



Hills Road Sixth Form College

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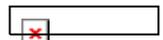
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Basic information about the college

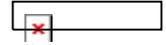


Name of college:	Hills Road Sixth Form College
Type of college:	Sixth Form College
Principal:	Colin Greenhalgh OBE DL
Address of college:	Hills Road Sixth Form College Hills Road Cambridge CB2 2PE
Telephone number:	01223 247 251
Fax number:	01223 416 979
Chair of governors:	Peter Goddard CBE FRS
Unique reference number:	130615
Name of reporting inspector:	Tony Nasta HMI
Dates of inspection:	29 October-2 November 2001

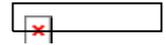
Part A: Summary



Information about the college



How effective is the college?



The quality of education is outstanding in all areas. High standards have been maintained in all areas during a period of rapid growth in the numbers of full-time students aged 16 to 18 and part-time adult students.

Key strengths

- outstanding examination results
- excellent standards of coursework
- high standards of teaching and learning
- strong capacity of students to work independently
- wide choice of GCE A and AS-level courses
- very good progression to higher education (HE) and employment
- clear direction from governors and senior management
- systematic approach to measuring and improving achievement
- excellent support and guidance by tutors

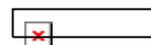
- extensive opportunities for sporting, cultural and other activities
- promotion of excellence through the initiative and enthusiasm of staff and students.

What should be improved

- monitoring of equal opportunities
- physical access for students and staff with mobility difficulties
- use of diagnostic assessment to influence teaching methods and guidance.

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

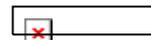


The table below shows overall judgements about provision in subjects and courses that were inspected. Judgements are based primarily on the quality of teaching, training and learning and how well students achieve. Not all subjects and courses were inspected. Inspectors make overall judgements on curriculum 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
Mathematics	Outstanding. Students make very good progress. The best students can devise their own proofs and achieve well in challenging papers such as the sixth term examination paper (STEP) and in national competitions. Teaching is good; outstanding aspects include the use of IT to enable students to explore ideas visually.
Biology	Outstanding. Students gain a deep understanding and achieve outstanding results in GCE AS and A level. Teaching is very good and students are rigorously assessed and well supported. Practical work challenges students' imagination and intellect. The department is well equipped and the accommodation is good.
Chemistry, physics and electronics	Outstanding. Pass rates are high on all courses. The extensive teaching programme is well co-ordinated. The choice of GCE A and

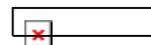
	AS levels is wide. Students benefit from taking part in student science societies and in national competitions where they achieve much success.
Economics and business studies	Outstanding. Pass rates on General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) business and GCE A-level courses are excellent. Most students gain high grades. Case-study exercises and projects enable students to develop a sophisticated understanding of business methods. There is effective leadership and management of the curriculum.
Art and design	Outstanding. Teachers provide outstanding opportunities for their students, encouraging them to experiment and research creatively. Students maintain strong motivation and self-discipline. They make rapid progress, extend the range of their work, and deepen their understanding. Examination results are outstanding. Many students progress to related studies in HE.
Music and performing arts	Outstanding. Students achieve outstanding examination results and demonstrate flair and creativity in lessons, and performance. Teaching is of a consistently high standard. The curriculum is well planned. Students benefit from the wide range of specialist facilities and opportunities for performance.
English and media studies	Outstanding. Pass rates on all courses are consistently outstanding. Teaching is very good and students' work is of a high standard. The college provides excellent resources to support teaching and learning. Students take advantage of a full calendar of extra-curricular activities.
Modern languages	Outstanding. GCE A and AS-level students gain high levels of fluency, confidence and competence. Students with no prior qualification in Spanish and Italian make outstanding progress. Independent study forms an integral part of the curriculum.
Social and political sciences	Outstanding. Students make rapid progress and achieve high standards. Pass and retention rates at GCE A level are outstanding. Students gain first-hand experience in the world of politics and social science through the extensive programme of visits and contacts with external experts, and through the review of current research.
History and classics	Outstanding. Teaching is well planned, stimulating and effective. Teachers assess students' assignments thoroughly and give constructive and helpful feedback. Students' written and oral work is very good, often excellent. Examination results are outstanding. IT is an integral part of the curriculum. Students of both history and classics are offered an extensive range of enrichment activities.

How well is the college led and managed?



Leadership and management are outstanding. Strong leadership by the principal, the college strategy team and the corporation has enabled the college to grow and to maintain exceptionally high standards. Demanding targets for student retention, achievement and progression are set, checked and met. Heads of department demonstrate effective leadership in challenging teachers to gain the best response from their students. Insufficient attention is given to the monitoring of equal opportunities. Quality assurance procedures are effective and contribute to the maintenance of high standards. Adult and continuing education courses are well managed.

To what extent is the college educationally and socially inclusive?



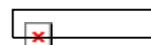
The college works in partnership with schools and other colleges in the Cambridge Collegiate Board, which is a consortium of schools and colleges that co-ordinates the progression of young people from school to post-16 education. Year 11 school leavers use a common application procedure and the partner institutions try to ensure that the range of provision matches the breadth of students' needs. Within this context, the college has retained its role as a selective sixth form centre offering only advanced level courses. Students receive good advice and guidance about the opportunities that the college provides; very few students leave the college early. The admissions policy gives priority to students who live within the city and south Cambridgeshire. Student demand for the GCE A and AS-level courses exceeds the number of places available. The college has not been successful in increasing the take-up of vocational qualifications. Since the last inspection, there has been a substantial expansion of part-time courses for adults, especially in IT, modern foreign languages and art and design. The portfolio of courses for adults has been developed so that access is available both for beginners and for those wishing to study at more advanced levels.

How well are students and trainees guided and supported?



Students benefit from guidance and support procedures that are coherent and systematic. Induction enables them to integrate easily into the college community. Tutors provide highly effective academic and personal support. Students make good progress and participate fully in a rich variety of social and cultural activities. Careers education and guidance are thorough and help students to progress into HE and employment. The collection and use of initial screening information are insufficiently systematic to identify individual learning needs, or to allow teachers to refine their teaching strategies in response to particular needs.

Students' views of the college



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

What students like about the college

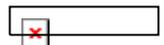
- positive working atmosphere
- wide choice of subjects
- enthusiasm, experience and knowledge of teachers

- mutual trust between students and staff
- broad range of enrichment opportunities
- good access to workshops and subject surgeries
- effective tutorial support
- effective induction into the college community
- high academic standards.

What they feel could be improved

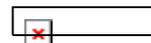
- crowded basement and corridors at lunchtime
- some aspects of work on key skills
- cost of college food.

Other information



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

Part B: The college as a whole



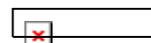
Summary of grades awarded to teaching and learning by inspectors

Aspect & learner type	Graded good or better (Grades 1 to 3) %	Graded satisfactory (Grade 4) %	Graded less than satisfactory (Grades 5 to 7) %
Teaching 16-18	83	15	2
Learning 16-18	83	15	2

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

A breakdown of grades for lessons for students aged 19 and over is not shown as this category accounted for under 5% of all the observations.

Achievement and standards



1. Students between the ages of 16 and 18 taking advanced courses account for about 98% of provision as measured by full-time equivalent students. Their performance in GCE A-level examinations is outstanding. Over 99% of students gain two or more GCE A levels. A very high proportion of students achieve high grades, almost two-thirds in 2001 at grade A or B. Pass rates of 100% were achieved in 27 of the 42 subjects offered at GCE A level in 2001. The results achieved in examinations are well above the average for sixth forms and substantially above the average for all schools and colleges.

2. Students' performance in the GCE AS-level papers, taken for the first time in 2001 with the introduction of Curriculum 2000, are similarly outstanding. The pass rate was over 97%; almost two thirds of passes were at grade A or B. Results in the two vocational qualifications offered to full-time students are also excellent. Of the 31 students finishing an advanced GNVQ, 68% gained a distinction and 23% achieved a merit.

3. The college attracts well-qualified students. In 2000, the average entry score, based upon General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) passes, was 6.57 for GCE AS/A-level courses and 5.53 for GNVQ courses (where A*=8, A=7, B=6 and so on). Most students achieve better results than those predicted for them on the basis of their GCSE results. On average, each student taking GCE A levels gained one grade higher than was predicted. The analysis of value added scores by ability band shows that students with the lowest average entry scores make the greatest average gains at GCE A level.

4. Students extend their skills and knowledge through participation in a wide range of enrichment activities. Hundreds of students take part in sports, music and drama. During 2000/01, the college ran teams in basketball, cricket, equestrian events, hockey, netball, rowing, rugby, soccer, swimming and tennis. The college orchestras, jazz and concert bands, choirs and theatre groups

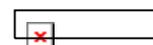
perform regularly in the locality, and at national and international venues. Students play a leading role in organising a wide range of societies which are usually closely linked to their subject interests.

5. Almost all students come to the college with the intention of securing a place at university. Approximately 90% are successful. The college has an impressive record of helping students to gain entrance to Oxford and Cambridge Universities; for example 54 students gained places in 2001. Students are well prepared for HE; they develop good habits of independent study while at the college. In all teaching departments they are encouraged to extend their knowledge beyond the boundaries of the subject syllabuses. In 2001/02, about 150 students are supplementing their courses by taking the new GCE AS-level in critical thinking and are benefiting from being introduced to the theories of knowledge which underpin their subjects.

Adult learners

6. Since the last inspection of the college in 1996, there has been a rapid expansion of part-time courses for adults; 469 enrolments were funded by the Learning and Skills Council in 2000/01. There were over 2,000 enrolments to non-accredited courses, especially in IT and modern foreign languages. Students are able to progress from level 1 courses through to more advanced levels. For example, in modern foreign languages many adult learners start with the 'absolute beginners courses', which are not examined and continue onto GCSE qualifications. Results for the relatively small number of students taking GCSE and GCE A-level examinations were very good in 2001. The overall pass rate was 84% at GCE A level and 98% (A* to C) at GCSE. On short courses in IT, the overall pass rate was low at 54%; many adult students were primarily motivated by a desire to gain basic computer literacy and did not elect to complete the formal assessment process.

Quality of education and training



7. Teaching, learning and attainment were graded by inspectors in 144 sessions. Over 80% were awarded the top three grades, and 52% were judged to be very good or excellent. Average attendance was 90% which compares very favourably with the 84% average attendance for sixth form college inspections undertaken in 1999/2000.

8. The positive features of teaching noted in the last inspection report are still very much in evidence. Lessons are well prepared and carefully planned. There is a strong sense of purpose and enjoyment that is shared by staff and students. Most teachers use an effective combination of whole-class teaching, group activities and individual work to maintain high levels of interest and concentration. Students are encouraged to develop their analytical skills. IT is generally an integral part of the curriculum. In the few instances where lessons or aspects of teaching were unsuccessful, teachers were not sensitive to the ability range within the class and made insufficient checks to see if students were understanding the work.

9. Independent learning is promoted successfully through the use of comprehensive subject handbooks and self-study guides. All sixth form students are required to develop their key skills. They make good use of drop-in workshops to improve specialist skills in IT, communications and application of number, and to gather additional evidence for their portfolios. Feedback on students' assignments is generally thorough. Teachers are effective in correcting errors and encouraging improvement. Some departments undertake a suitably detailed analysis of in-course assessment, for example, through cross-moderation of marking, and use this information to address recurring problems. Other departments have a less thorough approach to ensuring that marking is consistent and that good practice on assessment methods is shared.

10. Prospective students are provided with comprehensive information about the college. The college works in partnership with other post-16 providers through the Cambridge collegiate board to manage post-16 progression. There is a common guide to the range of post-16 options in the

Cambridge area and a common admissions procedure. Great care is taken by college staff at interview to place students on appropriate courses.

11. The sixth form curriculum for full-time students reflects the strong demand for GCE A and AS-level subjects. There is a very wide choice of GCE A and AS-level subjects which can be taken in almost any combination. Some 46 GCE AS-level syllabuses are offered, covering 35 different subjects. The range of vocational qualifications offered is narrow and has declined since the last inspection. Two vocational GCE A-level (formerly GNVQ) courses in art and design (not running in 2001) and business are being followed.

12. The study skills department offers a welcoming and supportive service. Staff help students to improve their study skills and time management, including those students with emotional or psychological problems. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities receive effective assessment and support. Support for visually impaired students has been particularly successful in ensuring that all parts of the curriculum are available to them. During the students' induction process, there are discussions on individual learning needs with personal tutors, but occasionally a need for support goes undetected. Routine screening on entry does not take place and on occasions this has led to a delay in providing specialist support.

13. Tutorial support for students aged 16 to 18 is very effective and contributes to the high student retention and pass rates. Tutors are enthusiastic and committed to the welfare of their students. Through individual progress reviews, students gain a clear idea of their performance against their target grades and action plans. The reviews provide an effective link between the teaching departments and the pastoral system. However, the reviews do not include a record of students' progress in their work on key skills. An experienced team provides comprehensive careers information and advice, which is augmented by specialist advice from a careers guidance company.

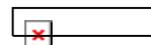
14. Parents receive copies of the progress reviews, which provide helpful information for them and are highly valued. Attendance issues and other problems are reported to parents when the need arises. There is an induction evening for new students' parents, which provides them with an opportunity to meet personal tutors and senior guidance staff. Subsequently parents' meetings are held to discuss academic progress.

15. All teachers have a recognised teaching qualification and many have higher degrees. There are 72 full-time teachers and 90 part-time teachers. Part-time as well as full-time teachers are well supported. The training needs of all staff are considered during the annual appraisal. Senior members of staff observe some lessons as part of the college's self-assessment process. Although the findings from these observations are fed back into departmental reviews, there is little analysis of themes that are common across the college, and little dissemination of good practice.

16. Much recent investment has taken place to improve IT facilities and in many curriculum areas students have access to high-specification workstations which have Internet access. There is an ambitious strategy to increase substantially the availability of learning materials on-line. In a few departments, for example history and classics, good learning materials are available to students electronically. There is insufficient access to specialist IT resources in art and design. The effective library staff provide good support for students and teachers. There are strong links between the library and subject departments. The book stock and periodical list are adequate for supporting the study of most subjects. Learning resources held in subject areas are excellent.

17. Since the last inspection, there have been significant improvements to the accommodation. Funding of approximately £6 million was raised through a successful collaborative project in which the Lawn Tennis Association, the National Lottery Fund, Cambridge City Council, the Foundation for Sport and the Arts and the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) were involved. This investment has led to the opening of the Hills Road Sports and Tennis Centre, an excellent facility which serves the needs of both students and the wider community. There have been substantial improvements to staff and student accommodation. The new buildings and equipment have enabled the college to expand its evening provision for adults significantly. Further improvements, including creating access for students with physical disabilities to areas currently inaccessible to them, are included in the next phase of the college accommodation strategy.

Leadership and management



18. Strong leadership is provided by the principal, the college strategy team and the corporation, and contributes significantly to the high standards of achievement. Senior managers have established clear lines of responsibility and accountability which help to promote effective communications throughout the college. There is a firm focus on the students and the standards they achieve. The high standards reported in the last inspection in 1996 have been maintained during a period of substantial expansion in full and part-time student enrolments, and extensive re-modelling and improvement to the accommodation.

19. The mission is regularly reviewed within the college planning cycle. It contains a clear statement of college aims and objectives. The staff fully understand these and put them to constructive use in action planning and evaluation activities within their departments. Senior managers set demanding targets for student retention, achievement and progression. They evaluate thoroughly the extent to which targets are achieved. The college performance report is produced annually and presented to the corporation. It is an excellent outcome of a process of self-assessment which is thorough and involves all staff.

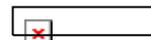
20. Heads of subject departments are highly effective leaders. Teamwork is good and there is a strong tradition of self-critical examination. The links between the teaching departmental reviews and the evaluation of college performance are clear. The analysis of performance data, including value added information, is strong. However, the targets set by some departments are insufficiently precise. Students' attendance is carefully monitored. However, the systems used for tracking attendance are cumbersome and unnecessarily time consuming for staff.

21. Governors are highly effective in meeting their responsibilities. Their oversight of the work of the college, including financial performance and academic standards, is good. Policies and procedures have been developed to help the governance and management committee to review performance. The corporation exercises its strategic role well and delegates powers to committees appropriately. The corporation is very clear about its roles. Liaison between governors and senior management is good and links with departments are developing. Although the range of expertise among governors matches the needs of the college very well, the corporation has faced difficulties in recruiting and retaining women on the board. There are too few female governors.

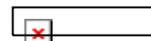
22. There are effective measures for responding to appeals and complaints. All complaints are taken seriously. There are appropriate procedures for dealing with unacceptable behaviour and racial harassment. However, although there is commitment to equality of opportunity at all managerial levels, the monitoring of equal opportunities is underdeveloped. Insufficient emphasis is placed on equal opportunities in departmental reviews. There is no systematic analysis of the recruitment and progress of students from partner schools serving different parts of Cambridgeshire.

23. The college gives good value for money. It sets and meets demanding targets for student recruitment, retention and achievement. Student completion and pass rates are very high. Resources are used effectively. Average class sizes are high. Full-time students are offered a wide choice of subjects and enrichment activities. Since the last inspection of 1996, the college has expanded its provision for both full-time and part-time students, whilst maintaining excellent standards.

Part C: Curriculum and occupational areas



Mathematics



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

Strengths

- outstanding achievement of students
- good teaching
- good use of IT for development of students' understanding
- wide range of mathematical resources
- effective use of professional development
- good support for individual students
- effective leadership.

Weaknesses

- insufficient attention to the differing needs of some learners.

Scope of provision

24. The wide range of mathematics courses provides opportunities for students to study statistics, mechanics, or discrete mathematics as a supplement to the pure modules. Further mathematics is offered to students as a fourth subject and attracted over 60 students in 2001. GCSE mathematics is available to the minority of students who have not previously achieved grades A to C. A part-time

GCE A-level course for adults is available in the evening. Recruitment to mathematics courses is high. Some 300 students take the subject each year. In Year 13, there are special classes to prepare the most able students for STEP papers.

Achievement and standards

25. Pass rates in GCE A-level mathematics and further mathematics are outstanding. The percentage of grades A - C achieved is much higher than the national averages. Students' performance in the very challenging STEP papers is excellent and many students are successful in national competitions. For example, in 2001, one student was chosen to join the British mathematical Olympiad team. Although there was a decline in the student retention rate in the department in 2001, the rate was still above the national averages for sixth form colleges. High proportions of students achieve the very high entry requirement and go on to study mathematical subjects at university. Students develop high levels of fluency in manipulating mathematical ideas and extend their knowledge beyond the requirements of the syllabuses. For example, in one lesson, students were able to derive equations in three-dimensional space after a practical and visual demonstration of key ideas.

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	19	17	13
		% retention	95	100	100
		% pass rate	67	59	92
GCE A-level mathematics (all syllabuses)	3	No. of starts	291	313	309
		% retention	90	91	82
		% pass rate	92	94	99

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

Quality of education and training

26. On entry, students receive careful guidance to enable them to select the most appropriate mathematics course. Teaching is good; there are some outstanding features. Effective discussions during lessons enable students to explore their ideas and to correct errors and misconceptions. Good use is made of IT. For example, students investigated the connection between the binomial theorem and Pascal's triangle using specialist software to help in establishing proofs. Students were also able to predict the limits of geometric series with different ratios by using spreadsheets and graphing their results. In most lessons, teachers' clear explanations demonstrated good command of the subject matter and sensitivity to the ability range. In a minority of lessons, insufficient attention was given to the needs of students who did not have sufficient background knowledge to cope with the work. For example, in a lesson on the integration of reciprocals, students lacked fluency in indices and logarithms. Specialist surgeries, which are available to students on a drop-in basis, provide dedicated support outside timetabled lessons.

27. The department has a good selection of specialist resources and benefits from excellent accommodation. There are eight rooms around a base area, which contains a suite of computers and a study area. There are stimulating displays in the study area, which include a weekly mathematical problem, posters of famous mathematicians and examples of the application of mathematical ideas in the world. Students make good use of the wide range of specialist resources, such as the excellent library and mathematical puzzle magazines. Staff are well qualified and work well together. They make effective use of the many opportunities for professional development. Recent departmental training has included the use of specialist software for graphing. Individual

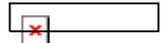
teachers have received specific professional development for the teaching of statistics and mechanics. The department is proactive. For example, it has contributed to the recent national debate on the impact of Curriculum 2000 on the teaching of mathematics.

28. All teachers mark students' work regularly and thoroughly. Most teachers use information which they have gained from assessing students' work to inform subsequent lesson plans. Insufficient attention is paid to ensuring that students present their work clearly and give adequate explanations. Students' progress is reviewed in line with college procedures and practice. Good use is made of predicted GCE A-level grades to motivate students.

Leadership and management

29. The department is effectively led. Teachers work collaboratively and have developed a wide range of specialist resources. There are clear policies on such issues as the use of graphical calculators, the approach to sigma notation, and the effective introduction to the teaching of mechanics. There are regular departmental meetings at which targets are set and systematically monitored. Painstaking analysis of students' performance data helps to ensure that consistently outstanding results are maintained. The head of department observes all staff in the teaching department and has clearly identified their strengths and weaknesses.

Biology



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

Strengths

- very good teaching
- consistently high achievements at GCE A level
- high levels of student retention
- thorough assessment
- strong leadership and effective team work
- imaginative organisation of staff development.

Weaknesses

- insufficient use of IT in teaching.

Scope of provision

30. The college provides GCE AS and A-level courses in biology and human biology to full-time students aged 16 to 18. At the time of the inspection, 431 students were studying biological sciences: 236 taking GCE AS-level courses and 195 taking GCE A-level courses. The number of students in this area has grown over the past five years. There are no part-time courses for adults.

Achievement and standards

31. Over the past three years, students' achievements have been outstanding. Pass rates in both GCE A-level biology and human biology have not fallen below 99%. The proportion of high-grade passes (A to C) in biology over the same period has been over 80%, and in human biology over 70%. Students taking GCE AS-level courses in biology and human biology achieved 100% pass rates in 2001. These achievements are well above the national averages for sixth form colleges. The proportion of students that completed courses in biological sciences over the past three years has also been substantially higher than the national average. In GCE A-level biology, retention rates have been above 89% since 1998/99, and in two of the last three years, the retention rate in GCE A-level human biology has been above 83%. In addition, in 2001, the proportion of students who completed GCE AS-level courses was at or above 95% in biology and human biology. In each of the past six years, at least one student of GCE A-level biological sciences was reported to have been in the top five of all students taking Associated Examining Board (AEB)/Associated Qualifications Alliance (AQA) specifications in England and Wales.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
GCE A-level biology	3	No. of starts	133	177	161
		% retention	93	94	89
		% pass rate	99	100	99
GCE A-level human biology	3	No. of starts	38	18	53
		% retention	92	67	83
		% pass rate	100	100	98

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

Quality of education and training

32. Teaching is well planned and schemes of work, assessment criteria and assessment timetables are appropriately detailed. In lessons, teachers make well-judged demands on students. Students demonstrate good practical skills, show confidence in using the equipment and achieve very good results. The standard of students' written work is high; feedback from teachers is clear and helpful. Homework is set regularly, and marked and returned promptly. Each year students spend a week at a field centre in Norfolk studying the ecology of sand dunes. Students speak positively about the fieldwork. They find it very interesting and demanding, and appreciate the opportunities for coursework which it provides. Practical assessments in biology provide good opportunities for students to build up their portfolios on the development of their key skills in communication.

However, there is little opportunity for students to use IT in any of their lessons in the biological sciences. Assessment and tracking of students' progress is particularly strong. Tests and assignments are well organised and help students to learn.

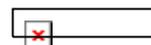
33. Three of the laboratories are modern and spacious, and provide a cheerful environment for students to work in. They are well equipped and the glassware and chemicals are safely stored. The fourth laboratory is furnished with fixed benching and is poorly decorated. It does not provide a good environment for practical work in the biological sciences as the benches are too close together. All staff are very experienced and work well together as a team. They have a variety of different skills and specialisms from which the students benefit. There is a good supply of textbooks in the biology laboratories and the library has an adequate supply of modern biology books. There are, however, too few CD-ROMs on biological topics for students' use in either the department, or the library. The quality of printed handouts and test materials is excellent. Students find them helpful. Students use the college intranet for additional learning materials including quizzes and exploratory exercises. There is no access to the biology accommodation for users of wheelchairs.

34. Teachers support students effectively on their courses. Students speak highly of the help they receive. Subject surgeries and examination practice sessions, some taking place on Saturday mornings, are particularly appreciated. There is a well-planned tutorial programme and systematic reviews of students' progress.

Leadership and management

35. The biology team is very well led and managed. The staff work well together and there is a good team spirit. Teachers co-operate well with one another, sharing resources and workloads. Target grades for achievement are agreed with students and these form an integral part of the departmental review process. Teacher appraisal occurs regularly and training needs arising from appraisal are effectively addressed. Staff development is imaginatively planned and organised. It includes weekend residential teambuilding and curriculum development activities in Norfolk.

Chemistry, physics and electronics



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

Strengths

- high pass rates on GCE A-level courses
- effective co-ordination of a large teaching programme
- excellent learning resources
- thorough monitoring of students' progress

- good progression to HE in science-related subjects.

Weaknesses

- insufficient checking of students' learning in some lessons.

Scope of provision

36. The college offers GCE A and AS-level courses in chemistry, physics and electronics to full-time students who are aged 16 to 18. At the time of the inspection, 186 chemistry, 167 physics and 44 electronics students were enrolled on the GCE AS-level programmes. There is no provision for post-19 students and no vocational courses in science.

Achievement and standards

37. Most examination results are well above the national average. In the last two years, pass rates of 96% or over were achieved in chemistry and 100% in electronics. The proportion of GCE A-level students achieving grades A to C is consistently higher than the national averages. In 2001, 79% of chemistry students achieved grades A to C, compared to the national average of 64%. Pass rates on all the GCE AS-level courses were above the national average. In 2001, 72% of students progressed to science-related courses in HE: the majority of the remainder deferred applications to 2002. Individual students frequently attain outstanding results, for example in 2001, one of the GCE A-level students achieved one of the top five marks in the country.

A sample of retention and pass rates in chemistry, physics and electronics, 1999 to 2001

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
GCE A-level chemistry	3	No. of starts	150	201	186
		% retention	91	92	88
		% pass rate	93	97	96
GCE A-level physics	3	No. of starts	137	140	153
		% retention	92	89	85
		% pass rate	90	95	91
GCE A-level electronics	3	No. of starts	*	17	16
		% retention	*	88	38
		% pass rate	*	100	100

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

* course did not run

Quality of education and training

38. Most of the teaching is either good or very good. Lessons are meticulously planned and students are clear about the learning objectives. Students pursue practical experiments with care

and enthusiasm. Appropriate attention is given to health and safety issues. In physics classes, good use is made of practical demonstrations. Students are encouraged to access the departmental intranet to obtain relevant information about their course or their project work. In a few instances, teachers would have improved lessons further by more frequent checking of students' understanding of the work.

39. Students are well motivated, work productively, and make effective contributions to lessons. The student societies in science are well attended and provide an opportunity for students to learn about current research and other scientific work. For example, in a lunch time session, a member of the British Antarctic Survey made a presentation of his research on the decay of the ozone layer. Most students' work is of a high standard and is marked carefully. Homework is set each week. Students' progress is monitored in end-of-topic tests. Assignments are well planned. Students find them interesting. The work is designed to challenge and extend all students whatever their ability level. Teachers make constructive comments and give helpful feedback to improve students' learning.

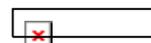
40. Students speak highly of the good working relationship with their teachers. Students' progress is monitored thoroughly and appropriate feedback is given. Students are offered informal subject-specific careers guidance and help in preparing for university interviews. The workshop `surgeries' run by teachers provide an opportunity for students to gain additional tuition on specialist topics. Many students undertake relevant work experience. Four GCE AS-level students won Nuffield science bursaries last summer to work on industry-based research projects.

41. Teachers have a good level of specialist knowledge; many have higher degrees. The laboratories are well serviced by a dedicated team of technicians. A good range of textbooks and laboratory manuals is provided for students. The accommodation is good. The laboratories are spacious, well furnished and appropriately equipped. There are stimulating wall displays and effective use is made of the multimedia projector in physics. There are modern, networked computers available in each of the three areas. However, there is no access to any of the physics laboratories for users of wheelchairs.

Leadership and management

42. The programme areas are well managed. The large GCE A/AS-level teaching programme is effectively co-ordinated and schemes of work are coherently organised to ensure consistently good provision. All students receive an attractive and informative welcome pack. Good, well-designed learning materials are provided for students. There is excellent teamwork within each subject area. Staff share teaching and resources effectively. Monitoring of students' progress is effective. Target setting is well established and student retention and pass rates are carefully monitored.

Economics and business studies



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

Strengths

- meticulously planned schemes of work and assignment programmes
- high standard of teaching

- confident, articulate and responsive students
- effective range of study guides and case studies
- effective curriculum leadership and management
- outstanding pass rates in examinations.

Weaknesses

- some aspects of the assessment of vocational courses.

Scope of provision

43. The college offers an Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE) in business, and GCE A and GCE AS-levels in accounting, business studies and economics. The accounting course was introduced in September 2001. The AVCE in business is currently the only full-time vocational qualification being taught at the college.

Achievement and standards

44. Students' achievements are outstanding. Pass rates on the GNVQ advanced course in business and on the GCE A-level business studies and economics courses are consistently high, and well above the national average for sixth form colleges. Most students gain high grades in examinations. For example, over 80% of the passes on the GCE A-level business studies course in 2001 were between grades A to C. An analysis of value added scores shows that most students achieve better results than those predicted from their achievements at GCSE. The first set of results on the GCE AS-level courses introduced as part of the Curriculum 2000 reforms confirm that high levels of attainment are being sustained. Most student retention rates are high and particularly so on the vocational courses. Students' attendance rates are high. A significant number of students continue their study of business and economics in HE and employment. Students' written work demonstrates a good understanding of business theory and practice, and in lessons, students are confident, articulate and responsive. They work well together, and make effective use of their time. Their experience and knowledge is broadened through an extensive programme of enrichment activities, including Young Enterprise, company visits and overseas exchanges.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
GCE A-level business studies	3	No. of starts	62	76	84
		% retention	81	86	82

		% pass rate	96	98	100
GCE A-level economics	3	No. of starts	62	39	63
		% retention	93	89	89
		% pass rate	98	100	100
GNVQ advanced business	3	No. of starts	15	15	18
		% retention	93	93	94
		% pass rate	100	100	94

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

Quality of education and training

45. Most teaching is good or outstanding. Teachers are enthusiastic about their subject, confident and highly skilled. Schemes of work are well structured and well-planned assignment programmes ensure a balanced development of students' knowledge and skills. Almost all lessons are well prepared, and have clear objectives and learning outcomes. Teachers successfully integrate theory with practical work by using detailed and challenging case study materials. In an outstanding GCE AS-level business studies lesson on human aspects of management, a case study enabled students to explore consultation, delegation and leadership styles, whilst developing their own critical thinking and interpersonal skills. The exercise led to lively discussions amongst the group, and students displayed a high level of motivation. In a small number of lessons, teachers wanting to check students' understanding and progress made poor use of directed questions and reviews.

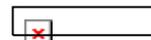
46. Assessment practice is thorough. Teachers monitor students' progress and carefully record achievement against learning goals. Assessment procedures for GCE A/AS-level provision are appropriately detailed and well documented. There is a consistent approach to assessment across programmes which have several separate classes of students. Assignments are marked promptly and most feedback is thorough. Some written feedback on AVCE assignments lacks sufficient detail or direction. There is insufficient analysis of assessment data on the vocational qualifications. Students receive personal support from their teachers through a well-organised programme of tutorials and workshops. Careers education and guidance is strong, and students appreciate the range of support available.

47. Students have access to excellent course handbooks and study guides, which they use in lessons and for private study. There is an attractive suite of modern, well-equipped classrooms and an adjacent network of computers, which provide an attractive environment for research and independent study. Teachers do not always make the best use of IT. For example, the quality of overhead transparencies and handouts does not always illustrate the high standards of presentation common in modern business.

Leadership and management

48. The department consists of a small and well-led team. There are systematic quality assurance arrangements to monitor students' performance. The effective deployment of resources ensures that high standards of achievement are sustained and that all students are supported. There is a strong emphasis on equality of opportunity. For example, effective support is provided to students with dyslexia or visual impairment, which enables them to achieve their potential. Students who join the college with the minimum entry requirements have been successful in completing their courses and attaining high grades.

Art and design



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

Strengths

- outstanding examination results
- self-disciplined, highly motivated students
- very good teaching
- extensive learning resources
- fair and accurate assessment
- high level of progression to related HE
- outstanding opportunities for students
- good development of the subject area.

Weaknesses

- underdeveloped use of computer applications.

Scope of provision

49. The college offers three full-time GCE A-level courses in art and design, art history and photography. An advanced vocational course ran successfully for three intakes until 2000. Attempts are being made to recruit to this course for 2002 through directed marketing with partner schools. Options in GCE A-level art and design include painting, graphics, printmaking and textiles. An important part of the syllabus, common to the photography course, is contextual studies. Within this overall programme, students have ample choice. A two-year GCE AS-level evening course in art and design recruits a small number of part-time adult students.

Achievement and standards

50. Students in art and design show a notable degree of self-discipline and motivation. They are enthusiastic and able to work independently, enjoying both practical and theoretical studies. There are exceptionally high standards of written work. Students benefit from outstanding opportunities to extend their practice and understanding. They find their engagement with art and design is of a different order to their previous experience of the subject. Through excellent external links students are able to undertake live commissions in industry and in the wider community. For example, students have successfully undertaken 12 mural, and three sculpture projects in a local teaching hospital. Similar commissions have been undertaken in a local primary school.

51. Pass rates are consistently higher than the national average on all courses. Pass rates of 100% have been achieved for three consecutive years in the art and design and photography GCE A levels, in the advanced GNVQ and in the two-year GCE AS level in art and design. A drop in the retention rate for art and design at GCE A level from 97% to 83% between 1999 and 2001 is a minor cause for concern. Retention rates of 100% have been achieved in GCE A-level photography for three consecutive years. During the same period, the retention rate for the advanced GNVQ was held at an average of 15% above the national average. There is a high level of progression, particularly from the GNVQ course, to a diverse range of courses in art, design and architecture in HE.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
Advanced GNVQ art and design (two-year course)	3	No. of starts	10	9	15
		% retention	90	89	93
		% pass rate	100	100	100
GCE A-level art and design (two-year course)	3	No. of starts	68	70	78
		% retention	97	91	83
		% pass rate	100	100	100
GCE A-level history of art (two-year course)	3	No. of starts	14	18	22
		% retention	100	100	91
		% pass rate	100	100	90
GCE A-level photography (two-year course)	3	No. of starts	8	6	14
		% retention	100	100	100
		% pass rate	100	100	100

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

Quality of education and training

52. Teaching shows significant strengths. Teachers encourage creative experiment and research among their students, an approach that allows individual students to progress at the optimum pace for their needs. Students in art history and contextual studies find the topics stimulating. They are provided with a rich seam of contextual information about topics that, in one lesson, included the development of aerial photography, and in another, the innovations of perspective in art. In the latter lesson, the early renaissance artists under discussion were successfully brought to life with anecdotes about their day-to-day existence. Study visits are made to galleries in the United Kingdom and abroad. The department has close links with local artists, architects and designers.

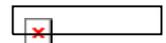
53. Students discuss their work with teachers frequently and value the ease of access to feedback about their progress. Teachers organise critical appraisal of homework as a group exercise and familiarise learners with this traditional form of peer group appraisal. At the final end-of-year assessment, a group of artists, designers and craft workers attend the exhibition of students' work to offer their professional criticism and advice. Students find that this approach makes the formal assessment process less formidable. Formal assessment is fair and work is marked accurately.

54. The collective expertise and experience of full-time teachers, visitors and technical staff provide students with a broadly based and valuable resource. The range of studios and workshops is excellent and matches the specialist options available in the course programmes. Students make good use of a departmental computer suite but the overall development of computer applications is relatively underdeveloped. There are extensive reference resources that have been established as a result of department initiatives. Among them there is a collection of objects to be used as drawing stimuli that includes sheep skeletons, fossils, plastic toys and living and dead plant forms. Librarians work closely with the department to catalogue the large collection of visual reference materials and journal articles.

Leadership and management

55. College managers have promoted development and growth in art and design. The department benefits from purpose-built accommodation. Communication between managers, senior tutors and the department is very good. Teachers have confidence in the centrally organised tutor system. They also feel confident about their own ability to tackle problems and issues at a departmental level.

Music and performing arts



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

Strengths

- outstanding examination results
- high retention rates
- consistently high standard of teaching
- lively and exciting learning environment
- good opportunities for students to develop performance skills

- well-planned curriculum
- high standard of teaching rooms and specialist equipment
- flair and creativity of students.

Weaknesses

- no significant weaknesses.

Scope of provision

56. Full-time students have a choice of GCE A and AS levels in music technology, music, performance studies, dance, drama and theatre studies. Two college departments, music and performing arts, manage the provision. At the time of the inspection, over 300 students were enrolled on these courses. Many enrichment activities are available, including drama productions, orchestras, bands and choirs. GCSE music is offered as a part-time evening class.

Achievement and standards

57. Students achieve outstanding results. All subjects had 100% pass rates in 2001. A very high proportion of students achieve high grades, and in performing arts, all students taking the examination achieved A to C grades in 2001. Retention rates are also high. In 2001, all were at least 10% above the national averages for sixth form colleges. Value added data for the two departments show that students consistently achieve higher than predicted grades at GCE A level.

58. Students are confident, progress rapidly in classroom activity, are purposeful in their approach and welcome the trust placed in them by staff. Second-year students have the maturity to work to the etiquette and discipline needed by performers. They have well-honed listening skills and show high levels of concentration during performances. Students organise their own productions. They run the theatre society to promote interest in drama. They work well in groups and show imagination and flair in their approach to learning. Rates of progression to HE are good. For example, students win places at prestigious specialist colleges such as the Welsh College of Music and Drama and the London Guildhall School of Music.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
GCE AS-level dance (one-year course)	3	No. of starts	7	21	14
		% retention	83	71	100
		% pass rate	100	100	100
GCE A-level dance	3	No. of starts	7	*	5

		% retention	86	*	100
		% pass rate	100	*	100
GCE A-level music (two-year course)	3	No. of starts	39	36	27
		% retention	87	86	93
		% pass rate	100	100	100
GCE A-level performing arts (two-year course)	3	No. of starts	30	28	19
		% retention	93	85	100
		% pass rate	100	100	100
GCE A-level theatre studies (two-year course)	3	No. of starts	41	36	35
		% retention	95	92	89
		% pass rate	97	100	100

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

* course did not run

Quality of education and training

59. The quality of teaching ranges from good to outstanding. Lively and self-critical discussion is fostered. In a theatre studies class, three students performed a scene from 'Our Country's Good'. The others in the class provided clear positive criticism and suggestions of alternative ways of working the scene. The teacher encouraged the students to make wider connections to epic theatre, relating this approach to the dramatic ideas being studied on the course.

60. Students benefit from excellent course handbooks. In music, the handbook provides a listening list to extend students musical knowledge, practice exam questions and further sources of information. Lessons are well planned and handouts are of a high standard. Subject surgeries provide an opportunity for students to explore additional areas of interest. Students' work is marked clearly and fairly. Feedback from teachers in class, or comments written on marked work, are positive and indicate areas for improvement. Teachers in music start the preparation of exam technique in aural skills and practical performance early in the course. Students speak positively of the help that they receive in revision prior to exams.

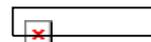
61. Teachers are sensitive to the wide range of learning styles of their students. In a music technology lecture on the history of electronic music, the teacher used video clips, still projections from a computer and recorded music to enliven the lesson. In a performance studies lesson, students worked with percussion, pianos and poetry to perform a short group composition on rhythm.

62. The departments provide students with a sense of identity for their subject area. Photographs and posters of past productions and concerts are displayed which celebrate the wide range of students' activities. The music practice rooms are bright and well equipped with musical instruments. The recital room is large enough to accommodate a 50-piece orchestra and is linked to a modern recording studio. Music technology rooms and equipment are of a high standard, although some problems of reliability have been experienced with the sequencing software and hardware. The music technology suite is not accessible to users of wheelchairs. The hall used for dance is large and has a good sprung floor. Library resources are satisfactory for both subject areas. Specialist music texts and recordings are available from the music department. Teachers are enthusiastic, which in turn, motivates their students. Many perform in their own right as members of choirs and orchestras. There are 15 peripatetic instrument teachers covering the range of strings, guitar, woodwind, brass, singing and percussion.

Leadership and management

63. Students have a strong sense of belonging to, and involvement in, the life of the subject areas. Course teams make good use of students' feedback to improve the quality of teaching and learning. The management of performing arts and performance studies courses is complex, as timetables involve different combinations of music, dance and drama staff. Communication is good and departmental meetings are held regularly. Frequent joint performance projects allow staff across the two departments to work together and share good practice. There has been rapid growth in student numbers. The departments rely on the contribution of part-time staff, particularly in dance and music technology.

English and media studies



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

Strengths

- consistently outstanding pass rates
- high standard of students' oral and written work
- good and much outstanding teaching
- excellent resources
- well-organised and effective assessment of students' work
- extensive enrichment activities
- well-led, cohesive and effective teaching team.

Weaknesses

- no significant weaknesses.

Scope of provision

64. Most English and media studies courses offered by the college are at advanced level. There is a small amount of GCSE English provision. The department's curriculum includes GCE A and AS levels in English literature, English language, combined English language and literature, media studies and film studies. All GCE A and AS-level courses have healthy and stable recruitment patterns. Over 300 students studied GCE AS-level English courses and 91 studied media studies in 2000/01. Opportunities to develop and gain accreditation in the key skill of communication at level 3 are provided to students through their mainstream courses. Students participate fully in the wide range of subject-related activities, for example debating and writing competitions, as part of the college's enrichment programme.

Achievement and standards

65. In all GCE A-level English and media studies subjects, pass rates are consistently outstanding. Students have achieved 100% pass rates since 1998. In 2001, the pass rates in the new GCE AS-level courses were also 100%. Retention rates for all courses are consistently above national averages for sixth form colleges. Pass rates in GCSE English have improved and were above national averages in 2001. Students on GCE A and AS-level courses enter the college with very high GCSE scores. They make sufficient progress to exceed the grades predicted on the basis of their entry scores at GCSE. The percentage of grades A to C achieved in all GCE A-level courses is much higher than the national averages. Over the last three years, more than 90% of students achieved high grades. All students completing GCE A-level media studies achieved high grades and 51% achieved grade A. The quality of students' work is high. Their oral contributions in lessons are sometimes startling in their level of perception and acuity, far exceeding that expected of advanced-level students. Students' written work demonstrates a very high level and range of subject knowledge and skills. The presentation of students' work is of a high standard and is up to industry standards in media studies. Media students' entry for the national 'Newsday' competition in 2000 was outstanding in its design, contents, technical competency and journalistic skills.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
GCSE English	2	No. of starts	*	9	8
		% retention	*	44	75
		% pass rate	*	50	82
GCE A-level English language	3	No. of starts	23	35	21
		% retention	96	86	90
		% pass rate	100	100	100
GCE A-level English language and literature	3	No. of starts	164	124	124
		% retention	88	87	90
		% pass rate	100	100	100
GCE A-level English literature	3	No. of starts	83	115	97
		% retention	92	91	90
		% pass rate	100	100	100
GCE A-level media	3	No. of starts	61	41	42

studies		% pass rate	100	100	100
(two-year course)					

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

* course did not run

Quality of education and training

66. Most teaching is good and some is outstanding. Students apply themselves diligently. Teachers ensure that they prepare students for exams effectively but also help and encourage them to enjoy their lessons. A lesson on narrative involved students telling one another stories and discussing gruesome urban myths. As well as enjoying the lesson, students further developed the understanding of the concept of story. In another lesson, when students discussed the sensuality of cookery writing, they were clearly excited by the act of analysis. Teachers use open questions effectively and encourage students to initiate discussion and test their ideas openly and confidently. In a few lessons, the teachers' lack of attention to students' learning styles prevented some of them from learning as effectively as expected. IT is being increasingly incorporated into learning and students use IT skilfully. Students who need extra help with aspects of their work make good use of the specialist surgeries provided by the English and media studies departments.

67. Students take full advantage of a wide range of lively enrichment opportunities to enhance their learning. Events include regular theatre trips, study conferences, poetry readings and film viewing. Students themselves organise and run 'Voices', a society which provides a platform for creative writing, poetry and debate.

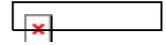
68. Assessment of students' work is thorough, assignments are cross-marked to ensure accuracy and work is returned to students quickly. A range of assessment approaches is used. Students produce a combination of written work and presentations as evidence to demonstrate competence in the key skill of communication. Teachers have high expectations of students and encourage them to produce work of a high standard. Marking is thorough; teachers' comments are specific and clearly highlight how students can improve.

69. Teachers produce excellent teaching and learning materials which enable students to work independently. Schemes of work contain a range of up-to-date and inspiring material to extend students' knowledge and skills, for example lively material from a television show, an extract from a cookery book and contemporary news articles. The department is housed in attractive accommodation incorporating an open-plan work area equipped with a suite of computers linked to the Internet. Students have open access to this resource and teachers also make effective use of the computers during lessons. Rooms and circulation areas are decorated with splendid displays of students' work and other stimuli, which give the area a powerful sense of identity.

Leadership and management

70. Courses are well planned and well managed. The curriculum is constantly refined and developed. Teachers work well in a dynamic team which has strong and open leadership. Detailed, thoughtful analysis of course performance data gives the team an agenda for action and is supplemented by students' views, which are collected formally and informally. Equal opportunities issues are raised regularly within lessons, though they are not specifically addressed in the planning of programmes or lessons. Students are supported by excellent schemes of work, which give essential course information, resource lists, assignment suggestions and stimulus material. Students are set targets for achievement and their performance is thoroughly and thoughtfully reviewed.

Modern languages



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

Strengths

- outstanding standards of achievement at GCE A level
- outstanding progress in Spanish and Italian by students with no prior qualifications in those languages
- very good retention rates on the majority of courses
- high achievement levels in oral and written work
- good, often excellent, teaching
- excellent accommodation and learning resources
- wide range of courses for adults and students aged 16 to 18
- strong emphasis on and provision for independent study.

Weaknesses

- insufficient emphasis in some lessons on the development of students' speaking skills.

Scope of provision

71. Full-time students wishing to study at advanced level are offered GCE AS/A levels in French, German, Spanish and Italian. There is also a one-year foreign languages at work programme in

French and German provided as an option for all full-time students. Adult students can take GCSE French, Spanish and Italian and a range of non-accredited courses for beginners. At the time of the inspection, there were a total of 177 full-time students aged 16 to 18 studying modern languages at GCE A level, and 27 adults enrolled on GCSE courses.

Achievement and standards

72. Standards of achievement in GCE A and AS-level examinations are outstanding. Pass rates and the proportion of higher grades are above sixth form college and national averages. Students achieve higher grades than those predicted for them on the basis of their GCSE results. Students with no prior qualifications in Spanish and Italian make outstanding progress. Overall pass rates on GCSE courses for adults are good. Retention rates on the majority of courses are very good, well above national averages.

73. In most lessons, students' attainments are good. Students on GCE AS and A-level courses, representing over 93% of the college's provision, demonstrate high levels of fluency, confidence and competence in oral and written work. In discussion in French on the set literary text, they presented arguments and supported their opinions using idiomatic expressions and complex structures. In German, they explored the effects of discrimination well. Students with just over a year's study in Spanish summarised the key points of a recorded news bulletin spoken at speed. Students on the GCE AS-level Italian course use the target language to explore the location of historic sites on a map of Florence. Students have a well-developed capacity for independent study that contributes significantly to their progress. In a small number of lessons, including the foreign languages at work courses offered as part of sixth form enrichment, students lack the confidence and skills to contribute spontaneously in the target language.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
GCSE modern languages aged 19 and over	2	No. of starts	*	87	27
		% retention	*	55	91
		% pass rate	*	73	98
GCE A-level French aged 16 to 18	3	No. of starts	90	88	88
		% retention	90	85	85
		% pass rate	99	100	100
GCE A-level German aged 16 to 18	3	No. of starts	38	26	38
		% retention	83	92	82
		% pass rate	100	88	100
GCE A-level Spanish aged 16 to 18	3	No. of starts	22	19	25
		% retention	82	95	92
		% pass rate	100	94	100
GCE A-level Italian aged 16 to 18	3	No. of starts	19	15	14
		% retention	74	93	79
		% pass rate	100	100	100

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

* course did not run

Quality of education and training

74. The overall quality of teaching and learning is good and, in over half the lessons observed, it was very good or excellent. Teachers have a high level of subject knowledge and expertise, and in most lessons, they make judicious use of the target language to promote students' language skills. In most lessons, teachers have high expectations of students and present them with very challenging tasks using materials that extend their oral and comprehension skills. In these lessons, the pace and variety of the activities are such that students' concentration needs to remain very high. They concentrate well and communicate effectively in the target language to each other and to the teacher. The study of grammar is effectively integrated into these purposeful activities. In a few lessons, teachers have inappropriately low expectations of students' contributions in the target language. Insufficient emphasis on the development of speaking skills reduces the range of learning experiences and inhibits progress.

75. Independent study forms an integral part of the work of GCE students and is effectively linked to lessons. This approach enables students to broaden their experience and knowledge of the language and culture through films, literature and other media, while working at a pace that meets their needs. Foreign language assistants work well with students to promote fluency. Students highly value the induction process and subsequent support that they receive from teachers in lessons and through one-to-one and group surgeries.

76. Formal and informal assessment of learning during the courses is very effective. There is thorough and constructive marking of students' work that encourages them to improve the quality of their writing and extends their skills of analysis and debate. Students' linguistic skills are not formally assessed on entry to identify learning needs.

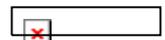
77. The college provides a wide range of courses. For adults and students aged 16 to 18, there are excellent opportunities to begin or extend skills in modern languages and to gain accreditation. In the adult provision, there is a carefully planned programme and good opportunities for progression that are of benefit to adult learners. Students are offered a very good range of extra-curricular opportunities. These include exchange programmes, work experience and cultural visits to museums and galleries in the target language country.

78. The standard of accommodation and learning resources is excellent and makes a significant contribution to students' achievement. The well-equipped suite of rooms including language laboratories, the discrete private study gallery and good access to IT equipment, enable teachers to provide stimulating learning opportunities.

Leadership and management

79. The leadership and management of the modern languages department are good. Teachers are provided with effective guidance. There are appropriate standards and clear expectations for the quality of teaching and learning. The policy on assessment and marking maintains good practice and ensures consistency across all languages. The work of the foreign language assistants is carefully managed to bring maximum benefit to students' learning. Annual review, reporting and action planning are appropriately focused on issues relating to pass and retention rates. However, data collection and analysis specific to modern languages are underdeveloped, and do not sufficiently contribute to improving teaching and learning.

Social and political sciences



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

Strengths

- consistently high student achievements
- high retention rates
- effective development of students' personal and intellectual skills
- excellent support for individual students
- stimulating programme of additional activities
- high standard of sociology coursework
- well-equipped and attractive environment for learning.

Weaknesses

- insufficient sharing of good practice among teachers.

Scope of provision

80. The college provides social and political science courses at GCE A and AS level in psychology, sociology, government and politics, philosophy and religious studies. All but one of the 42 social and political science classes provide for full-time students, aged 16 to 18. Part-time provision is limited to one GCE A-level course available in the evening. The popularity of social and political science subjects has led to a considerable increase in full-time student numbers. Since 1995, the number of GCE A-level enrolments has risen threefold to around 275. In addition, there are about 450 social and political science enrolments at GCE AS level.

Achievement and standards

81. Students make good progress in the development of their powers of analysis and evaluation. In philosophy, students are encouraged to think critically and independently. Good research skills lead to high standards in GCE A level and students have won national prizes for their coursework. Pass and retention rates for students aged 16 to 18 on GCE A-level courses have remained consistently high for the past three years. The proportion of students gaining high (A to C) grades exceeds the target of 75% set by the college. In 2001, 43% of all GCE A-level achievements in social and

political sciences were at grade A. Students achieve higher grades than those predicted for them on the basis of their GCSE results. In 2001, students in psychology and sociology were placed in the top five of those who achieved the highest marks nationally. In 2001, there were excellent pass rates on GCE AS-level courses in social and political sciences. In each subject, the proportion of students gaining higher grades (A to C) was more than 80%. Many students continue to study social and political science subjects at university. In 2000, a significant proportion progressed to degree courses in politics and psychology.

A sample of retention and pass rates in social and political sciences, 1999 to 2001

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
GCE A-level religious studies	2	No. of starts	21	8	14
		% retention	95	88	100
		% pass rate	95	86	100
GCE A-level psychology	3	No. of starts	76	86	104
		% retention	86	92	92
		% pass rate	100	88	98
GCE A-level sociology	3	No. of starts	43	64	64
		% retention	86	89	91
		% pass rate	100	100	95
GCE A-level government and politics	3	No. of starts	20	16	36
		% retention	80	88	86
		% pass rate	94	100	100
GCE A-level philosophy	3	No. of starts	21	39	21
		% retention	86	92	86
		% pass rate	94	97	100

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

Quality of education and training

82. Lessons are very well structured and often include lively debate. In a politics lesson, students established the key beliefs of the Conservative Party by analysing its election manifesto. Tracing these ideas to important figures in Conservative history deepened their understanding of modern Conservatism. Religious studies and philosophy teachers make good use of videos, diagrams and pictures to enable students to consolidate their understanding of abstract ideas.

83. Assessment of students' work is accurate and regular. Teachers give appropriate feedback to students on strengths and weaknesses. Sociology students clarify ideas for coursework in helpful interviews with their teacher. Social and political science students explore and consider issues in ways that deepen their understanding, learning and personal experience. An extensive programme of visits and outside speakers enriches students' studies. Politics students visit Washington D.C. to study the political system in the United States of America. Psychology students participate in research carried out by Cambridge University's department of psychology. They have the opportunity to learn about standard laboratory tasks undertaken by cognitive psychologists, and the nature of psychological research. Religious studies students visit Hindu temples and attend a local (Navaratri) Hindu festival. Leading academics and politicians have addressed well-attended meetings of the philosophy, politics and psychology societies.

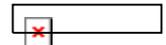
84. Students value the very good levels of individual guidance and support which they receive. In subject 'surgeries', they benefit from the specific specialist help given by their teachers. Teachers monitor students' performance against target grades and review their progress systematically with them. The advice and guidance given by tutors, teachers and careers staff enable students to make well-considered decisions about HE. The supportive work of tutors contributes to the high proportion of social and political science students who complete their courses successfully.

85. Regular professional development has enabled teachers to respond effectively to changes in the GCE AS/A-level curriculum. Staff share teaching materials, schemes of work and assessment practices. They do not share good practice about teaching and learning. Classrooms are well equipped and contain stimulating wall displays. Computers, available in an open-access resource area, are used extensively for research and investigation. Psychology teachers make use of statistical software in their teaching and to help students in their coursework. There is a good supply of specialist textbooks for students as well as sufficient books and periodicals in the library.

Leadership and management

86. The staff in social and political sciences are committed to the aims and values of the college. Thorough preparation and effective planning ensure that recent reforms to advanced-level qualifications benefit students. Close attention is paid to raising students' retention and pass rates. Performance is thoroughly analysed at subject and departmental level against college targets. Effective action is taken to remedy shortcomings. Students' views are taken seriously and influence curriculum planning.

History and classics



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

Strengths

- very good teaching
- excellent pass and retention rates
- good resources
- very good student work
- good use of IT across the curriculum

- wide range of enrichment activities.

Weaknesses

- insufficient monitoring of assessment to ensure consistency of marking standards.

Scope of provision

87. GCE AS and A levels are offered in Latin, history, and classical civilisation. Students are able to choose between three major periods of history. Latin is available to students who have not previously studied the subject as well as those who have taken GCSE. Subjects are available on a full-time basis.

Achievement and standards

88. Pass and retention rates in all subjects are excellent. Students in GCE A-level classical civilisation achieved a 100% pass rate in 2000 and 2001, and the pass rate in GCE A-level history was 98% in 2000. Retention and pass rates are above the national averages in all subjects. Pass rates at GCE AS-level in Latin, classical civilisation, and history are also outstanding.

89. Students produce good written work and show a thorough grasp of their subjects in lessons. They show a mature understanding of complex issues. Discussions are focused and well informed. In a GCE A-level Latin lesson, students displayed a wide knowledge of the background and context of a passage by Livy. In a GCE classical civilisation class, students were able to draw useful comparisons between the treatment of the Electra story by Sophocles and Euripides. There were many examples of impressive written responses to essay questions and coursework, including excellent answers on Nazi propaganda, Greek art, Richard III and Roman Britain. Some of the written work in classics is outstanding. It shows a sophisticated grasp of subject material and extended vocabulary. Essays and coursework are based on extensive research and reading. Answers are knowledgeable and well written.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
GCE A-level history	3	No. of starts	167	155	195
		% retention	91	92	93
		% pass rate	97	94	98
GCE A-level classical civilisation	3	No. of starts	*	15	19
		% retention	*	100	84
		% pass rate	*	100	100
GCE A-level Latin	3	No. of starts	*	5	10
		% retention	*	100	80
		% pass rate	*	100	88

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

* course did not run

Quality of education and training

90. Students benefit from stimulating and effective teaching. Careful attention is given to lesson planning with the result that lessons are well organised and purposeful. Major topics within the subjects are accompanied by study packs containing a wealth of information and sources to help learning and research. There are also subject handbooks that provide students with details of the course, assessment methods, study skills, appropriate resources and specialist vocabulary. Lively teaching engages students' interest and deepens their understanding. In one GCE AS-level history class, students learned how to plan examination answers on Henry VII. They used a series of short exercises to organise their historical knowledge and develop arguments from different viewpoints. In another GCE AS-level history lesson, students studied the meaning of the term Romanisation by discussing and recording the methods by which a country can be subdued. They then compared the different interpretations given by historians and reached a reasoned conclusion, which showed a good grasp of historiography. Lessons contain an appropriate balance of whole class, individual and small group work. Present day events are used to stimulate historical discussion.

91. Students are confident and fluent in their oral work. Assessment of students' written work is suitably detailed and helpful. All work is set at an appropriate level and students receive full comments in the text, and at the end of their essays. However, internal assessment is insufficiently monitored to ensure that standards of marking are consistent. Detailed records of students' progress are kept. There are regular progress reviews and parents' consultation evenings. Most students progress to HE and a substantial number continue their studies of history and classics. Students are offered extensive enrichment activities outside formal lessons. An active student history society has a programme of visiting speakers and the department hosts an annual lecture series of the Cambridge historical society. Greek is taught outside the normal timetable to beginners. There are a number of departmental prizes, including a travel bursary enabling students to visit historical sites in Europe. Classics and history students are able to study in Rome, Parma and Pompeii through visits and exchange programmes.

92. Good resources support teaching, research and independent learning. There are attractive displays of students' work in classrooms. The history base room has access to the Internet and contains an extensive range of books, pamphlets, and journals. There is an effective intranet providing on-line subject materials. Teachers receive regular training and development and have an expert knowledge of their subjects. The department has close links with the university's history library which students can use for additional research.

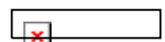
Leadership and management

93. History and classics are well managed. Departmental meetings are fully recorded. Teamwork is effective. Each subject area has a named leader who produces the schemes of work and holds regular meetings to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching and learning. Teachers analyse pass rates and individual students' performance in appropriate detail. They produce clear action plans for future developments and improvement.

Part D: College data



Table 1: Enrolments by level of study and age



Level	16-18 %	19+ %
1	0	37
2	2	43
3	98	20
4/5	0	0
Other	0	0
Total	100	100

Source: Provided by the college in summer 2001.

Table 2: Enrolments by curriculum area and age

Curriculum area	16-18	19+	Total
	No.	No.	Enrolments %
Science	2,235	241	36
Agriculture	0	0	0
Construction	0	0	0
Engineering	0	0	0
Business	239	0	4
Hotel and catering	0	21	0
Health and community care	0	26	0
Art and design	719	29	11
Humanities	3,211	53	47
Basic education	9	99	2
Total	6,413	469	100

Source: Provided by the college in spring 2001.

Table 3: Retention and achievement

Level (Long Courses)	Retention and pass rate	Completion year					
		16-18			19+		
		1997/98	1998/99	1999/00	1997/98	1998/99	1999/00
1	Starters excluding transfers	4	6	0	90	56	0

	Retention rate (%)	*	83	*	51	64	*
	National average (%)	78	81	82	72	69	74
	Pass rate (%)	*	60	*	33	50	*
	National average (%)	69	71	77	67	75	76
2	Starters excluding transfers	110	228	341	74	104	120
	Retention rate (%)	93	96	92	77	69	61
	National average (%)	79	80	82	71	71	75
	Pass rate (%)	92	69	59	93	68	90
	National average (%)	84	85	82	75	77	77
3	Starters excluding transfers	3,640	3,050	3,283	99	77	67
	Retention rate (%)	93	90	90	70	69	72
	National average (%)	77	78	80	62	65	69
	Pass rate (%)	96	96	92	57	64	86
	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 and tertiary or sixth form colleges).

* data 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.*

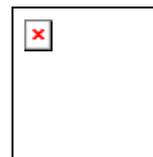
2. College rates for 1997/98 - 1999/2000: *Benchmarking Data 1997/98 to 1999/2000: Retention and Achievement Rates, produced by the Further Education Funding Council, September 2000.*

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

Table 4: Quality of teaching observed during the inspection

Courses	Teaching judged to be:			No of sessions observed
	Good or better %	Satisfactory %	Less than satisfactory %	
Level 3 (advanced)	83	15	2	144
Totals	83	15	2	144

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