance, drama and theatre studies, film studies and performance studies passed. Approximately 90% of students studying GCE A-level film studies and two-thirds of the students studying GCE A-level dance achieved high grades. In 2002, the pass rate on the GNVQ intermediate performing arts course was very low, at 37 percentage points below the national average. This course has now been replaced by the BTEC first diploma course in performing arts.

86. Students' work in the majority of lessons demonstrates clear, analytical thinking and sound understanding of the topics being covered. In a GCE A-level film studies lesson exploring the symbolism contained in Maya Deren's film *Meshes of the Afternoon*, the students drew from a wide range of sources to set their comments into a socio-political and historical context. In a rehearsal of Sarah Daniel's *Ripen our Darkness*, students on a BTEC national diploma in drama developed well-considered vocal and physical characterisations.

A sample of retention and pass rates in performing arts and media, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
GNVQ intermediate performing arts	2	No. of starts	13	17	20
		% retention	69	65	90
		% pass rate	56	91	28
GCE AS media studies	3	No. of starts	*	188	174
		% retention	*	82	80
		% pass rate	*	98	95
National diploma performing arts	3	No. of starts	12	13	13
		% retention	75	62	85
		% pass rate	44	100	91
GCE AS dance	3	No. of starts	*	37	27
		% retention	*	84	81
		% pass rate	*	90	95
GCE AS film studies	3	No. of starts	*	25	45
		% retention	*	84	58
		% pass rate	*	90	96
GCE AS music	3	No. of starts	*	26	27
		% retention	*	85	85
		% pass rate	*	100	96

Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

* course did not run

Quality of education and training

87. Teaching is good or better. The best lessons are well planned. In these, teachers use a variety of imaginative methods to engage and stimulate the students' interest. They ensure that work is related to the requirements of the examination. Teachers give the students helpful tips on ways of improving their work and they go over important points to make sure the students have grasped them. They ask the students searching questions and encourage them to develop their ideas through discussion. In a GCE A-level dance lesson, the dynamic content of a set phrase was explored through a series of practical exercises. These helped the students to develop their choreographic skills. Evaluation is an integral part of the learning experience. Students are encouraged to evaluate their own and each other's performance using the external examination criteria. In the less successful lessons, the aims are not always clearly communicated. Students are not sure what is expected of them or why they were doing certain activities. In some lessons, teachers do not check students' understanding sufficiently and fail to encourage students to evaluate their work.

88. Students value the very good support offered to them in the majority of lessons. In particular, adult students on the evening GCE AS film studies course receive good guidance on a one-to-one basis and benefit from excellent learning resources. They are given thorough notes on their progress every week.

89. Students know how well they are doing and what they have to do to improve. They receive a termly review of their progress and this is carried out with rigour. Documentation on their progress is also completed thoroughly at the five census points. The use of an assessment header sheet has been introduced. On this, tutors give an outline of the assignment, set out the nature of the learning tasks, specify the grade or mark awarded and make comments. Students receive extremely detailed and helpful feedback on their work and progress.

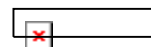
90. There is good and well-equipped accommodation for media, music and dance courses. The media rooms are attractive with stimulating displays of students' work and posters. At times, however, extraneous noise from adjacent rooms can be distracting. A digital video-editing suite with six workstations enables students to edit videos to a high standard. In recent years, there has been a rapid growth in the numbers of students on media courses and resources are becoming increasingly strained. On occasions, students have been unable to use technical equipment, which they have booked, because technician support has not been available at that particular time. Music and music technology courses have a suite of good rooms, including a sound recording studio. A purpose-built dance studio and the music rooms form part of a 'central studio' complex. This facility is used by both members of the college and the local community.

91. Students on drama courses are able to rehearse and perform in the college's professional Central Studio Theatre. This is an established venue for a wide range of professional touring shows. Although the theatre is not timetabled to be used as a teaching space, priority is given to enabling students to put on performances there in order to give them the experience of working in a commercial place of entertainment with professional sound and lighting technicians. The main practical space is a small studio which, following the increase in the number of students on drama courses, is heavily timetabled. Practical lessons also take place in a temporary building where there are three large rooms. These lack any kind of curricular identity and provide a poor environment for learning. They are inappropriate as workshops for practical activities.

Leadership and management

92. There have been major changes to the staffing and the structure of the performing arts department during 2002/03. The two separate departments of music, and drama and dance were recently combined. In addition to this, several staff left, new jobs were created and eight of the 13 members of staff are new. Students recognise how hard staff have worked to minimise the potentially disruptive effect of the reorganisation of the department upon their learning. Staff have made every effort to ensure that students were able to catch up on any work that was missed. The new staff team are enthusiastic and all share the common goal of helping the students to succeed.

Humanities



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

Strengths

- purposeful teaching and effective learning in most lessons
- good pass and retention rates on most GCE A-level courses
- pleasant accommodation and good resources
- good support for individual students
- extensive curriculum enrichment programme.

Weaknesses

- low pass rate on GCE AS law in 2002
- low retention rate on most GCE AS courses
- insufficient attention in lessons to individual students' needs
- late arrival of some students for many lessons.

Scope of provision

93. Eight GCE AS and A-level subjects are offered. They are: geography, government and politics, history, law, philosophy, psychology, religious studies and sociology. Students may also take GCE

AS general studies and critical thinking. At level 2, a course leading to a qualification of the Institute of Legal Executives is offered. It has replaced the GCSE law course, which was offered until 2002. In 2002/03, there were approximately 1,800 enrolments on humanities courses.

Achievement and standards

94. At GCE A level, retention rates in all subjects have been mostly close to, or above, the relevant national average. Students taking GCE A-level subjects achieve good results. Pass rates on most courses are at, or above, the national average. In philosophy, all students completing the course in the last three years have passed. In government and politics, and religious studies, all students have passed in the last two years. Many students take GCE A-level psychology and their pass rates in the last three years have been 99%, 100% and 97%, respectively. In 2002, the retention rates on GCE AS courses were below the national average in all subjects, except religious studies, and government and politics. GCE AS pass rates have been close to, or above, the national average rates in all subjects except law. In 2002, the pass rate for GCE AS law was significantly lower than the national average although, subsequently, many students achieved higher grades by re-sitting units. The GCE A-level grades obtained by many students in psychology, government and politics, religious studies and philosophy are higher than those predicted for them on the basis of their GCSE results. Much written work by students shows that most of them have developed the skills needed to use their knowledge to address tasks successfully. In some assignments, however, students do not sufficiently develop their ideas or support them enough with evidence. In most lessons, students participate in classroom activities with enthusiasm, contribute to debate and discussion effectively, and draw successfully on their previous learning.

A sample of retention and pass rates in humanities, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
GCE A-level sociology 2 years	3	No. of starts	88	110	79
		% retention	80	75	94
		% pass rate	90	92	92
GCE A-level psychology 2 years	3	No. of starts	96	121	120
		% retention	76	57	97
		% pass rate	99	100	97
GCE A-level history 2 years	3	No. of starts	92	134	91
		% retention	84	88	97
		% pass rate	94	83	94
GCE AS law	3	No. of starts	*	79	117
		% retention	*	83	74
		% pass rate	*	83	63
GCE AS psychology	3	No. of starts	*	246	340
		% retention	*	82	81
		% pass rate	*	89	83
GCE AS philosophy	3	No. of starts	*	42	50
		% retention	*	83	80
		% pass rate	*	71	88

Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

* course did not run

Quality of education and training

95. In humanities, 83% of lessons were good or better. Most lessons are well prepared and confidently delivered. Students are encouraged to explore and express their ideas, and learning tasks are varied and imaginative. In a GCE A-level psychology lesson, students learnt about the principles of profiling a criminal, reviewing evidence about crimes committed by some well-known criminals and building up pen pictures of them. In a GCE A-level history lesson, where students were studying the build up to the Korean war, they drew comparisons with the current involvement of the United States and the United Nations over confrontation with Iraq.

96. In many lessons, students work well, contribute relevant ideas confidently, and co-operate fully with teachers. A GCE AS philosophy student successfully led a lesson for part of the session using the 'Allegory of the Cave' to stimulate discussion on naïve realism by fellow students. In a small number of lessons, some students failed to concentrate and they did not learn very much. Also in a significant number of lessons learning was disrupted by the late arrival of several students. In some lessons, the students were of varying abilities, but the teacher gave them all the same tasks, which were too easy for some and too difficult for others. The teacher did not ensure that the classroom activities were adapted, where necessary, to suit the ability of individual students. In some instances, students were given tasks tailored to their individual learning needs to work through in directed study time.

97. There was very little use of ILT in lessons, although in some subjects, such as psychology, law and geography, use of the Internet and college intranet has been incorporated into schemes of work. Teachers of some other subjects give the students advice on useful websites.

98. In many lessons, resources are well used. In several lessons, short video extracts were used to focus on particular issues. In two GCE A-level sociology lessons, teachers used videos showing the activities of protest groups to demonstrate features of new social movements, contrasting them with more traditional groups. Before the video, students were given clear indications of what they were to look for, and there was good use of the freeze control to highlight significant features. Teachers have produced some good learning materials themselves. For example, in a lesson on GCE A-level early modern history course, the students benefited from an excellent handout the teacher had produced which brought together relevant extracts from historical texts and documents on Cromwell's Irish campaign and provoked a vigorous debate. Most teaching is in pleasant rooms which are used mainly for the teaching of particular subjects. In most classrooms, good displays give a strong sense of subject identity and illustrate recent work and activities.

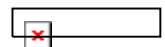
99. There are extensive activities for enriching students' learning. For instance in geography, field trips have been re-established as a central feature of the GCE AS and A-level courses. History and government students visit Washington. Religious studies students have visited a mosque. Law students take part successfully in an annual mock trial competition at a local court. Psychology students strengthen their knowledge about criminal behaviour by attending a sixth form conference in London on the subject. Where necessary, students are given financial help to enable them to participate in these activities.

100. Strong and effective support for individual students is a major feature in humanities. Teachers are well aware of the needs of individual students and respond effectively to them and provide extra support outside lessons. Through their regular one-to-one interviews with students, staff are able to offer further support for individual students and set them targets. Many of these targets are precise and measurable. Teachers also provide students with valuable guidance through written comments on their work. There is widespread use of cover sheets on which teachers make structured comments on how students have met assessment criteria. When returning marked work, however, some teachers fail to annotate it to show how the assessment relates to the issues raised on the summary sheets. Many humanities students benefit from additional learning support and value this. Some additional learning support tutors, however, do not give tutors enough feedback on the progress of students receiving help.

Leadership and management

101. Most courses and subjects are well managed. Decisions are made at regular subject team meetings. The self-assessment reports for the humanities departments are detailed in their analysis of teaching, learning and students' achievement on individual courses. There is a clear will on the part of staff to raise standards. Although some effective action has been taken, some of the issues identified through self-assessment have not been addressed effectively. For instance, in some lessons, teachers do not ensure that the needs of all students are met. There is also little use of ILT in some lessons as a teaching and learning aid. There is some strong leadership of subject and departmental teams and staff work well together. New teachers to the college have received very good support, particularly in psychology. Staff development needs have been identified and met in most subjects. The head of division liaises effectively with individual heads of department to ensure that common issues are dealt with consistently.

English and modern foreign languages



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

Strengths

- high pass rates on GCE AS and A-level courses
- many students with high grades in GCE A-level English literature
- good teaching and effective learning
- enthusiasm and good team-working of staff
- effective assessment of students' work.

Weaknesses

- insufficient help for weaker students in some lessons
- little use of the target language by students in modern language lessons
- outdated and unreliable language laboratory.

Scope of provision

102. The numbers on English courses have increased very significantly since the introduction of Curriculum 2000. Many students have enrolled on the GCE AS English and literature course, and it is now one of the largest courses in the department, with 145 students. There are 100 students studying English literature and approximately 50 on the English language GCE AS course. Numbers are smaller on the GCE A-level courses, with 78 students taking English literature, 35 students taking English language, and 55 students on the combined English language and literature course. There are 140 students on the GCSE English course. Approximately 370 students study a variety of modern foreign languages, including French, German, Italian, Spanish and Russian. GCE AS and A-level and GCSE courses are offered during the day and in the evening.

Achievement and standards

103. The retention rate on the GCE A-level English literature courses is high and above the national average. Retention rates on GCSE and GCE AS English courses are below the national average. Retention rates for all other English courses are in line with the national average. They are low for GCSE Russian and Spanish courses.

104. The proportion of students who achieve grade C or above in GCSE English, French, German, Italian and Russian have been above the national average for the past three years. Students on GCE AS courses obtain good results. For example, in 2002, the pass rate for GCE AS English literature and French was over 95%. On most GCE AS courses, however, the proportion of students who achieve grade C or above is below the national average. Students do well on GCE A-level courses. In 2002, all students who completed the GCE course in English language and literature passed. The pass rate on other English courses was over 98%.

105. During their time at the college, students grow in confidence and become more mature. Many are able to speak clearly and cogently about their work and express their ideas well. The building of students' confidence has been a high priority for English staff. Teachers help students to improve their skills in discussion. For example, in one lesson, the students entered into discussion about a Blake poem with enthusiasm, expressed themselves fluently and explored what the author meant in considerable depth. The discussion took on a life of its own and through it, the students generated new and perceptive ideas about the text. In modern foreign languages, students demonstrate good skills of listening, writing and understanding. In lessons, however, many students are not confident in the use of the language they are learning.

A sample of retention and pass rates in English and modern foreign languages, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
GCSE English	2	No. of starts	134	146	167
		% retention	79	75	77
		% pass rate	54	52	52
GCSE German	2	No. of starts	16	14	16
		% retention	25	43	75
		% pass rate	75	83	58
GCE AS English language and literature	3	No. of starts	*	36	97
		% retention	*	78	87
		% pass rate	*	93	89
GCE A-level English	3	No. of starts	117	127	87

literature		% retention	78	86	98
		% pass rate	97	94	99
GCE AS French	3	No. of starts	*	75	71
		% retention	*	73	82
		% pass rate	*	78	95
GCE A-level French	3	No. of starts	38	37	22
		% retention	87	68	95
		% pass rate	85	88	100

Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

* course did not run

Quality of education and training

106. Teaching is good and 83% of lessons were good or better. In the best lesson on any English course, the teaching methods were imaginative and extremely successful in stimulating the students to develop highly perceptive insights into complex concepts and abstract ideas. In English and in modern foreign languages, the teaching on GCE A-level courses was better than that for GCSE subjects. Some English lessons were highly structured round a set pattern of learning activities that were a little restricted in their range. In these lessons, the students carried out an oral task, received feedback on their performance in it, and then entered into discussion. The needs of some students are not met in a number of English lessons. For example, some students who are finding their course difficult are reticent in lessons and are not given the help they need.

107. There is much good teaching of foreign languages. The target language is used consistently by the teacher in the majority of lessons, which are well structured and help students to develop a range of linguistic and exam-related skills. Lively teaching and learning strategies are employed, including activities at different levels and games to illustrate grammar points. These maintain students' interest and encourage motivation. In one GCE A-level French lesson on the German occupation of France, the teacher used very good questioning techniques to encourage all students to express their ideas and participate in discussion. Students responded very well, mastering difficult concepts and demanding linguistic exercises.

108. Although the three language assistants for French, German and Spanish, respectively, provide good support for students individually and in small groups, they do not give them enough encouragement to use the target language during lessons. In some less successful lessons, the students were required to undertake activities for which they had not been prepared adequately. Many lacked the skills to carry these out satisfactorily and they learnt little from them.

109. Modern foreign language teachers use IT in their lessons with ease and confidence. They use PowerPoint, data projectors, links to the college intranet and also relevant Internet sites effectively. In one Russian lesson, for example, students swiftly and successfully completed an exercise on a website to strengthen their vocabulary relating to different professions.

110. Assessment is well organised and is usually rigorous. The comments given to students on modern foreign languages courses as feedback on their work are, however, sometimes too vague to be of much value to them. Students on English courses are not always set clear targets. Homework is set regularly and returned promptly. There is a good range of enrichment activities for students, including work experience opportunities and trips abroad.

111. The attractive and modern base rooms, with well-produced displays, provide a good learning environment. There is a good range of resources available to students, including an open learning suite with access to computers and good learning resources. In English, teachers produce their own

study packs on relevant topics and texts. Modern foreign language students make good use of cassette and video players, a range of learning materials and satellite television. The language laboratory is outdated and unreliable, and is of little use to the students as a learning facility.

Leadership and management

112. The English and modern foreign languages teams are well managed. Staff have clearly identified roles and responsibilities. Self-assessment is detailed and thorough. Communication is good, with much informal sharing of good practice. At their regular team meetings, staff discuss teaching and learning methods and issues related to curriculum development.

Part D: College data

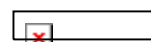
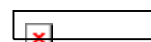


Table 1: Enrolments by level of study and age 2000/01

Level	16-18	19+
1	2	42
2	18	31
3	79	25
4/5	0	0
Other	1	2
Total	100	100



Source: provided by the college in spring 2001

Table 2: Enrolments by curriculum area and age 2001/02

Curriculum area	16-18 No.	19+ No.	Total Enrolments %
Science and mathematics	2,907	60	24
Land-based provision	0	0	0
Construction	0	0	0
Engineering, technology and manufacture	73	0	1
Business administration, management and professional	367	85	4
Information and communication technology	1,898	721	21



Retailing, customer service and transportation	0	0	0
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	384	2	3
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	0	0	0
Health, social care and public services	133	48	1
Visual and performing arts and media	1,140	133	10
Humanities	1,717	89	14
English, languages and communication	2,386	181	20
Foundation programmes	179	78	2
Total	11,184	1,397	100

Source: provided by the college in spring 2002

Table 3: Retention and achievement

Level (Long Courses)	Retention and pass rate	Completion year					
		16-18			19+		
		1999	2000	2001	1999	2000	2001
		1	Starters excluding transfers	229	234	225	257
	Retention rate	75	81	90	77	72	76
	National average	80	81	83	70	74	74
	Pass rate	55	50	61	46	43	59
	National average	62	70	66	61	65	66
2	Starters excluding transfers	673	713	535	271	262	237
	Retention rate	78	84	80	69	68	59
	National average	80	81	81	71	75	74
	Pass rate	80	79	72	61	81	78
	National average	81	79	83	68	68	67
3	Starters excluding transfers	2,325	2,066	5,429	239	338	330
	Retention rate	76	80	83	60	64	57
	National average	78	80	84	65	70	71
	Pass rate	85	84	82	64	68	73
	National average	85	85	85	61	63	66

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, Learning and Skills Council, September 2002.

2. College rates for 1997/8-1998/9: 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: provided by the college in spring 2001.

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)	84	14	2	129
Level 2 (intermediate)	59	36	5	22
Level 1 (foundation)	67	33	0	3
Other sessions	100	0	0	2
Totals	81	17	2	156

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