



# St Brendan's Sixth Form College

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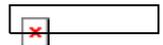
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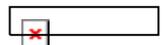
**Basic information about the college**



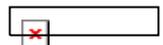
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Name of college:	St Brendan's Sixth Form College
Type of college:	Sixth Form College
Principal:	Peter Bradshaw
Address of college:	Broomhill Road Brislington Bristol BS4 5RQ
Telephone number:	0117 977 7766
Fax number:	0117 972 3351
Chair of governors:	Geoff Barrett
Unique reference number:	130563
Name of reporting inspector:	David Starling HMI
Date(s) of inspection:	10-14 December 2001

**Part A: Summary**

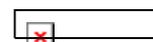


**Information about the college**



St Brendan's Sixth Form College is a Roman Catholic designated college whose trustee is the Bishop of Clifton. The college is located on the south-east edge of Bristol. The trust deed specifies that the college provides Catholic education. For the past 21 years of a much longer history, the institution has been a sixth form college. At the time of the inspection, there were 952 students, 938 of them 16 to 18 year-olds studying on full-time programmes. The college's mission was revised in March 2001. The college seeks to serve the Catholic and wider community by providing full-time advanced and intermediate-level education, underpinned by Christian values and ideals, for young people aged 16 to 19, together with lifelong learning opportunities for others. The college strives for excellence in teaching and learning, to act in the spirit of the gospel, to provide experience of a Christian community and to support each individual as a unique creation of God.

### How effective is the college?



Inspectors judged the quality of education to be good in computing and information technology (IT), visual and performing arts, psychology, sociology, philosophy, government and politics, history, geography, English, communication studies and modern foreign languages. Provision in mathematics and business was judged to be satisfactory, whilst that in science was judged to be unsatisfactory. The main strengths and the areas that should be improved are listed below:

#### **Key strengths**

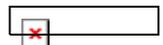
- high levels of achievement in some areas of work
- much good teaching
- commitment to academic improvement
- many highly qualified, committed teachers
- effective monitoring of progress and support for students
- positive and caring Catholic ethos
- effective governing body and senior management team.

#### **What should be improved?**

- retention rates, particularly on vocational courses
- attendance and punctuality of students
- effectiveness of the management information system
- communications between teachers and senior managers
- aspects of curriculum management including the understanding, analysis and use of value added information
- teaching methods in relation to individuals' learning needs
- opportunities for students to take full advantage of enrichment activities
- key skills provision.

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

### Quality of provision in curriculum and occupational areas

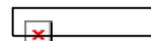


*The table below shows overall judgements about provision in subjects and courses that were inspected. Judgements are based primarily on the quality of teaching, training and learning and how well students achieve. Not all subjects and courses were inspected. Inspectors make overall judgements on curriculum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

Area	Overall judgements about provision, and comment
Science	<b>Unsatisfactory.</b> Retention and pass rates are low. Some of the teaching is unimaginative and students have too little opportunity to express their ideas. Accommodation, equipment and technical

	support are good.
Mathematics	<b>Satisfactory.</b> Pass rates at General Certificate of Education Advanced level (GCE A level) are below the national average. A significant amount of the teaching is good. Students are well supported and there is effective assessment and review of students' progress. Schemes of work do not address the needs of all learners.
Business	<b>Satisfactory.</b> Students make substantial progress in relation to their prior levels of attainment. They are well supported. Teaching is not sufficiently stimulating and the range of learning activities is too narrow.
Computing and information technology	<b>Good.</b> There is a good range of GCE Advanced Subsidiary level (GCE AS) and GCE A-level computing and IT courses, but the college offers no vocational courses. Established courses have high pass rates. Retention rates are in line with national averages. Teaching is good, particularly in computing.
Visual and performing arts	<b>Good.</b> There are consistently high levels of achievement in art and design. Teaching is good. Students are well motivated and there is lively, imaginative work in all areas. Students express their ideas confidently. Assessment schedules on some GCE AS courses create uneven workloads for students.
Psychology, sociology and philosophy	<b>Good.</b> Pass rates are high in GCE A-level psychology and sociology. Retention rates are a cause for concern in GCE A-level sociology and philosophy. Students co-operate effectively and their work is of a high standard. Much of the teaching is good, although methods of teaching large classes are sometimes inappropriate. Some rooms are too small for the classes which use them.
Government and politics, history and geography	<b>Good.</b> Levels of achievement have improved and pass rates are high on most GCE A-level courses. Retention rates on GCE A-level programmes are low. Teaching is good, though teachers do not always exploit the resources available. Students work conscientiously. Courses are well managed. Quality assurance is becoming more effective.
English, communication studies and modern foreign languages	<b>Good.</b> Levels of achievements at GCE AS and A level remain consistently high, and have improved at GCSE. Staff work well together to help students achieve their full potential. Learning resources are good and are well used by staff and students. Most accommodation is good and there are effective displays in rooms and adjacent corridors. A few rooms are too small for the classes using them. The area is managed well.

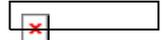
### How well is the college led and managed?



Leadership and management are satisfactory. The principal, senior managers and governing body provide capable and decisive leadership. Senior managers consult closely with middle managers, course teams and governors in setting the strategic direction of the college and drawing up the annual development plan. The college's managers have responded decisively to a difficult financial position by reorganising the management structure of the college. There is not enough central control of management procedures in some subject areas and too often there is a poor understanding, at departmental level, of management roles. The self-assessment report is

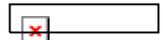
information system is not currently capable of supporting teachers and administrators with the quality of information they require. The governing body has a strong commitment to the welfare of the college and exercises its duties effectively in monitoring the college's academic and financial health.

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



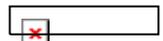
The college's mission to be an inclusive institution is reflected in its equal opportunities policy and its clear statements on discrimination. Over the past five years, the college has made efforts to expand the range of its intake. It has followed a policy of increasing the proportion of students from minority ethnic groups. Currently, over 10% of students are from minority ethnic communities. Many of these students are Muslim and there is now an explicit attempt to increase recruitment of students from African-Caribbean backgrounds. The college has tried to make itself better known to potential students in north and south Bristol. Bus services are run from places as far distant as Weston super Mare and Chippenham in Wiltshire. The college has very few students over 19 years of age and despite its mission, it makes no provision for students at level 1. There are no pre-GCSE mathematics or English courses.

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



The strong concern for the individual welfare of its students is one of the college's major strengths. The college has developed wide-ranging links with Roman Catholic partner schools. Partly as a consequence, students receive highly effective pre-course guidance. Enrolment and induction procedures for new students are also effective. The college provides strong tutorial and personal support for students. Their attendance at college and their academic progress are monitored carefully. The evaluation of students' progress at college workshops, however, is not thorough enough. The college welcomes students to its imaginative, well-organised core Christian theology course and to its extensive enrichment programme. However, timetable clashes mean that some students cannot take advantage of a number of enrichment activities. Throughout their time in college, students receive good careers education and guidance.

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



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

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

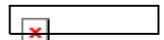
- friendly and supportive atmosphere
  
- good teaching and helpful teachers

- good library and information centre facilities
- modern information learning technology (ILT) facilities with good Internet access
- the college's commitment to equal opportunities and staff responsiveness to individuals' needs
- monitoring of progress, feedback and support from teachers.

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

- information on key skills
- overlapping assignment deadlines
- understanding of the concept of minimum target grades
- students' common room facilities and some classrooms
- transport to college
- timetables that restrict access to the full range of enrichment and liturgical activities.

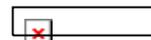
**Other information**



The college has two months to prepare an action plan in response to the report. It must show what

The governors must agree the plan and send copies of it to the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED).

## Part B: The college as a whole

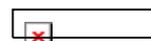


### Summary of grades awarded to teaching and learning by inspectors

Aspect & learner type	Graded good or better (Grades 1 to 3) %	Graded satisfactory (Grade 4) %	Graded less than satisfactory (Grades 5 to 7) %
Teaching 16-18	61	32	7
Learning 16-18	57	35	8

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

### Achievement and standards



1. The emphasis of the college's provision is on academic courses at level 3. Nearly all students are under 19 when they take their examinations. The overall pass rate at level 3 has improved over the past three years and now places the college at the national median for sixth form colleges. Retention rates at 77%, however, are below the median of 82%. There has been no improvement in the number of students leaving level 3 courses early over the past four years and the number of those leaving level 2 courses without completing has increased. Retention rates on level 2 courses are down from 80% in 1998 to 76% in 2001. The issue of declining retention rates on some courses was raised in the last inspection report. The separate reports on areas of learning in Part C give more detail about achievement and standards on particular courses.

2. The college offers over 40 academic courses leading to GCE AS/A-level qualifications and the Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE) in health and social care, performing arts and travel and tourism. Pass rates at GCE A level are in line with the average for sixth form colleges nationally. In 2001, 88% of students aged 16 to 18 who completed their course passed their examinations. In the same year, the average points score for students taking two or more GCE A levels was 17.8, which is below the national average, but above that for most post-16 students in the local area. Some 57% of GCE A-level candidates gained higher grades, A to C, in line with the national average. Results are particularly good in GCE A-level economics, art and design, politics and English language. Attainment in nearly all lessons observed was at least satisfactory. There were many examples of good written work in English. Art and design students were confident in the creative use of a range of key techniques. Students in psychology and philosophy demonstrated a good grasp of specialist vocabulary and abstract concepts.

3. Although pass rates range from average to high for the small number of students taking General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) advanced level courses, in 2001 the college achieved a

pass rate of 84%, compared with a national average of 86% for the country as a whole. Retention rates for the college's GCE AS students, at 82%, are higher than average for the college as a whole.

4. Data produced by the national Advanced Level Performance System (ALPS) for 2001 suggest that, measured against the performance of similar students at a group of Beacon and accredited colleges, most GCE A-level students perform better than predicted on the basis of their GCSE performance.

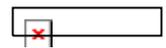
5. About 10% of enrolments are for GCSE courses. Ten GCSE subjects are offered. In 2001, 76% of 16 to 18 year olds completed their GCSE course, and 47% of these obtained passes at grades A\* to C. This is below the national average of 52% for sixth form colleges in 1999. Over the past four years, GCSE results have fluctuated around the national average. There are particularly good results in GCSE IT and art and design, but results in geography in 2001 were well below the national average. Students' levels of attainment in lessons were satisfactory.

6. All students study for a level 1 certificate in personal development in education and training as part of their enrichment programme, although many do not take the qualification. This is the only level 1 provision at the college. Short course provision in information and communication technology (ICT), aimed at developing students' computer literacy, has now been replaced by key skills. There is little evidence of achievement in key skills as, at the time of the inspection, a large proportion of portfolios remained incomplete.

7. In 2001, 62% of the 336 students completing advanced level courses progressed to higher education (HE) and 15% went into employment. Of those completing courses at level 2, 61% progressed to level 3 courses, 20% to further education (FE), including the 4% returning to St Brendan's, and 15% to employment.

8. Attendance during the inspection was 82%. This figure is above the national average for FE, although it has fallen since the last inspection from 89% and is below the college's target of 85%. A significant proportion of students were late in arriving for some lessons.

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



9. In 93% of the lessons observed by inspectors, teaching was judged to be at least satisfactory, and in over 60%, it was good. Teachers are appropriately qualified for the subjects that they teach, and most keep well abreast of developments in their specialist subjects. In art and design, English, languages, mathematics, ICT, psychology and philosophy, the lessons are well planned, much of the teaching is lively and students work well. However, the college is unrealistic about the extent to which standards of teaching have improved since the last inspection. Some teachers have not adjusted their methods to take account of larger classes and planning in some subjects tends to focus on how teachers will teach, rather than on what students will learn. Teaching was unsatisfactory in approximately 7% of lessons.

10. Students work effectively on their own in geography and in art and design. They are also well prepared when they arrive for lessons. In history, teachers take good account of students' preferred methods of learning, and assessment methods are highly effective. In ICT and geography, students work well on their own and show enthusiasm for their work. There is a model scheme of work for politics, but the mathematics scheme of work does not take enough account of students' differing learning needs. Value added analysis is used to evaluate students' performance and there are performance targets for each subject. There were examples, however, of teachers regarding the targets as too high for students and of targets being moved to be more in line with examination results.

11. ICT facilities were well used in geography and in some English lessons. In geography, the college intranet provision is rich and effective, despite the lack of intranet access in one of the specialist classrooms. In ICT, there are inadequate facilities for whole class teaching. There was little use of ICT in mathematics or business studies. Business students do not have enough contact with local businesses. Rooms were sometimes too small for the classes using them and, in a number of cases, this was having an adverse effect on teaching and learning. For example, one teacher could not get round the room to look at students' work.

12. Teachers are well qualified in their subjects. Some have higher degrees and almost all have a teaching qualification. The college provides good professional development. Several teachers have completed an ILT champions course.

13. The extensive college site is attractive and well maintained. Sports facilities are good. There is a large sports hall and extensive playing fields. The attractive chapel is used for small group liturgies or Mass, and is a place that staff and students visit for quiet reflection or prayer. The adjacent room is a focus for chaplaincy enrichment activities and is a chaplaincy base to which all students are welcome. Sections of some corridors have attractive poster displays on religious themes. Dining accommodation is adequate and a range of competitively priced food is available. The adjacent student common room is a pleasant area for students to meet, but it becomes very crowded at certain times of day.

14. Classroom accommodation is generally good and curriculum subjects are well resourced. In most curriculum areas, rooms are well furnished and provide a pleasant working environment. In some areas, for example in humanities, a few classrooms are too small for the classes which occupy them. Recent refurbishment has included provision of some modern lockers, and much improved corridor surfaces in parts of the college. There is a rolling programme of redecoration. Teaching accommodation for performing arts is poor. To some extent, the problems have arisen from the popularity of subjects within this curriculum area. For example, the photography room is far too small for the numbers studying the subject; the music room is not well located and there is inadequate space for practice rooms. Some short-term improvements have been made, for example, photography students can use an adjacent room that connects to the photography room, but this makes supervision of all students difficult. The college has drawn up plans for new buildings for this curriculum area but has failed to obtain funding. Access for students with restricted mobility is difficult. Current plans are to build an exterior lift and install several stair lifts, which would facilitate access to areas including the library, common room and auditorium.

15. The library and information centre provides a very good facility that is highly regarded by students. There is an extensive collection of books for most curriculum areas. The provision is particularly strong for English and theology. The theology collection also provides a resource for students on diocesan courses. Information sheets for each subject provide a useful starting point in searching for books, periodicals or a range of audiovisual resources. The library catalogue is easy to use. There are ample workspaces for students and a suite of computers. The computers are connected to the college network and offer access to the Internet and the college intranet. The intranet has sections for each curriculum subject, giving details related to examination courses and lessons. The law intranet has been identified by students, including some now studying the subject at university, as being of excellent quality. Most subjects have links to appropriate websites; there are also links to diocesan, national and international catholic websites. College computer provision is good. There is an adequate number of modern workstations in open access areas, and technician support is good.

16. Assessment is regular, fair and accurate. A college policy on marking provides broad guidance, such as an expectation that marked work should be returned within two weeks, which departments are expected to take into account when devising their own procedures. However, some departments do not have common marking schemes, and sometimes, students are confused about the meaning of grades. Although many students receive thorough feedback about their work, the standards they are achieving and what they need to do to improve, the quality of this feedback is not consistent across the college. Not all teachers, for example, correct spelling and grammar.

17. A few departments have adjusted their programmes; for example, modules have been re-

ordered after analysing students' work. In the college as a whole, however, there is too little focus on the use of assessment to inform teaching.

18. There is a system for recording students' attendance, target grades and the grades allocated by subject teachers, and the records help inform discussions that students have with tutors about their progress. Students are also encouraged to make judgements about their own progress. There are three meetings a year for parents of students in the lower sixth, and one for parents of students in the upper sixth, at which the parents have the opportunity to review students' progress with teachers.

19. There are effective verification procedures for AVCE courses; otherwise, little internal moderation occurs other than that required by examination boards. Most teachers are aware of each student's minimum target grade, as generated by the national ALPS value added system, but, because in 2000, this grade was the same for all the student's subjects, it was sometimes of limited use as an indicator of a student's expected progress in a particular subject. The national system now differentiates between subjects.

20. The college has a curriculum that meets the expectations of its clientele. The curriculum consists mainly of GCE AS and A-level courses for 16 to 18 year olds. There is some GCSE provision in mathematics and English but no provision for those with study needs below GCSE. The only post-19 provision is the element of initial teacher training based at the college.

21. The college has made many efforts to expand the range of its intake. Its policy of increasing the proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds means that 10% of its students now come from minority ethnic groups, a percentage 4% higher than the average for the population nationally.

22. There is a good range of communication courses on offer, and there are particularly good links between teaching, learning and assessment in languages and communication. Leavers' evaluation forms indicate that students are happy with the college's provision. There is a good range of enrichment activities on offer, including drama, community service, a gospel choir, a jazz club, and sport including soccer, net ball, rugby and badminton, receiving mention by students as worthwhile options. A minority of students encountered difficulty attending enrichment activities because of timetable clashes. A number of students excel in their chosen activity. For example, students have represented England at under-19 level in rugby, represented Avon in cross-country running and won a prestigious fine art competition.

23. Progression of students from Roman Catholic partner schools is facilitated by the wide-ranging links between schools and the college. All Year 10 pupils from partner schools attend taster days at the college. All prospective applicants attend open evenings and subsequently gain workshop experience of the college curriculum in a preparation day, held in advance of enrolment. Students and their parents benefit from the presence of college staff at Year 10 and Year 11 open evenings at the schools, and of school staff when they enrol at the college. Pre-entry guidance is good. The college publishes an attractive prospectus and detailed course leaflets, and puts on a range of tours, taster days and open evenings. The enrolment process is efficient. It includes arrangements for careers guidance, if required. This year, re-enrolment of all students starting their second year of study enabled staff to give advice on changes to programmes following GCE AS examination results. Students are informed about college procedures during an induction day. Individual pre-admission interviews explore with students why they wish to attend a Catholic college. The requirement of attendance at assemblies and the weekly core Christian theology lesson is explained during induction.

24. There is well-planned programme of tutorials, covering a range of pastoral and careers topics, and tutors are given detailed guidance in conducting tutorials. Each student has a personal tutor who is responsible for daily registration and for progress monitoring and review. Three curriculum directors, each responsible for a curriculum area, lead personal tutor teams. Tutor groups are comprised mainly of students studying similar subjects and are led by a tutor who teaches one of the subjects they are studying. There is a well-established, effective procedure for monitoring students' attendance. Punctuality for lessons is a problem, not only in the morning when some students have difficulty with long journeys, but also after the lunch break. The short registration

period is increasingly being used to focus on individual students' needs as well as for conducting regular progress reviews. Attendance of half the group at assembly facilitates the provision of this individual support, but some tutors express regret that it prevents them from joining their group at assembly.

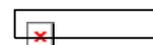
25. Learning support needs are identified prior to admission, or during enrolment and induction. Assessment is arranged, where appropriate, to determine the nature of the extra support needed and individual support is then provided. The college keeps good records of this support. Inspectors identified a small number of cases where appropriate specialist support had not been provided. Workshops are timetabled for communication and numeracy, but numbers attending are small, especially for the numeracy workshops. Although there are accurate records of attendance at workshops, there is no formal evaluation of the effectiveness of this support. Students speak appreciatively of the willingness of subject staff to give extra individual help outside lesson times.

26. Students receive good personal support. The full-time chaplaincy leader is available for informal discussion or advice on personal matters, and can direct students to suitable outside agencies where necessary. The students' diary also contains details of a range of outside agencies. The college counsellor offers confidential consultation and support. Currently, there are no regular arrangements for students to discuss issues with a priest or for the sacrament of reconciliation. Financial support is available through the access fund. Students value the range of support available. The chaplaincy leader organises assemblies, which are frequently led by students. These provide opportunities for prayer or quiet reflection, as well as being a focus for the sharing of information from curriculum directors. There is a weekly Mass, celebrated prior to the start of the college day and attended by a small group of staff. Mass is also celebrated on Holy Days and on other occasions during the college year, and is attended by larger numbers of staff and some students. The frequent positioning of these acts of worship mid-morning means there is insufficient time for the inclusion of music, but on other occasions, such as the carol service, students and the music department collaborate effectively in the celebration. Several Catholic priests take turns to say Mass at the college. The local Anglican vicar visits the college termly to lead worship. Small numbers of students attend annual retreats at a centre within the diocese and the college works closely with the diocesan youth service; for example, in sending representatives to an ecumenical youth centre in France or to the World Youth Day in Rome.

27. All students attend the imaginative, well-organised, weekly core Christian theology course. Students enjoy the lessons, which give them the chance to explore a range of ethical and moral issues, and to debate these in groups which are different from those in which they study their examination subjects. Attendance at these lessons is below the average for all college subjects. Students admit that they occasionally miss them because of the pressures of assignment deadlines. A wide range of enrichment activity is timetabled. Activities arranged through the chaplaincy include support for a variety of organisations such as the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development and Amnesty. Both staff and students give generously to projects such as the provision of Christmas hampers to needy families identified by the local branch of a Catholic social welfare charity. The Tam Tam Brazil project involved production of a compact disk by the music department and fundraising to provide a school for Brazilian street children.

28. There is a comprehensive programme of careers education and guidance. Personal tutors work in co-operation with the careers education, guidance and support manager, and the Connexions service, to provide effective support for students. The careers library is well stocked. Students value the thorough preparation of applicants to HE. They also commented on the equally good service offered to those students who wished to progress directly to an apprenticeship or to employment. Parents are invited to attend the careers information evening.

## Leadership and management



29. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The college is capably led by the principal, senior managers and governing body. Its values as a Catholic college, clearly expressed in its mission statement and student charter, are strongly centred on valuing each individual student. Whilst the college exists primarily to serve the Catholic community, it also welcomes those from other faith backgrounds who are happy to be educated in an explicitly Christian college. Senior managers consult with middle managers, course teams and work closely with governors in setting the college's strategic direction and drawing up the annual development plan. Raising levels of attainment forms an important part of the college's operational objectives and the self-assessment report is closely related to the operational objectives. Progress in achieving the objectives is monitored closely by senior managers through course reviews and a regular programme of management and curriculum meetings.

30. The college has recently been forced to respond quickly to a difficult financial position by reorganising its management structure. This has involved removing a tier of middle management and reducing the number of senior managers. Governors and senior managers have responded swiftly to the problems posed by a pattern of declining recruitment, a 2% drop in student retention, and a consequent shortfall in the budget of £384,000.

31. Management responsibilities are described clearly and curriculum directors and managers carry out these responsibilities effectively. In English and communication, modern languages and humanities, effective course management contributes significantly to the high levels of achievement. However, the quality of management at course level varies. There is a lack of central control over the application of college management procedures in some subject areas and a poor understanding at departmental level of management roles. At course level, almost all staff have administrative responsibilities. Teachers with responsibilities for large courses are under considerable pressure, coping with their management and administrative responsibilities.

32. Quality assurance arrangements have improved since the last inspection. There is a thorough quality-assurance cycle involving a rolling programme of evaluation, review, planning, target setting, action planning, monitoring and audit. Senior managers undertake a comprehensive internal inspection programme that includes lesson observations. Staff are trained in lesson evaluation. Observations and grades are moderated, analysed and discussed with teachers and governors, and used to inform strategic planning and professional development for staff. Many of the lesson observations focus too much on teaching and insufficiently on students' achievement. The self-assessment report is a key component of the quality assurance cycle. It is completed with careful attention to detail, but some of the evaluations it contains are over-generous. Relatively few weaknesses are identified in relation to teaching and learning.

33. The staff appraisal system is linked to the college's strategic objectives and contributes directly to the identification of staff development needs and allocating priorities. The college invests substantially in professional development. Full records are kept of staff development activities. The effectiveness of the activities is evaluated and the staff development co-ordinator produces an annual report for senior managers and governors. Last year, 51 members of the teaching staff fulfilled the requirements for the sixth form colleges' Professional Standards Payment (PSP).

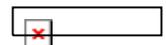
34. The college is in the process of moving from one management information system (MIS) to another. The data currently supplied are unreliable and too many administrative tasks must be carried out manually. At present, staff do not receive enough support from the system. It is cumbersome to keep up to date with the input of information from registers and other sources, some of which arrives in a confused or incomplete form. There is no overall MIS development plan and no clear statement of the full range of information that is likely to be required. This makes it difficult for the MIS manager to plan effectively to reduce the administrative burden on staff. The lack of an effective, centralised MIS system is interfering with the college's ability to monitor its vulnerable financial position.

35. The college's mission to be an inclusive institution is reflected in its equal opportunities policy and its clear statements on discrimination. The policy and its implementation are monitored by senior staff, reviewed regularly and agreed by the governing body. A monitoring report on equal

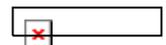
opportunities has recently been submitted to the personnel committee of the governing body. The college has identified a need to report in greater detail on the academic performance of the 10% of students from minority ethnic groups. The college takes great care to respond to students' special learning needs and to provide all students with a secure and supportive working environment. There is a clear complaints procedure with the right of appeal written into the provision.

36. The governing body has a strong commitment to the work and wellbeing of the college. It exercises its duties to monitor the academic and financial health of the college carefully and effectively. It took quick action, in consultation with senior managers, to draw up a recovery plan to counter the effects of the recent shortfall in funding and it insists on monthly monitoring statements which provide information on retention rates and finance. Full governing body and sub-committee minutes show that governors also demand information on examination results and that they are able to draw on local and national comparative figures in judging how well the college is performing. They ask probing questions and set taxing performance targets. The detailed written reports from the principal about the college's strengths and weaknesses are clear and objective. Reports on the restructuring process, for example, convey clearly the adverse impact that this has had on the morale of some members of staff, who feel that communication with senior management is weak and that insufficient account is being taken of the pressures under which they are working. The current student governor provides a written report for governors and makes valued contributions to governing body meetings. Teaching and learning resources are efficiently managed and well deployed. Overall, the college's financial resources are being well managed within a difficult situation, but budgetary constraints are holding back much-needed improvements in some aspects of the accommodation.

## Part C: Curriculum and occupational areas



### Science



Overall provision in this area is **unsatisfactory (grade 4)**

#### **Strengths**

- strong support for students from subject teachers
- carefully-planned and well-organised curriculum
- good resources and technical support
- good accommodation.

### **Weaknesses**

- low retention rates
- low pass rates
- much unimaginative teaching
- little opportunity for students to express themselves in lessons
- too little attention to the effectiveness of teaching and learning in course reviews.

### **Scope of provision**

37. The college offers GCE A level and AS in physics, chemistry and biology. At both levels, the most popular subject is biology. At GCSE, the college offers only human physiology and health. Over the last three years, the number of GCSE students has increased.

### **Achievement and standards**

38. Although retention rates have risen over the last three years, they remain below the average for sixth form colleges. The retention rate for GCE A-level biology has risen significantly over the last two years and is now close to the national average. The retention rate for GCE A-level physics has been more than 10% below the national average for the last three years. The retention rate in GCE A-level chemistry has remained below the national average. The retention rate for GCSE human physiology and health is also below the national average.

39. Pass rates are below national averages. In 2000/01, the pass rates in GCE AS biology was in line with the national average, but pass rates in chemistry and physics, at 73% and 63% respectively, were well below. The overall percentage of high grades is below the national average. There is an upward trend in the percentage of students gaining grades A\*-C in GCSE human physiology and health, but the percentage remains 10% below the national average, which is itself very low.

40. Students work competently in the laboratory and show good IT skills, especially in physics. Writing and recording skills are underdeveloped. In one GCE A-level class, students found it difficult to summarise from their textbook.

### **A sample of retention and pass rates in sciences, 1999 to 2001**

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
GCSE human	2	No. of starts	72	39	53

physiology		% retention	76	69	81
		% pass rate	9	11	26
GCE A-level biology	3	No. of starts	80	59	60
		% retention	76	88	88
		% pass rate	82	94	66
GCE A-level chemistry	3	No. of starts	51	48	43
		% retention	53	73	81
		% pass rate	85	80	80
GCE A-level physics	3	No. of starts	51	43	54
		% retention	51	67	70
		% pass rate	88	89	84

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

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

41. In a practical session in GCE AS biology, the students planned and modified their experiments and were able to develop a good understanding of the effect of variable factors. Similarly, in a practical physics session, GCE A-level students developed a good understanding of the errors associated with measurements and calculations. Many practical sessions, however, are conducted at too slow a pace, with students doing little more than following instructions. In some lessons, students simply copy information. They are given no opportunity to talk about the work or to explain what they find difficult. Students spent a third of one lesson watching a video, but were given no opportunity to comment on the video or to say what they had learned. In many GCE AS/A-level classes, teachers solicit contributions from students by directing questions at individuals. Apart from this, however, there is little opportunity for students to express themselves. Students' questioning skills are poorly developed. In some GCSE classes, students are required to spend time on low-level activities which do not help them to make progress. In contrast, the students in one lesson were producing a poster to show what they had learned.

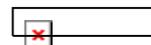
42. In many lessons, students are provided with instruction sheets which are well designed. In chemistry, students were using a software package to develop their understanding of spectra. In biology, students worked with a variety of visual aids, including images collected from the Internet. Computers were available in the laboratories and students used them to word process information, plot graphs and draw relevant diagrams.

43. Staff are approachable and give time to support students outside normal lesson time. Extension workshops have been established to help students who are having difficulty with elements of their courses. There are well-planned schemes of work, showing key dates and deadlines, which are included in student handbooks.

### **Leadership and management**

44. Courses are reviewed at the end of the teaching year. The reviews are reasonably thorough, but there is not enough examination of the relationship between students' achievements and the effectiveness of teaching and learning. Lesson observations are carried out as part of the college's internal inspection process, but there is little subsequent discussion of how classroom practice might be improved. Teachers discuss the progress of individual students on an informal basis, but do not record agreed actions for improving performance that can be evaluated at a later stage. Subject staff are only beginning to understand the importance of accurate data analysis and target setting.

## Mathematics



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

### **Strengths**

- much effective teaching
- effective assessment and review of students' progress
- above average retention rates on GCE A-level and GCSE courses
- good resources to support GCSE assessment.

### **Weaknesses**

- below average pass rates at GCE A level
- failure to address the needs of all learners in schemes of work
- lack of pre-GCSE programmes
- course management roles which lack clarity.

### **Scope of provision**

45. The provision in mathematics caters for students studying at GCE AS/A level and GCSE. GCSE mathematics is taken by students who are already enrolled on other intermediate and advanced-level programmes. At GCE A level, students have a choice of pure mathematics and mechanics, or pure mathematics and statistics. Workshop support is also provided.

### **Achievement and standards**

46. Standards are variable across the curriculum area. Achievement is higher than the national average at GCE AS and comparable to the average at GCSE. GCE A-level results have improved since the last inspection, but are still below the national average. With the exception of GCE A-level pure mathematics, outcomes of up to a grade lower than predicted from students' incoming GCSE grades indicate that the college has not added value to students' achievements. Achievement of higher grades at GCE A level has fallen from 65% in 2000 to 48% in 2001. Retention rates have risen on GCE A-level and GCSE courses. Students' attainment in lessons observed was good or satisfactory. Good work is exemplified by well-presented and logically-solved problems. The average level of attendance at lessons observed was 83%, slightly below the college target.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
GCSE mathematics	2	No. of starts	201	187	138
		% retention	78	82	88
		% pass rate	41	61	43
GCE A-level mathematics	3	No. of starts	106	82	96
		% retention	76	76	83
		% pass rate	82	81	85

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

***Quality of education and training***

47. Mathematics teachers are committed and experienced. There is much challenging teaching in clear, well-structured lessons, although in some lessons, the range of learning styles is limited. Teachers provide help for individual students in lessons, but do not always prepare adequately for students of differing ability when drawing up their lesson plans. Students are well motivated and respond to the enthusiasm of their teachers. There are very good relationships between staff and students. There is little use of IT in lessons.

48. Students are given regular assessments of their work both during lessons and on completion of their homework. In many cases, work is meticulously marked, and there are good written comments from teachers about how students might improve their performance. Work is often returned by the next lesson. Students are not always aware of their minimum target grade, based on their GCSE score on entry, although all students are given these grades during the autumn term. There are well-used and effective common resources to support GCSE assessment. Students' overall progress is monitored satisfactorily by subject teachers.

49. Although many students have passed the higher tier paper at GCSE before starting GCE AS mathematics, all students starting the GCE AS course receive a good, well-produced booklet on basic mathematics skills, which aims to address any gaps in their knowledge. A few more able students take an accelerated course which enables them to cover further mathematics. The GCSE mathematics group contains students of widely differing ability, but there is no formal diagnosis of their strengths and weaknesses on entry and no separate provision for less able students. Following the GCSE re-take examinations in November, teachers run timetabled additional mathematics workshops, but few students take advantage of these.

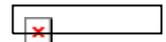
50. The subject is taught in a suite of specialist rooms. There are few IT facilities. The college intranet contains material produced by mathematics staff, and some commercial software, but there is little of it and it is not available in the mathematics rooms. Occasionally, with larger classes, there is not enough space in classrooms. In some rooms, students do not have sight of the white boards without turning through 90 degrees. In others, there is little room for the teacher to circulate. GCE AS/A-level students are given relevant text books, written for the course. Some GCSE students

have books. In other cases, books are provided for use during the lesson. Library resources are good. There is a wide range of appropriate literature on mathematics.

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

51. Work in mathematics is well managed, although some staff are uncertain about their course leadership roles. There are regular, minuted meetings of course teams. Annual course reviews take account of students' responses to questionnaires. Course targets are not always set and there is little evidence that the college's quality assurance system has had much impact on levels of achievement.

### **Business**



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

### ***Strengths***

- good progress of GCE A-level students in relation to their prior levels of attainment
- good learning resource centre which is well used by students
- strong support for students from teaching and non-teaching staff.

### ***Weaknesses***

- insufficiently varied or stimulating teaching
- below average retention rates in GNVQ advanced business
- no provision at level 2.

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

52. The majority of students in this area are following GCE AS/A-level business programmes. There are a small number of students studying economics. The college no longer offers vocational business courses. The lack of programmes at intermediate and entry level is a weakness that restricts the college's efforts to widen participation.

### **Achievement and standards**

53. Overall, pass rates are in line with national averages. In business, the pass rate has been slightly above average, with a slight drop below average in 2001. In economics, the pass rate for the small number of students who take the examination has been 100% in each of the three years to 2001. Pass rates in GNVQ advanced business have been below national averages, but rose to meet the national average in the last year of the course in 2001. Retention rates in economics have risen and are now in line with the national average. Retention rates in business were slightly above average in 1998/99 and 1999/2000, falling to meet the national average in 2001. The value added system used by the college indicates that GCE A-level students make good progress in business and economics in relation to their prior levels of achievement. The average level of attendance in lessons during the inspection was 86%.

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

<b>Qualification</b>	<b>Level</b>	<b>Completion year:</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2001</b>
GNVQ intermediate business	2	No. of starts	15	7	n/a
		% retention	80	100	n/a
		% pass rate	85	29	n/a
GNVQ advanced business	3	No. of starts	20	14	22
		% retention	70	79	64
		% pass rate	57	40	86
GCE A-level business	3	No. of starts	92	94	90
		% retention	78	78	73
		% pass rate	94	95	86
GCE A-level economics	3	No. of starts	17	8	14
		% retention	59	50	86
		% pass rate	100	100	100

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

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

54. There are detailed schemes of work which help the planning of learning and lessons are well prepared. However, lesson activities are not varied enough to do justice to the topics taught. Teaching is pitched at an appropriate level and the subject matter often reflects students' experience. However, students have too few opportunities to talk and show at greater length what they have learned and experienced. In an economics lesson about the social impact of business in the developing world, and in a business lesson on the idea of wishing to do good as a motivation for working, there was little discussion or debate. Overall, students make satisfactory progress. In relation to their prior achievement, progress is often good. In one GCE AS lesson, students with widely differing levels of attainment were able to talk accurately about what they had learned and apply their knowledge to a business case study. In a GCE A-level business lesson, the students were able to link concepts from several modules in dealing with a case study. An attempt to relate economic theory to contemporary events, however, proved too demanding for some members of one class. Key skills are represented in the schemes of work, but in practice, teachers do not give enough attention to developing these skills. The key skill of communication is included in business studies work.

55. Students are set suitably demanding targets, appropriate to their level of study. There is no formal initial assessment, although students' progress is reviewed after a two-week induction

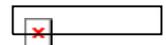
programme and suitable remedial action is taken where needs are identified. Project work deadlines are co-ordinated to ensure that students do not have too much work at any one time. Students receive helpful and encouraging comments on their work. Marking standards are not always consistent and work is not always returned within the two-week period required by college policy. There are regular reviews of students' progress at which their records of attendance are also examined. The personal study targets set at review meetings have much more impact on the quality of some students' work than on that of others. Staff provide extra classes and individual support to prepare students for module tests and these are much appreciated by students. Students feel that they are well supported and find teachers and library staff helpful and approachable.

56. Students have access to good IT and library resources, and they make effective use of these. Teachers are appropriately qualified and there are effective links between teaching and non-teaching staff to ensure that students have suitable resources. Course leaders make insufficient use of local and national businesses as resources. The college has a flexible approach to entry requirements and existing students' needs are well met. Some of the rooms used for teaching are not suitable for practical lessons or for small group work.

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

57. The management of the department is satisfactory. Some of the college's aims, however, such as the development of more effective methods of teaching and learning, are not being pursued with sufficient thoroughness. Departmental meetings tend to focus on how to react to outside requirements and there is not enough time given to departmental development. Recently arrived value added data and its implications had not, as yet, been formally reviewed by the department.

### **Computing and information technology**



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

#### ***Strengths***

- high attainment in computing
- good project work
- ability of students to work effectively on their own
- good teaching in computing
- modern computing facilities in well-designed accommodation.

### **Weaknesses**

- failure of students to be punctual for lessons
- insufficient in-service training for IT teachers
- insufficient resources for teaching large groups efficiently
- lack of clarity over areas of management responsibility.

### **Scope of provision**

58. The college offers a good range of GCE AS/A-level and GCSE provision in IT and computing, together with key skills certification. GCE A-level and GCSE computing courses are well established. GCE AS computing and GCE AS/A-level IT courses are recent additions to the college provision.

### **Achievement and standards**

59. Retention rates for all courses are close to their respective national averages. The proportion of students gaining A-E grades in GCE A-level computing rose sharply in 2001 and is now well above the national average. In 2001, a GCE A-level computing student achieved one of the top five grades in the country. Levels of achievement in other subjects are high.

60. Students' work is never less than satisfactory. Much of it is very good or excellent. Some work in GCE A-level computing is outstanding. One student project, a sophisticated staff appraisal and development system, has hyperlinks to the Internet to give details of relevant in-service training, and it may be taken up by one of the country's leading software companies. Standards in GCSE IT are high. For example, students are able to use some of the more advanced features of a database system, such as drop down lists, in their project work. Many students are able to bypass the simple 'wizard' supplied with the software and enter new values by direct editing of the fields in the 'lookup' function's properties table. Although students have a positive attitude to their work, a significant proportion of students are arriving late for lessons, particularly at the start of the day.

### **A sample of retention and pass rates in computing and information technology, 1999 to 2001**

<b>Qualification</b>	<b>Level</b>	<b>Completion year:</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2001</b>
GCSE IT	2	No. of starts	35	43	52
		% retention	83	67	75
		% pass rate	90	90	88
GCE A-level computing	3	No. of starts	52	69	59
		% retention	79	75	76

		% pass rate	85	87	95
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Source: ISR (1999 and 2000), college (2001)

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

61. Teaching is generally well organised and effective. The best teaching and learning was seen in computing; the least effective was in the key skills course. In the best lessons, teachers plan and structure their work well and use various methods to ensure that all students understand the topics introduced. For example, in one GCE AS computing class, the teacher gave a clear explanation of the role of linked tables in a database to the whole group using a projection system linked to a computer. The teacher asked pertinent questions to ensure that the students understood what had been covered and was also responsive to questions asked by the students. This was followed by project work in which the teacher received assistance from a GCE A-level student, helping other students with their problems. There were a few less effective lessons in which teachers lacked confidence in the subject expertise or reverted to inappropriate teaching methods. For example, in one lesson on the role of IT in society, the teacher talked for most of the session and allowed little time for students to express their own ideas and ask questions. There was no encouragement to students to make notes and some of the examples given by the teacher related to out-of-date practices.

62. Teachers have an excellent working relationship with students, although they are sometimes too accepting of persistent lateness. They are usually aware of students' individual needs and seek to build on students' prior attainments. Additional sessions are available for students who have problems with their coursework. Although teachers provide effective support in the classroom for students who ask for it, there are no formal mechanisms in place to identify students who are experiencing problems and who are in danger of not completing the course. For example, there is no systematic check at the start of a new year to ensure that students are on an appropriate course. In classes where there is a significant imbalance between the sexes, the needs of female students are not always addressed fully. For example, the few female students who start advanced computing courses are less likely to complete the course than the male students. Teachers assess students' project work thoroughly.

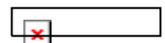
63. In both computing and IT, students often develop good personal and learning skills because of the nature of the tasks set. For example, students' projects might call for them to visit locations outside the college, discuss computer specifications with relative strangers and make notes of their requirements. In one IT lesson, students were required to gain access to a large website, find information about data encryption and précis their findings in order to answer a well-structured set of questions.

64. Students benefit from good room layout and modern computing equipment. However, IT rooms lack appropriate facilities for whole class teaching, such as permanent display projectors.

### **Leadership and management**

65. Although computing and IT share the same facilities and resources, management of the two areas is separate. The high degree of autonomy enjoyed by computing staff has led to some lack of clarity over areas of responsibility. As a result, some aspects of good management are neglected. No use is made of the outcomes of internal class observations to try to improve teaching and to share good practice within teams, or to find ways of addressing lateness and non-attendance.

### **Visual and performing arts**



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

***Strengths***

- consistently high pass rates in visual arts
- ability of students to work effectively on their own
- good, rigorous teaching in most lessons
- good command of key technologies and processes by visual arts students
- lively, imaginative and confident work from students.

***Weaknesses***

- low retention rates on some GCE A-level courses
- unbalanced assessment structure on some GCE AS courses
- inadequate length of lessons for practical work
- poor accommodation in the performing arts.

***Scope of provision***

66. A good range of GCE AS/A levels is offered in visual and performing arts and media, along with an AVCE in performing arts. Visual art courses comprise art and design, fashion, textiles and photography. Performing arts courses comprise music, music technology and theatre studies.

***Achievement and standards***

67. Pass rates are high in GCE AS/A-level art and design, photography and textiles. Pass rates in

GCE A-level theatre studies have been below average for the past three years, but in 2001, GCE A-level theatre and dramatic arts pass rates were well above average. Pass rates are below the national average in media studies. College value added data indicate that students in textiles, photography, and visual arts have grades well above those predicted at the start of their studies. Retention rates are well below average in GCE A-level music, photography and textiles. Average attendance during the inspection, at 77%, is well below that expected by the college.

68. Students are developing an appropriate range of skills in all arts and media subjects and using their skills creatively. They are able to express their ideas confidently and their work is invariably lively and imaginative. Students' study skills are good. Standards of work in fine art and textiles are particularly high. In GCE A-level visual arts, students are able to employ key techniques and processes using a range of media and materials. Drawing skills are good; sketchbooks and worksheets are of a high standard. One GCE A-level student successfully competed in an international art competition for representational landscapes and won the first prize. Photography students understand the potential of multi-media applications.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
GCSE art and design	2	No. of starts	**	**	41
		% retention	**	**	81
		% pass rate	**	**	100
GCSE media studies	2	No. of starts	*	*	24
		% retention	*	*	88
		% pass rate	*	*	76
GCE A-level art and design	3	No. of starts	177	157	161
		% retention	67	75	66
		% pass rate	94	90	99

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

\* course did not run

\*\* data not available

69. Students work to high standards in the performing arts and many demonstrate considerable talent. Standards of work are much more variable in media studies, although most students are able to navigate electronic media skilfully to support research and are making the right connections between research, the development of ideas and the production of finished pieces of theoretical and practical work.

***Quality of education and training***

70. Teachers across the area ensure that students enjoy their studies and that the work is suitably demanding. At the same time, the good relationship between staff and students helps to promote students' confidence and encourages them to work effectively on their own. The development of students' own projects is balanced, particularly in the GCE AS year, by effective teaching of basic skills which students are then able to apply as courses progress. There is careful planning to ensure that students' interest is sustained at all times. Performing arts teachers draw effectively on the skills of individual students, so that the whole class benefits. Teachers' aims for the lessons are shared with the students. They know what is expected of them and what they need to do to achieve high standards. Most lessons are organised so that students can work at a pace which suits them.

There was some lively and effective teaching on the AVCE performing arts course. In some cases, students were divided into small teams, working in different studios to develop performance techniques. Where a group was short of a performer, students would respond spontaneously by providing the missing instrumental component. The work was lively and imaginative.

71. Students are well motivated. They are punctual for lessons and apply themselves well to their studies. In art subjects, the students are encouraged to work from primary sources, both in their research and design work. Performing arts students work well together and help each other, particularly during preparation for an impending public performance. In media studies and drama, students are learning and progressing effectively.

72. Staff are responsive to the needs of students and work hard to provide a high level of individual support and guidance. The small classes in media studies means that students receive a lot of individual guidance, but there are too few students to develop the healthy interaction which might be expected in larger classes. Students are assessed regularly and receive constructive feedback on their progress and what they need to do to improve their work. The timing of assessments on some GCE AS courses, however, is creating undue pressure on students, particularly those taking a number of subjects, and is adversely affecting the quality of some of their work. This was particularly evident in a GCE AS photography lesson, where students were struggling to reach the expected level before submitting coursework for assessment.

73. Art students make study visits to galleries and exhibitions, and the college provides a variety of enrichment activities. Students in all areas have access to a wide range of specialist equipment. Most students are adept at using the Internet for research and there is evidence of the use of multi-media applications in students' coursework and portfolios. Accommodation in art is good, and although rooms are sometimes untidy and cluttered, teachers have established an environment which helps to foster creativity. Accommodation for performing arts subjects is poor. Staff and students in this area work in a difficult and cramped environment which restricts opportunities for course development. Teaching staff are well qualified in the subjects they teach. They draw on their considerable professional background to bring valuable specialist experience to their lessons.

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

74. Managers have high expectations for the quality of provision. Teachers share this perception. There are well-devised quality assurance procedures which are operated effectively by staff. Communication between subject areas is weak and this is affecting the work of the department, a matter recognised in the self-assessment report. Retention rates are low. High achieving students leave courses early and some join full-time vocational courses in the same subject area, which are only available elsewhere.

### **Psychology, sociology and philosophy**



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

#### ***Strengths***

- high pass rates in GCE A-level sociology and psychology, and GCSE sociology
- much good teaching

- strong support for students from subject teachers.

### **Weaknesses**

- unsatisfactory pass rates in GCE A-level philosophy
- unsatisfactory retention rates in GCE A-level philosophy and sociology
- inadequate size of some classrooms.

### **Scope of provision**

75. The college offers GCE AS/A-level courses in philosophy, psychology and sociology, and GCSE sociology. The inspection covered all subjects at all the levels offered.

### **Achievement and standards**

76. Pass rates in both psychology and sociology are high and above the national average for the three years up to 2001. Although the pass rate in psychology declined slightly in 2001, it was in line with the national average. The proportion of high grades in GCE A-level philosophy, psychology and sociology is above the national average. Pass rates and retention rates in GCSE sociology are above the national average. However, the overall pass rate in GCE A-level philosophy is low and has declined since 1999. The most recent pass rates have been good in GCE AS philosophy and psychology and satisfactory in sociology. The value added analysis of students' achievements at GCE A level indicates that students have performed as well as, or better than predicted, in psychology and sociology. Retention rates in GCE A-level sociology are unsatisfactory and up to 2001, the retention rate for GCE A-level philosophy has declined and is now unsatisfactory. Attendance was 85% during the inspection, in line with the college target.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
GCSE sociology	2	No. of starts	14	23	20
		% retention	93	52	75
		% pass rate	77	58	60
GCE A-level philosophy	3	No. of starts	20	20	18
		% retention	90	75	56
		% pass rate	72	60	60
GCE A-level sociology	3	No. of starts	46	34	38
		% retention	63	62	63

		% pass rate	79	95	92
GCE A-level psychology	3	No. of starts	76	64	71
		% retention	66	77	76
		% pass rate	90	96	89

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

77. The standard of students' work in lessons is high. Written work is sound and often good. Students demonstrate analytical and evaluative skills and handle concepts competently. They make increasingly good use of IT in sociology and psychology. Sociology students had successfully carried out independent research using the Internet and the college intranet. Students work together co-operatively, and show respect for each other's views. Students are expected to develop the key skills of communications through their subject work, but the scheme has not yet been implemented fully.

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

78. There is much good teaching, which is well planned and carefully structured. In sociology and psychology, staff select modules which best meet the needs and interests of their students. Good working relationships between staff and students are established quickly and students are encouraged to work collaboratively. In the best lessons, students make effective progress in acquiring knowledge and developing their critical skills. Teachers help students to learn and use specialist vocabulary and to develop key concepts in a systematic way. In a few lessons, teachers introduced activities which were not only valuable to the students, but which contained an element of fun. For example, a psychology lesson introducing the topic of stress, ended with a quiz, in which students had to identify phobias such as achluphobia, scholiophobia and spermophobia and homichlophobia, and were helped to do this by thinking about the Latin and Greek roots of the words. Some of the teaching materials, including well-designed subject handbooks, actively promote equal opportunities. Teachers draw attention to ethical issues and establish ground rules for dealing with sensitive issues such as 'under-studied relationships' in psychology. Many classes are large and the methods which teachers used when teaching them were not always appropriate. Teachers spent time addressing questions to the class at large rather than individual students. They were not critical enough of poor feedback from students working in small groups, and some activities were conducted at too slow a pace.

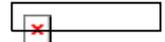
79. Students are set frequent homework tasks and tests, and their work is marked and returned quickly. Marking meets examination requirements. However, not all staff correct errors of grammar and spelling, comments on some scripts are brief, and teachers do not always give advice on how students might improve their work. All teachers, nevertheless, provide students with opportunities for individual interviews to discuss their work. Support for students is strong. Students value the amount of additional subject support which teachers readily provide, including programmed weekly support sessions and individual appointments. Students work to clear targets and know what progress they are making. Regular reviews lead to realistic and realisable action plans and to progress reports and parents' evenings. Students' induction programme lasts for two weeks and helps students to make decisions about their subject choices. The programme includes inductions to the library and research assignments. Philosophy students use the CD-ROM of Sophie's World as part of their introduction to philosophy.

80. Students attend external subject conferences and lectures. The philosophy teacher has established a subject link with an independent school, and students visit each other's establishments. Subjects are appropriately resourced and most accommodation is satisfactory. Some rooms are too small for the classes which use them. This means that teachers find difficulty moving round the classroom to check on students' progress and that learning activities are restricted. Staff are well qualified. All have recognised teaching qualifications; many have higher degrees. The book stock in the library is good.

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

81. Courses at subject level are well planned and well managed. Members of subject teams work together effectively and makes efficient use of resources. Psychology and sociology are managed by one curriculum leader, and philosophy is located in the theology department.

### **Government and politics, history and geography**



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

#### ***Strengths***

- high pass rates at GCE AS and A levels on most courses
- much good teaching
- ability of students to work effectively on their own
- thorough assessment and monitoring of students' progress
- effective course management.

#### ***Weaknesses***

- low retention rates at GCE A level
- lost learning opportunities in lessons
- insufficient use of resources.

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

82. The college offers full-time courses at GCE AS/A level in history, geography and politics. GCSE geography was provided up to 2001. Over the three years to 2001, there has been a decline in the number of students taking GCE A level. The reforms to the curriculum in 2000, however, have led to a significant increase in the number of students taking GCE AS, particularly in history and politics.

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

83. There has been a significant improvement in levels of achievement over the past three years. GCE A-level pass rates in history and politics have increased from close to, or below, the national average to well above it in 2001. The proportion of students achieving higher grades in these subjects is above the national average and has been consistently so in politics. In GCE A-level geography, the 2001 pass rate remains well below average. Results for GCE AS history and geography in 2001 were good. Retention rates on GCE A-level courses have been consistently below the national average over the past three years. There was a marked improvement in retention rates at GCE AS in 2001.

### ***A sample of retention and pass rates in government and politics, history and geography 1999 to 2001***

<b>Qualification</b>	<b>Level</b>	<b>Completion year:</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2001</b>
GCSE geography	2	No. of starts	25	16	16
		% retention	88	56	81
		% pass rate	27	44	15
GCE A-level geography	3	No. of starts	89	60	60
		% retention	82	78	78
		% pass rate	77	85	76
GCE A-level history	3	No. of starts	52	73	58
		% retention	81	70	71
		% pass rate	76	80	95
GCE A-level politics	3	No. of starts	13	13	8
		% retention	77	77	63
		% pass rate	90	90	100

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

84. In most lessons, levels of attainment are at least satisfactory. Geography and history students work confidently on their own, using source materials, collecting evidence and formulating judgements. Advanced-level geography students have good investigative skills and make capable use of the intranet and other reference material. Students are well motivated and when given the opportunity to debate issues, they do so with relish and maturity. History students participate fully in intellectually demanding and stimulating discussions and politics students make good use of their knowledge and experience, arguing their points with skill and conviction. Students in all subjects express their ideas well, speak competently, have a good grasp of their subject and show a disciplined attitude to study.

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

85. Lessons have clear aims and are well planned. Teachers have high expectations of students and set them suitably demanding tasks. On one occasion, geography students were engaged in a variety of exercises to examine the so-called 'north-south divide' in British economic development. They split into groups to visit the learning centre where they made use of various resources

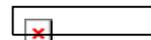
including the Internet, books, atlases and regional statistics from HMSO. In an effective politics lesson, students were encouraged to control their viewing of a video programme on the electoral system and to initiate discussion. In some history and politics lessons, teachers spent too much time talking to the class at the expense of allowing students to think for themselves and discuss issues. This taxed students' interest, especially in double lessons. Some teachers relied too heavily on question-and-answer sessions, failing to attract a contribution from a significant number of students and not doing enough to probe students' understanding of the topic. In one lesson on Nazi Germany, the teacher provided plenty of opportunity for students to express their own ideas, and their contributions to the lesson were knowledgeable and fluent. There was good use of primary source material in history lessons, particularly so in a lesson on the theme of war and society. In a GCE A-level history lesson on the Irish famine of 1845-1849, the learning tasks set by the teachers were carefully arranged to increase in difficulty as the lesson progressed. Written assignments are set regularly and assessed thoroughly, although the methods of marking vary within and between subjects.

86. In several history and politics lessons, teachers made insufficient use of the resources available. Resources were largely restricted to textbooks, handouts, and use of the overhead projector and whiteboard. In a well-crafted GCE AS geography lesson, by contrast, the teacher made use of slides, statistics, maps, reference books and the Internet. The use of IT at course level is developing slowly, and geography has a useful website on the intranet. Facilities in the learning centre are very good and library staff give helpful support to students. Display space in the subject rooms for history and geography is not being used effectively. Some classes are too large for the classrooms which they use. Staff work hard, often in difficult circumstances, and provide very effective guidance and support in lessons, often on an individual basis. Students comment on the ready availability of teachers to give additional help in lessons and in non-timetabled time. Course enrichment activities include fieldwork, visits to the USA and museums in Bristol and London, and membership of the Geographical Association.

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

87. Following the restructuring of the curriculum, most of the staff teach in more than one curriculum area. Teachers and curriculum managers are coming to terms with the management implications of the restructuring and quality assurance is becoming more effective. Leadership and management at course level are effective. There are comprehensive files of schemes of work and good records of students' progress in relation to their target grades. There are student handbooks for each subject. These are well designed and informative, particularly in the case of geography. Curriculum managers are working to disseminate and adopt good practice, promote the advancement of IT in learning, develop effective methods of measuring progress in key skills development and audit students' learning needs on entry to college. Progress on many of these fronts, however, has been slow.

### **English, communication studies and modern foreign languages**



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

#### ***Strengths***

- good teaching and effective learning
  
- effective curriculum management

- consistently high pass rates in English
- extensive range of GCE AS/A-level courses
- good learning resources.

### ***Weaknesses***

- few courses below level 2
- poor recruitment for some modern languages
- below average pass rates in GCE A-level languages.

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

88. The college offers GCE AS/A-level courses in communication studies, English literature, English language, English language and literature, French, Spanish, German and Italian. There are also GCSE courses in English, French, Spanish and Italian. At GCE A level, students have an extensive choice of study. Below level 3, the choice is more restricted, and GCSE courses are taken by a number of students for whom they are not suitable. There is no provision for part-time students.

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

89. Pass rates on GCE A-level English courses have been consistently high over the last three years. In 2001, pass rates on the new GCE AS were also high. GCE AS/A-level communication studies results have improved substantially and pass rates are now above the national average. Students perform well in relation to the grades predicted for them on the basis of their GCSE results. The proportion of students achieving A\*-C grades in GCSE English has risen over the last three years from well below the national averages to be in line with the average in 2001. The pass rates in modern foreign languages at GCE A-level have been below the national average, apart from the pass rate for French in 2001. Recruitment has fallen over the past three years. The number of students progressing from GCE AS to GCE A level in 2001 was low.

90. In lessons, most students work with enthusiasm and interest. Their written work is usually of an appropriate standard. They generate good ideas, but not all students are able to express their ideas clearly and accurately, particularly in the case of GCSE English and modern languages students. In some lessons, latecomers disrupt activities. In some GCSE English classes, students were poorly motivated.

***A sample of retention and pass rates in English, communication studies and modern foreign languages, 1999 to 2001***

<b>Qualification</b>	<b>Level</b>	<b>Completion year:</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2001</b>
GCSE English	2	No. of starts	100	82	82
		% retention	77	80	84
		% pass rate	44	50	52
GCSE Italian	2	No. of starts	11	10	13
		% retention	64	90	62
		% pass rate	50	44	50
GCSE Spanish	2	No. of starts	7	17	21
		% retention	71	76	81
		% pass rate	0	69	71
GCE A-level communication skills	3	No. of starts	51	30	41
		% retention	59	50	61
		% pass rate	70	80	96
GCE A-level English language	3	No. of starts	86	110	78
		% retention	74	73	74
		% pass rate	100	96	95
GCE A-level English literature	3	No. of starts	99	86	80
		% retention	88	65	81
		% pass rate	86	96	97
GCE A-level French	3	No. of starts	47	30	25
		% retention	60	83	72
		% pass rate	79	72	89
GCE A-level German	3	No. of starts	18	11	15
		% retention	72	64	73
		% pass rate	77	86	80
GCE A-level Spanish	3	No. of starts	15	3	24
		% retention	67	100	83
		% pass rate	90	100	90

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

\* course did not run

***Quality of education and training***

91. Teachers are well qualified and experienced. They prepare lessons thoroughly and teach with confidence. Teachers and students work well together. In many lessons, the range of activities was appropriate, resources were good and students were interested in their work. In GCE A-level English literature classes, teachers used three video versions of the same scene in Othello to show differing interpretations of character and theme. Students were asked to concentrate on specific

features of the performances. They responded well, and showed that the lessons had increased their awareness of the play. In a GCE A-level Spanish class, students gained confidence in expressing themselves accurately in the target language by discussing the differences between English and Colombian education, making good use of the language assistant's knowledge of her country of origin. The teacher stimulated students' interest in the subject with lively, and at times, witty contributions. In modern foreign languages lessons, students work effectively in small groups, developing their own ideas. In one GCE A-level communications lesson on group organisation and dynamics, most of the students worked in small groups devising basic rules for survival on a desert island, whilst other members of the class observed how the groups functioned and how decisions were made. In a few lessons, teachers talked for too long and students did not have enough opportunity to express their own ideas.

92. Teachers set tasks which were clearly defined and appropriately demanding. Some of these tasks were refreshingly original. English language and literature students, for example, were given an extensive list of topics to work from, including suggesting how 'Jane Eyre' could be adapted into a musical, and 'Twelfth Night' into a half-hour cartoon. Often, the students are provided with some of the essential information they need to carry out the task or reminded of the techniques they need to use. Work is carefully marked using assessment criteria which students understand. In most cases, students receive helpful written comments, indicating where improvements are required. In some cases, the comments are inadequate. In modern foreign languages, mistakes in writing the target language are not always corrected.

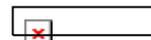
93. Teachers are responsive to students' learning needs. Where necessary, extra sessions are arranged for students. In modern foreign language lessons, teachers cater for students of differing abilities by providing alternative tasks and activities. The language assistants provide extra tuition for students, helping to build students' confidence or skill in using the target language. Teachers refer students who need regular extra help to additional learning support sessions provided centrally by the college. However, they do not receive adequate reports on students' progress at these sessions.

94. Resources are good. The library and information centre have an extensive stock of relevant books, including a rich variety of fiction. There are regular displays in the library related to the topics being studied. For example, while GCE A-level students were studying war poetry, there was a large poster on display, illustrating aspects of the First World War. The college intranet has access to a rapidly expanding range of materials and, for most courses, there is a menu of recommended websites. In a GCE A-level Italian class, the teacher used stimulating material from the Internet on Ramadan and the Islamic faith in Italy. Access to word processors is satisfactory and many students regularly word process their assignments. Students and staff benefit from specialist teaching rooms, which are used for most lessons in the subject. Rooms and neighbouring corridors have good wall displays. Two English rooms are too small for some of the larger classes, and one language room has no desks or tables for students to work at. Learning is enriched by visits to theatres, lectures and museums. For modern language students, there are good exchange links with Germany, and opportunities for work experience abroad arranged by an outside agency. Recently, one student who hoped to become a vet, worked in a Spanish poodle parlour.

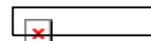
### ***Leadership and management***

95. The area is well managed. Curriculum managers administer their courses meticulously. Staff meetings are properly minuted. The minutes indicate a pre-occupation with routine matters at the expense of strategic issues. Schemes of work are detailed and lesson plans are thorough. Considerable emphasis has been given to developing team work, and there are many examples of resources and ideas being successfully shared between teachers. Experienced staff give generous support to new and less experienced teachers. Course reviews are conducted carefully, but course evaluation is hampered by unreliable data on students' achievements.

## **Part D: College data**



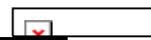
**Table 1: Enrolments by level of study and age**



Level	16-18 %	19+ %
1	13	0
2	13	21
3	74	79
4/5	0	0
Other	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: provided by the college in 2001

**Table 2: Enrolments by curriculum area and age**



Curriculum area	16-18 No.	19+ No.	Total Enrolments %
Science	1,217	0	18.1
Agriculture	48	0	0.7
Construction	0	0	0.0
Engineering	100	0	1.5
Business	801	0	12.0
Hotel and catering	61	0	0.9
Health and community care	41	0	0.6
Art and design	393	0	6.1
Humanities	4,012	14	60.1
Basic education	0	0	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,673</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: provided by the college in 2001

**Table 3: Retention and achievement**

Level	Retention and pass	16-18	19+

	rate	1997/ 98	1998/ 99	1999/ 2000	2000/ 01	1997/ 98	1998/ 99	1999/ 2000	2000/ 01
1	Starts excluding transfers	1,037	1,008	926	594	13	6	1	0
	Retention rate (%)	84	83	81	76	0	100	*	*
	National retention rate (%)	78	81	82	*	72	69	74	*
	Pass rate (%)	40	40	53	65	*	100	*	*
	National average(%)	69	71	77	*	67	75	76	*
2	Starts excluding transfers	605	603	590	609	3	2	2	3
	Retention rate (%)	80	78	77	76	*	*	*	*
	National retention rate (%)	79	80	82	*	71	71	75	*
	Pass rate (%)	91	91	96	90	*	*	*	*
	National average(%)	84	85	82	*	75	77	77	*
3	Starts excluding transfers	1,930	2,178	1,880	3,527	3	13	9	0
	Retention rate (%)	77	76	76	77	*	85	89	*
	National retention rate (%)	77	78	80	*	62	65	69	*
	Pass rate (%)	79	78	82	86	*	67	71	*
	National average(%)	86	85	85	*	69	71	74	*

Note: Summary of retention and achievement for the last three years by age and level of course, compared against national averages for colleges of the same type (that is General FE, Tertiary colleges and Sixth Form colleges).

\* not applicable

Sources of information:

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

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

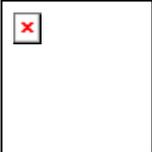
3. College rates for 1999/2000: provided by the college in spring 2001.

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

Courses	Teaching judged to be:			No of

	<b>Good or better %</b>	<b>Satisfactory %</b>	<b>Less than satisfactory %</b>	<b>sessions observed</b>
Level 3 (advanced)	62	31	7	106
Level 2 (intermediate)	50	39	11	18
Level 1 (foundation)	0	0	0	0
Other sessions	0	0	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>124</b>

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