



ADULT LEARNING  
INSPECTORATE



Office for Standards  
in Education

**Inspection report**  
**Bilborough College**

Dates of inspection: 27 September–1 October 2004

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Reference:

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## Basic information about the college

Name of college:	Bilborough College
Type of college:	Sixth form college
Principal:	Martin Slattery
Address of college:	Bilborough Road Nottingham Notts NG8 4DQ
Telephone number:	0115 929 9436
Fax number:	0115 942 5561
Chair of governors:	Mavis Moore
Unique reference number:	130787
Name of reporting inspector:	Peter Nelson HMI
Dates of inspection:	27 September–1 October 2004

## **Part A: Summary**

### **Information about the college**

Bilborough Sixth Form College is located on the western edge of Nottingham, bordering South East Derbyshire. The college campus is situated on the edge of the Bilborough estate, a local community with some of the highest levels of social and educational deprivation in the conurbation and the lowest level of higher education (HE) participation in the country. The college attracts students from across the conurbation and beyond, with a third of its students from Nottingham City, a third from Nottinghamshire and a third from South East Derbyshire.

Nottingham has a population of around 600,000. It has a buoyant local economy with high levels of employment, but also some of the lowest levels of educational achievement at Key Stage 4 in the country.

The college has undergone significant growth from 635 students in 1996 to 1,200 full-time students in 2004. It has plans to grow in the next three years to 1,600 full-time students. These plans are underpinned by a major redevelopment project involving a complete college rebuild at a cost of £20.8m. The new accommodation is due to open in September 2005.

The curriculum is based entirely on Curriculum 2000, on advanced subsidiary-level (AS-level) and general certificate of education advanced-level (GCE A-level) provision. There is also an evening-class programme provided in partnership with Broxtowe College of Further Education. The college offers courses in 8 of the 14 areas of learning, with the most substantial number of enrolments in mathematics, science and humanities.

Some 99% of the student population is aged 16 to 19, with a gender balance of 45% male and 55% female. Some 15% of the college's students come from minority ethnic backgrounds - a higher percentage than that of Nottingham itself. The college recruits students from nearly 70 schools across the region, many of whom use the college bus system. The college operates a pilot compact for pupils aged 14 to 19 with three local 11 to 16 schools and it has compact arrangements with six universities in the East Midlands and South Yorkshire.

The college mission statement reflects a very strong commitment to the sixth form ethos of 'promoting academic excellence and nurturing personal development in a supportive environment to serious and committed students'.

### **How effective is the college?**

Inspectors judged the provision to be outstanding in two curriculum areas and good in the other four. Standards of teaching and learning are very good. The college's key strengths and areas that should be improved are listed below.

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***Key strengths***

- high retention rates on GCE A-level courses
- high pass rates, with a significant proportion of high grades
- overall, students achieving GCE grades higher than those predicted by their general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) results
- strong commitment to students' independent learning
- very good teaching
- good support for students
- very good enrichment opportunities
- far-reaching and well-managed strategy for developing new accommodation
- positive and strong ethos amongst both staff and students.

***What should be improved***

- retention rates in some AS-level subjects in 2004
- sharing of good practice between subject areas
- use of information and learning technology (ILT)
- the integration of key skills provision.

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

**Quality of provision in curriculum and occupational areas**

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

Area	Overall judgements about provision, and comment
Science	<b>Good.</b> Retention and pass rates on GCE A-level courses are good. There is much good teaching. Students are well supported and their progress is reviewed thoroughly against target grades. However, there has been a decline in pass rates at AS level in 2004 and much of the laboratory accommodation is poor.
Mathematics	<b>Outstanding.</b> Mathematics pass rates are very high, with many high grades achieved. Students make very good progress relative to prior attainment and retention rates are good. There is very good teaching and good curriculum support for students. There is insufficient use of ILT.
Business and information communications technology	<b>Good.</b> Teaching and learning are good, with constructive feedback to students about their progress. Learning in information and communications technology (ICT) and computing is strongly linked to business practices. Retention rates are good and there are good pass rates in AS-level business studies and computing. Lesson planning takes insufficient account of students' previous studies and key skills are not integrated effectively with business and ICT subjects.
Visual and performing arts	<b>Good.</b> There are high pass rates on many courses with a significant proportion of high grades. Students make good progress relative to prior attainment. Teaching and support for students are very good and there is a strong commitment to independent learning by staff and students. Key skills are not delivered satisfactorily and there is insufficient grading of student work in art and design.
Humanities	<b>Good.</b> Very good pass rates in GCE A-level subjects. Students make very good progress relative to prior attainment. There is much very good teaching. Curriculum management and support for students is good. There has been a decline in retention rates at AS level in 2004.

Area	Overall judgements about provision, and comment
English and modern foreign languages	<p><b>Outstanding.</b> Provision in modern foreign languages is <b>good</b>. Pass rates and attainment are very good in most subjects, despite a recent decline in retention rates in some AS-level subjects. There is a consistently high standard of teaching with excellent support for students and a well-managed curriculum, which enable students to enhance their personal development and fulfil their potential.</p>

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

Leadership and management are good. There is a strongly embedded mission to maintain sixth form college traditions of academic excellence. This mission is supported fully by the governing body, college staff, parents and students. GCE A-level and AS-level pass rates are well above national averages for sixth form colleges. Teaching and learning are very good. Over the last eight years student enrolments have more than doubled, and a well-managed major project to redevelop the college campus is on target for completion in August 2005. The college provides very good value for money and financial management is also very good. There are many successful collaborative links with other educational institutions in the local area. Governance is good, with an active and supportive governing body whose members oversee the strategic direction of the college effectively. Communications are good and staff feel their individual contributions to the college's work are valued. The effectiveness of curriculum management is variable. There is insufficient sharing of good practice in teaching and learning. Insufficient attention is paid in the college self-assessment report to teaching and learning.

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

The college's response to education and social inclusion is satisfactory. It provides a curriculum offer consisting almost entirely of AS levels and GCE A levels. This is in the context of a locality that contains schools with GCSE pass rates well below average and where educational aspirations are very low. Consequently comparatively few pupils from some neighbouring schools have been able to enter the college. However, recent partnerships have been established to facilitate entry by students with borderline entry qualifications. These arrangements are beginning to have a positive impact. The college has been active in revising and implementing its equality and diversity policy and is making good progress with its response to equality and diversity legislation. It is meeting its statutory obligations under the Race Relations (amendment) Act. Currently, much of the accommodation is not accessible to people with restricted mobility, but this will be fully remedied when the new campus opens. Some reasonable adjustments have already been made to the present campus, including the provision of toilets for people with restricted mobility and ramps. The college is making good progress in its response to Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 (SENDA) legislation. Students who require additional learning support are very well provided for by the college. Their needs are identified promptly and support is provided for dyslexia, literacy and numeracy, hearing and visual impairment. However, the extent to which equality and diversity issues are promoted positively and consistently in the classroom is variable across the college.

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

The college provides good support for students. Arrangements for recruiting and advising prospective students are comprehensive. Detailed and clear information is available about the college and its range of courses and there are timely open days and taster courses. Students receive a comprehensive and well-organised induction to the college, followed by

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an effective tutorial review after four weeks. Additional learning support is very good. Students with a very wide range of specific learning needs, such as dyslexia, hearing impairment and health-related problems, receive structured and effective support that they value highly. The tutorial system is well organised with students receiving comprehensive guidance from personal tutors. Students value the broad range of services provided by careers staff, counsellors, and welfare advisors. Parents are kept well informed of students' progress and they are invited to parents' evenings regularly.

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

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

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

- friendly and relaxing atmosphere
- being treated as adults
- good teaching
- good support from staff
- good results
- students encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning.

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

- punctuality and cleanliness of college buses
- seating and social areas in and around college buildings
- quality and price of canteen food.

### **Other information**

The college inspection report will normally be published 12 working weeks after the formal feedback of the inspection findings to the college. Once published, the college has two months in which to prepare its post-inspection action plan and submit it to the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The college's action plan must show what action the college will take to bring about improvements in response to issues raised in the report. The governors should agree it before it is submitted to the local LSC. The local LSC should send to Ofsted only action plans from colleges that have been judged inadequate or have been awarded a grade 4 or 5 for curriculum provision, work-based learning and/or leadership and management.

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## Part B: The college as a whole

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

Aspect and learner type	Graded good or better (Grades 1 to 3) %	Graded satisfactory (Grade 4) %	Graded less than satisfactory (Grades 5 to 7) %
Teaching 16–18	80	20	0
Learning 16–18	80	19	1

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

### Achievement and standards

1. Almost all students at the college are full time and aged 16 to 18, who study subjects at AS level and GCE A level. Approximately 2% of enrolments are on GCSE courses; half of these are students re-taking GCSE mathematics. The college has maintained a first-come, first-served policy for all prospective students with a minimum of five GCSEs at grades A\* to C. However, a few places are also made available to students from local feeder schools who achieve a lower grade profile. The college's success rates place it in the top 10% of sixth form colleges nationally.

2. The overall retention rate has remained consistently high and college data show that it improved to 94% in 2003/04. The retention rate for all advanced level courses is 96%, significantly above the national average of 90%. The vast majority of enrolments are on AS-level and GCE A2 courses, which have retention rates of 91% and 97%, respectively; both several percentage points above the national averages. In 2003/04, the retention rate was 100% in half the subjects at GCE A2; however, in 2004 retention rates in a number of AS-level subjects declined. In GCSE subjects, the overall retention rate of 83% is also above the national average.

3. Pass rates are high and have continued to improve over the last three years during a period when student numbers have grown significantly. The overall pass rate for advanced level courses improved from 88% in 2001, to 90% in 2003. College data on students' achievements in 2004 show a further significant improvement to 94%. The overall pass rate at AS level is 91%, well above the national average. The pass rate at GCE A2, including general studies, is 96%, just above the national level, with 19 out of 31 subjects recording a pass rate of 100%. Pass rates have been consistently high over a number of years in mathematics, physical education, several arts-based subjects, most humanities subjects and English.

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4. In 2004, 49% of students entered for GCE A2 examinations and 41% of students entered for AS-level examinations achieved grades A or B. This is higher than the national average. Higher-grade achievement is particularly strong in electronics, general studies, media studies, physical education, religious studies and sociology. The average Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) points score achieved by students has increased steadily in each of the last three years.

5. Data which compares students' achievements at GCE A level with their previous GCSE results show that, overall, students are doing better than expected in comparison with their GCSE scores on entry. In 2004, the measure of the value that the college adds to students' progress places the college in the top 10% of sixth form colleges at AS level and the top 25% of sixth form colleges at GCE A2. The degree of progress made by students relative to their prior attainment is particularly high in electronics, mathematics, government and politics, media studies, physical education, religious studies, sociology and English. Data for most other subjects show students achieving results broadly in line with predictions made on entry. However, students make less progress than might be expected in German and music.

6. Achievements in key skills are poor. The vast majority of students with one or more key skill among their learning goals fail to complete all aspects of the assessment programme. In 2003/04, fewer than 10% of students achieved the key skills for which they were registered. This is largely the result of students failing to complete the necessary key skills portfolios.

7. Attendance during the inspection averaged 89%, some 3% above the national level for sixth form colleges. In mathematics, business and ICT, and English attendance is well above the sixth form college average for these subjects; in other subjects attendance is broadly in line with the average. Students arrive on time for their lessons, except at the start of each day, when the late arrival of college buses often hinders punctuality.

8. Students are well motivated and make good progress in their subjects. The standard of students' coursework in most subject areas is high. Progression rates from AS level to GCE A2 are particularly strong in drama, electronics, English language, geography, history, physical education and religious studies. The proportion of students going on to HE, some after a gap year, has increased year on year and is now close to 80%.

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

9. Teaching, learning and attainment were graded by inspectors in 80 lessons. The overall quality of teaching and learning was very good. Inspectors judged that teaching and learning was good or better in 80% of the lessons observed, and satisfactory in 20%. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed. Teaching was best in mathematics, visual and performing arts, English and modern foreign languages.

10. Lessons are well planned, with clearly stated aims and objectives. They are supported by well-designed schemes of work. Teachers ensure that, where appropriate, there are strong curriculum links with commercial and business practice. Practical and group

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activities in lessons are varied and well designed to stimulate student interest and involvement and enhance learning. Lessons are well paced to maintain students' attention and interest. Classroom management and student behaviour is very good. There is a positive working relationship between staff and students that helps create a strong and conscientious work ethic. Students and staff are highly motivated and morale is high. Students are actively encouraged to take responsibility for their learning through well-designed group work in lessons, challenging research projects and regular homework tasks. Staff regularly check that students understand, through detailed and well-chosen questioning. Regular assessment, along with constructive verbal and written feedback to students, strongly supports the learning process. Staff help develop students' confidence and regularly praise students for good work. Teaching and learning resources are well employed. Teachers make good use of well-designed, paper-based course booklets and other learning material. Staff regularly have additional activities prepared for the most able students and also provide a high level of support and guidance to individual students progressing at a slower pace. In a few lessons, learning is hampered by group sizes that are too big for the classroom and, on occasions, teachers take insufficient account of students' prior knowledge.

11. Teachers are well qualified. They have up-to-date subject and occupational knowledge that is employed well to promote effective learning. The high ratio of support staff to teaching staff allows teachers to focus on their primary duties and enhances student learning.

12. Many of the college's existing buildings are out of date and access is very limited for students with restricted mobility. Increasing student numbers is causing some cramped and unsuitable teaching accommodation in a few instances. For example, poor and inflexible accommodation in science impedes teaching and learning. There is insufficient storage in visual and performing arts and there are some unsuitable, cramped classrooms in modern foreign languages. However, there is a comprehensive, open access library and resource centre providing students with high-quality learning resources that help foster individual learning. The new buildings, due to open in September 2005, are designed to address all the existing limitations in accommodation and resources. Despite the major rebuild under way at the time of inspection, the college makes effective use of the existing accommodation and manages to keep to a minimum the inconvenience caused by the building project to existing students.

13. There is inconsistent development of the virtual learning environment to support the curriculum and develop students' research skills.

14. There are good systems in place for the assessment and monitoring of students' progress. Thorough initial assessment of literacy and numeracy is carried out when students join the college. The assessment results are used by the additional support team to identify students who would benefit from extra support. Minimum target grades based on prior attainment are set for each student. These target grades are often renegotiated during termly reviews if students are making particularly good progress in a subject. Students are clear

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about what is expected of them in their assignments and what they have to do in order to achieve their target grades.

15. Students' work is marked accurately and returned promptly. The quality of the feedback given to students is good, especially in mathematics, science and humanities. Students value the detailed and constructive feedback that they receive from their teachers. Assessment is particularly rigorous in English and modern foreign languages. In art and design and photography, assessment decisions are not always sufficiently clear or quantified to ensure that all students have a full understanding of the progress they are making. The college has a well-developed homework policy.

16. The college offers a broad range of 35 AS levels and GCE A levels, and 4 GCSE courses. There is only limited opportunity for second-year students to study AS-level courses. The college has good links and liaison with other educational providers and delivers GCSE general studies through compact arrangements with local schools. There is also a strategic partnership with Broxtowe College which provides courses for the local community at the Bilborough campus in the evenings and weekends.

17. There is an outstanding range of enrichment activities which provide very good opportunities for students to broaden their experience whilst studying at the college. These help enhance students' knowledge and raise their aspirations. The college also participates in a wide range of local sports activities including football, cricket and basketball leagues. The college has strong European partnerships enabling students to develop a European dimension within their programmes of study. This includes work experience exchanges for language students and cultural exchanges for history and psychology students. The results from student surveys clearly indicate how these enrichment opportunities help create high levels of student satisfaction, attendance and participation.

18. Guidance and support for students are good. Prospective students are interviewed by a personal tutor and their subject options discussed thoroughly. There is very close liaison with feeder schools. The college holds regular open evenings and responds to requests from schools and individuals for tours and visits.

19. Students' tutorial support is well organised and effective. All students meet with their personal tutor each day and receive information about timetabling changes, extra-curricular activities and administrative matters. These meetings provide an opportunity for students to raise any concerns that they have about their studies or about issues which might adversely affect their progress. The guidance given to personal tutors is comprehensive and includes advice and information on the college's additional support services, student confidentiality, the Connexions service and the conduct of tutorial meetings. Students receive a comprehensive and well-organised induction to the college. The college identifies students at risk of not completing their course and provides additional support for these students. The effectiveness of this support is well monitored. All students receive termly individual reviews which are used to discuss their progress, attendance and performance. These reviews set challenging targets for students, based on their prior attainment at GCSE.

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20. Careers education and guidance are good. The college's careers officer works effectively with students to provide comprehensive advice and information about potential careers and university courses. Students in Year 13 receive sound and impartial advice about opportunities available to them when they complete their studies. There is a well-equipped careers library and the college has progression agreements with local universities.

21. The college has an effective procedure for dealing with child protection issues, however, many college staff and governors have not received training in child protection.

### **Leadership and management**

22. Leadership and management are good. Significant progress and improvements have been made since the last inspection and many of the weaknesses identified at the time have been addressed effectively. The college recruited over 1,300 full-time students at the start of 2004, more than double the numbers enrolled in 1996. Student pass rates have improved in the last four years. Teaching and learning are very good, with a profile at inspection that is above the average for sixth form colleges. The local LSC has provided strategic and financial support for a £20.8 million project to rebuild the college. This project is being well managed.

23. The college has a very clear mission that is promoted by managers with energy and dedication. All managers, including the principal, deliver a weekly teaching commitment. The college is dedicated to maintaining sixth form traditions of academic excellence. Bilborough is committed to providing a major pathway for students seeking to enter HE. Over 75% of the cohort gained places in universities in 2004, significantly more than in previous years. The principal articulates a vision of the future that is coherent, realistic and distinctive. This vision is strongly supported by the governing body, college staff, parents and students. The local LSC has also demonstrated its confidence in Bilborough's future. The mission and vision are supported by a robust planning process involving a comprehensive range of targets, strategies and delivery plans. These cover all significant aspects of the college's activities, with clear arrangements for monitoring progress. Local LSC targets and objectives are also embedded in the college's strategic plan.

24. Curriculum management in English and humanities is good, but the overall effectiveness of curriculum management is variable. Curriculum leaders and teams take strong ownership of their subjects and there is clear commitment to quality improvement in many areas. Targets are set for retention rates, achievement and other key indicators. Performance is measured against challenging benchmarks. Teaching staff are well supported by their curriculum leaders. Good practice in teaching and learning is shared across some curriculum areas but this is not consistent practice and opportunities for collaborative development are missed. The extent to which equality and diversity issues are dealt with positively in the classroom is variable, and not all curriculum areas give equality and diversity sufficient attention. The cross-college homework policy is effective and highly valued by staff and students. However, the management of key skills is less effective. There is a lack of clarity about policy, practice, roles and responsibilities. A revised policy has been developed but it is too soon to assess its impact.

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25. There are well-established systems for self-assessment and quality assurance that result in identifiable improvements. There is detailed information available about student performance by gender, ethnicity and school of origin on the college information system, but these data are not yet fully utilised. The college uses external agencies to provide independent judgements on its provision. The profile of teaching and learning grades produced through the college's lesson observation process is significantly higher than that awarded during the inspection. The college self-assessment report is insufficiently critical, identifying very few weaknesses and has insufficient focus on teaching and learning.

26. The college provides very good value for money. The average class size is significantly higher than the sector average and staff utilisation is also high. The college's financial management is very good. The college has sustained grade 'A' financial status for several years. The average attendance in lessons during this inspection was above the national average.

27. Communications in the college are very good. The general management style throughout the college is open and consultative. Staff have been thoroughly consulted about the new building project. Their sense of ownership and commitment to the new development is very high. The previous inspection in 2000 commended 'the supportive and caring attitudes of staff' and identified 'a purposeful and happy atmosphere throughout the college'. This ethos has been sustained to the present day. Staff enjoy working at the college, and students benefit from the positive atmosphere. Staff development is planned carefully and managed efficiently. It reflects the college's strategic priorities along with individual needs identified through the appraisal process. All appraisals for the last academic year have been completed. Staff value the professional development opportunities made available to them.

28. The college is responding effectively to the requirements of the Race Relations (amendment) Act and SENDA. It has undertaken a thorough review of equality and diversity. Managers have begun to implement a revised policy that was approved by governors in March 2004. It is supported by a very thorough action plan that sets out a proactive approach to the promotion of good race relations. An equality and diversity steering group oversees all aspects of college activity. A detailed audit has been conducted by an external consultancy. Awareness training for the governing body has taken place. Much of the current accommodation is not accessible to wheelchair users, but the new building opening in 2005 is designed to be fully compliant with the SENDA legislative requirements.

29. The college has excellent working relationships with three local schools. Funding allocated to the college has been deployed to support the work of co-ordinators for pupils and students aged 14 to 19. It has also enabled the establishment of 'bridging courses' to assist marginal achievers. The headteachers are strongly supportive of these initiatives. There are also constructive relationships with local universities, including active partnerships with both Nottingham University and Nottingham Trent University. There is a positive working relationship with the local LSC who have expressed their support for Bilborough's vision of the future. There are valued partnerships with colleges in four European countries. Many of

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these external links owe much of their effectiveness to the pro-active leadership of the principal, whose positive contribution is highly valued by the other participants.

30. The governing body plays an active and significant role in the business of the college. There is an effective committee structure and the membership of the groups reflects a suitable balance of skills and community representation. The governors are well informed about college business and strongly support the college mission. They have played a leading role in developing the new accommodation strategy. The college benefits from the governors' broad range of knowledge and expertise.

## Part C: Curriculum and occupational areas

### Science

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

#### *Strengths*

- good retention rates
- high pass rates at GCE A2
- much good teaching
- thorough review of student progress against target grades
- good subject support for students.

#### *Weaknesses*

- decline in pass rates in most AS-level subjects in 2004
- poor accommodation.

#### *Scope of provision*

31. The college offers AS-level and GCE A-level science courses in biology, chemistry, electronics and physics. There are currently some 480 students on these courses, all of them aged 16 to 18 and studying full time. Biology is the largest subject area, with over 350 students. Electronics, with just over 50 students, is the smallest.

#### *Achievement and standards*

32. Retention rates are above the national averages in all subjects at AS level and GCE A2. Pass rates are high in GCE A2 subjects. At GCE A2, students across all science subjects achieve a greater percentage of higher grades than the national averages for sixth form colleges. Students on these courses generally also achieve better grades than predicted from their GCSE scores. In electronics and physics, the value added by the college at GCE A2 places the college in the top 25% of sixth form colleges in these subjects. The pass rate in GCE A2 electronics reached 100% in 2004, with 75% of students achieving grades A and B. Pass rates in AS-level chemistry and physics are now below the national average.

33. In all lessons, students show a good understanding of basic scientific concepts. In the case of many first-year students, their level of understanding is better than expected at this early stage in their course. For example, in one AS-level chemistry lesson, students were able to state correctly the number of electrons in the outer shell of named elements. Most

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students are competent in the use of scientific terminology. Student work is generally well presented. Students on electronics courses are confident in using computers to model circuits and to use the Internet to extend their studies. Students have competent practical skills and pay good attention to health and safety.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2002	2003	2004
AS-level biology	3	No. of starts	161	208	212
		% retention	97	94	91
		% pass rate	88	90	81
AS-level chemistry	3	No. of starts	94	180	103
		% retention	94	96	92
		% pass rate	89	89	76
AS-level physics	3	No. of starts	81	83	81
		% retention	95	93	95
		% pass rate	78	78	70
GCE A-level biology	3	No. of starts	105	110	148
		% retention	100	99	100
		% pass rate	85	95	95
GCE A-level physics	3	No. of starts	54	43	45
		% retention	94	100	100
		% pass rate	96	84	98
GCE A-level electronics	3	No. of starts	15	27	25
		% retention	100	96	100
		% pass rate	93	92	100

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

***Quality of education and training***

34. There is much good teaching. Lessons are well planned and in most cases teachers use an appropriate variety of approaches and learning resources. Working relationships between teachers and students are very constructive. Most teachers provide students with frequent and positive feedback which helps to keep them motivated. In all lessons, students are attentive and carry out learning activities effectively. They respond well to directed questions. In many lessons, simulations and modelling are used well to help develop students' understanding. In one physics lesson, for example, a computer simulation was used to demonstrate standing wave formation. In a chemistry lesson, simple pin models were constructed by students to predict bond angles and the shape of simple molecules.

35. Resource booklets provided to students give useful information about the course, good materials and tasks to support learning. These help to minimise the need for excessive note-taking. In many lessons, students are encouraged to work independently and in the most successful lessons, students work very co-operatively with their peers to extend their understanding. Teachers provide good support for these activities and summarise the outcomes well. In some lessons, extension activities are available for more able students. In a few lessons, however, there is insufficient attention given to differentiation and consequently some students are not adequately challenged or repeat work they have already covered. Teachers and students use ICT confidently in physics and electronics lessons, but opportunities to use ICT in other subjects are missed. In practical lessons, health and safety precautions are properly observed.

36. The accommodation available for science courses is poor. All lessons take place in laboratories and most of these provide dated and inflexible accommodation that restricts the variety of teaching and learning methods that can be used. There is no access for students with restricted mobility to any of the science classrooms. The college is fully aware of these issues and the construction of new college buildings is well underway. Other resources to support learning are satisfactory. Physics and electronics laboratories are well equipped with computers that provide Internet access and data projectors. However, these resources are less available in biology and chemistry laboratories. Equipment available for practical lessons is good and in most subjects there is a good range of materials for students to draw on. For most science subjects, the college's virtual learning environment provides useful materials and links to help consolidate and extend learning. In biology, for example, links provide access to topical articles on genetic engineering. Teachers have relevant qualifications, including teaching qualifications, and are knowledgeable in their subjects. They have access to a good range of staff development activities, including those designed to support the increased use of ICT in learning.

37. Assessment and monitoring of students' progress are good. Various forms of assessment and homework set regularly are used to monitor their progress. Assessments are marked and annotated well. Students receive constructive feedback and know what they need to do to improve. The progress of all students is thoroughly reviewed against target grades.

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Comprehensive records detail the outcomes of reviews and indicate the actions required for improvement. The review process is used effectively to provide feedback to parents.

38. Science students are well supported. College-wide mechanisms for identifying individual support needs at entry, and for responding to these needs, are good. Students have good access to additional support. Subject-specific support needs are also identified. In physics, for example, tests at induction are used to identify any need for additional support in mathematics. All science subject areas provide drop-in support lessons for students, who comment positively on the value of these sessions in clarify their understanding and preparing for examinations.

### *Leadership and management*

39. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Individual subjects are well managed. The course-review process provides a good framework for monitoring course performance and informing the self-assessment process. Challenging targets are set for recruitment, retention and pass rates. Performance of individual subjects is reviewed carefully against achievement data and responses to student questionnaires. Actions for improvement are identified in subject reviews and their implementation is monitored. For example, the recent drop in pass rates in AS-level biology has been addressed by changes in the sequencing of topics. In physics, greater emphasis has been placed on the diagnosis of mathematical competence at entry.

## Mathematics

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

### *Strengths*

- outstanding pass rates with many high grades
- high achievement relative to prior attainment
- high retention rates
- very good teaching
- excellent curriculum support for students.

### *Weaknesses*

- insufficient use of ILT.

### *Scope of provision*

40. Approximately 300 students, all aged 16 to 18 and studying full time, are studying AS-level and GCE A2 mathematics. Alongside pure mathematics, students can choose from options in discrete mathematics, mechanics and statistics. Further mathematics is also offered for the more able students. GCSE mathematics is taken by students who have not previously achieved a grade C in the subject. There are currently 50 students enrolled on the course.

### *Achievement and standards*

41. Pass rates in mathematics are very high and a large proportion of students achieve high grades. The A\* to C pass rate for GCSE mathematics has improved markedly over the last three years and reached 84% in 2004, almost twice the national average. The pass rate in AS-level mathematics has been consistently well above the national average for sixth form colleges. In 2004, some 51% of students obtained A and B grades, significantly above the national average of 35%. The pass rate in GCE A2 mathematics has also exceeded the national average for colleges of this type for the last three years and reached 100% in 2004. Some 67% of students achieved high grades compared to the national average of 57%. Retention rates are above national averages on all courses.

42. Students make very good progress relative to their prior attainment. Most students in GCSE mathematics achieve their aim of a grade C or better despite their lack of confidence in the subject on arrival at the college. Many AS-level and GCE A2 students achieve outcomes significantly better than the grades predicted based on their GCSE results. The standard of students' work is high. Students who started AS-level mathematics just a short time prior to inspection had made more progress than might be expected. In 2003, some 40

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students entered for the Senior Mathematics Challenge and 20 were awarded medals. Attendance in lessons observed is high. Over 90% of students who include mathematics in their programme progress to HE; 20% progress to a degree course in mathematics or another subject requiring a high level of mathematical competence.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2002	2003	2004
GCSE mathematics	2	No. of starts	72	60	49
		% retention	92	87	90
		% pass rate	32	62	84
AS-level mathematics	3	No. of starts	151	185	157
		% retention	89	97	92
		% pass rate	76	83	83
GCE A-level mathematics	3	No. of starts	71	87	127
		% retention	100	100	98
		% pass rate	97	98	100

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

***Quality of education and training***

43. Teaching is very good. Lessons are well planned and enthusiastically taught. Teachers provide exceptionally clear explanations of mathematical concepts and ideas. Techniques for solving problems are discussed by students, often working co-operatively in pairs, enabling them to develop their own ideas and learn from each other. Teachers effectively develop students' confidence by clearly acknowledging and praising successful work or relevant contributions. Questioning techniques are used adeptly to ensure all students contribute to the learning process and to enable teachers to check students' understanding thoroughly. Extension exercises are provided to keep more able students suitably challenged and individual students are given the amount of support they need. Students participate enthusiastically in lessons and demonstrate a very positive attitude to learning.

44. Teachers use a broad variety of learning activities which succeed in stimulating and maintaining students' interest. In many lessons, graphical calculators are used effectively by students to try out ideas, solve problems or investigate the graphical representations of

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functions. Individual whiteboards are used so that individual students' ideas and answers can be seen by others, enabling all students to participate easily and quickly. In one lesson, students enjoyed using cards with pairs of algebraic functions in a whole-class activity to revise basic calculus. In a minority of lessons, there is a lack of variety. Students listen and take notes, but are not actively involved and lose concentration. The large size of a few groups makes it more difficult to provide the highest quality learning experience.

45. Teachers are well qualified with relevant degrees and teacher training qualifications. Although graphics calculators are used effectively, there is insufficient use of other forms of ILT during lessons. Classrooms used for mathematics lessons lack computers, interactive whiteboards and digital projectors, so the benefits from viewing mathematical constructs on a large screen and using mathematical software are not available to students during lessons. The college virtual learning environment makes mathematics schemes of work accessible by students, but has no worksheets or guidance notes to enable individual study.

46. There is a clear timetable for major assignments and a marking scheme which provides feedback to students on their progress with fundamental mathematical skills. Teachers write helpful comments and indicate solutions to inaccurately answered questions. Excellent oral feedback is given to students in lessons. Students are supplied with booklets of past examination questions which help them prepare very well for module examinations.

47. The range of GCE A-level mathematics options is sufficient to meet the needs and interests of the students. Much weight is placed on the provision of GCSE mathematics for students joining the college with less than a grade C. All such students are encouraged to study the subject and parents are consulted before a decision to drop it can be taken.

48. There is very good academic and personal support for mathematics students. Following diagnostic testing, additional support is provided for GCSE students needing extra tuition. Well-structured workshop sessions are provided every day which enable students to get individual help, both on demand or through a booking system. AS-level mathematics students are tested for their knowledge of more advanced core mathematics skills. Arrangements are then made to provide any tuition, for example, in algebra, which could help to ease their transition from GCSE study. Students value the extensive academic support that is freely available to them outside of the classroom. Teachers have a good understanding of individual students' needs and will take decisive action, for example, by arranging ESOL support or adjusting schemes of work, when necessary.

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

49. Curriculum management is good overall. Both GCSE and GCE A-level mathematics are well led and organised. Communication and teamwork between mathematics teachers at the informal level are excellent. There are very effective arrangements for providing students with vital learning resources such as textbooks and calculators. Divisional meetings are held regularly. The most recent self-assessment provides a largely accurate reflection of the provision, but self-assessment findings are not always translated into robust action plans.

**Business and information communications technology**

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

***Strengths***

- good retention rates
- high pass rates in AS-level business studies and computing
- regular and constructive feedback to students about their progress
- learning in ICT and computing strongly linked to business practice.

***Weaknesses***

- insufficient recognition of previous learning in lesson planning
- poor integration of key skills.

***Scope of provision***

50. The college offers AS levels and GCE A2s in accounting, business studies, economics, ICT and computing. There are currently 428 students aged 16 to 18 taking one or more of these subjects; 68% of them are studying at AS level. The college has experienced significant growth in enrolments for each subject since the last inspection.

***Achievement and standards***

51. Retention rates are consistently above the national average in each of the subjects, at both AS level and GCE A level. Pass rates are at least satisfactory overall and in some subjects they are consistently good. In AS-level business studies and AS-level computing, the pass rates have been above the national averages in each of the last three years. Pass rates in ICT are improving and at AS level have been above the national average for two years with an increasing proportion of high grades. In 2004, many GCE A-level ICT students achieved grades that were higher than their predicted grades based on their GCSE performance. Pass rates in accounting are satisfactory, although the GCE A-level pass rate dropped to just below the national average in 2004 with only a small proportion of students achieving high grades.

52. Students make at least the progress that might be expected based on their prior achievement. Students on AS-level courses respond well to small group work when teachers use good questioning techniques to elicit ideas for the whole group. In business studies and economics at GCE A level, many students demonstrate effective research skills, produce thorough analyses and evaluation and show good problem solving skills. Students in ICT generate useful ideas for their practical projects. They demonstrate good flowcharting skills and develop specifications that meet user needs. Health and safety in lessons are well

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addressed. Some homework exercises, accounting statements and course notes are untidily presented and show too many deficiencies in grammar and spelling. Students in accounting, business studies and economics do not make sufficient use of ICT to present their coursework.

***A sample of retention and pass rates in business and information and communications technology, 2002 to 2004***

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2002	2003	2004
AS-level business studies	3	No. of starts	132	110	115
		% retention	93	95	96
		% pass rate	91	90	94
AS-level accounting	3	No. of starts	29	51	35
		% retention	90	90	94
		% pass rate	81	59	79
AS-level information technology	3	No. of starts	90	91	75
		% retention	89	97	87
		% pass rate	65	83	82
GCE A-level business studies	3	No. of starts	64	93	65
		% retention	100	99	98
		% pass rate	95	97	95
GCE A-level economics	3	No. of starts	32	45	54
		% retention	100	100	100
		% pass rate	97	100	96
GCE A-level computing	3	No. of starts	*	33	37
		% retention	*	100	100
		% pass rate	*	88	95

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

\* less than 15 starts

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

53. Teaching and learning are good. Most teachers prompt students to develop their ideas beyond simple responses, showing that they are continuously being extended. In a lively economics lesson, students moved successfully from a description of basic supply and demand theory to a critical examination of the impact of interest rates on sectors of the economy. The very good teaching encouraged students to become independent learners through Internet research, or through their reading of well-presented support booklets prepared by subject teams. Teaching schemes of work in business studies are planned in detail and make reference, for example, to how teachers will share responsibility for case study activity.

54. Learning in ICT and computing is strongly linked to business practice. Teachers provide positive role models for students and use their recent employment in the industry to convey the relevance and significance of particular topics. For example, the teacher's own knowledge and enthusiasm helped AS-level ICT students to appreciate the significance of computer crime and abuse to both the business and the personal user. Students showed good concentration and clearly enjoyed the teacher's examples from their own commercial experience. They listened actively to each others' views and joined in discussion, before doing further research on the Internet.

55. When planning lessons, some teachers take insufficient account of students' previous learning. For example, some students have previously studied GCSE business studies at school or have part-time employment and have knowledge and understanding of topics at AS level. Teachers fail to use this experience productively in lessons. In a few lessons, students are poorly briefed about how activities link to other topics or how they are applied in business. In an accounting lesson, students confidently followed set procedures relating to depreciation, but were not encouraged to think sufficiently for themselves. Several students were unable to work out the effect of their calculations on the year-end financial situation and became despondent after giving incorrect answers.

56. Accommodation and information technology (IT) resources are satisfactory. The layout and facilities in computer rooms can accommodate both theory and practical work. Classrooms are furnished adequately and have useful subject materials on display. However, they are poorly equipped with audio-visual equipment and space limitations often restrict the range of teaching and learning strategies. The range of relevant books in the library is small, though students are issued with a standard textbook for each subject. Teachers are appropriately qualified and those newly appointed have access to good support and professional development opportunities to ensure the quality of teaching.

57. Students receive good feedback on their work and the progress they are making. Teachers help to build students' confidence, while also being constructive in showing them how to improve further. Students receive regular developmental feedback during periods

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when they are working on activities and assignments lasting several weeks. Where students find work difficult, they are encouraged to attend lunchtime sessions for extra support. Relationships between teachers and students are excellent and opportunities for students' personal development are good. These factors are consistent with the overall mission and values of the college. Students show extremely positive attitudes to their studies. They enjoy their lessons and work hard.

58. Key skills are not integrated into the curriculum and there is no systematic approach to the teaching or assessment of key skills. Although opportunities to develop and demonstrate key skills are occasionally highlighted on schemes of work and in assignments, most teachers miss opportunities to improve students' skills and assess the standards attained within subject contexts.

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

59. Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. Subject leadership and the arrangements for monitoring the quality of provision and taking action to improve it are good. Students' attendance is rigorously monitored and absences are quickly followed-up. Managers monitor performance against targets for enrolment, retention and pass rates; but this process is distorted slightly by discrepancies between pass rate data relied on by curriculum teams and that held centrally. There has been little curriculum development or innovation since the last inspection, particularly in business, and there are few opportunities to share good practice across subject teams and divisions.

## Visual and performing arts

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

### *Strengths*

- high pass rates on many courses with a significant proportion of high grades
- good student progress relative to prior attainment
- very good teaching
- strong commitment to independent learning by staff and students
- very good support for students.

### *Weaknesses*

- inadequate accommodation
- unsatisfactory delivery of key skills
- insufficient grading of student work in art and design.

### *Scope of provision*

60. The college offers AS-level and GCE A2 courses in art and design, photography, media studies, drama and theatre studies, music, music technology, and performance studies. There are currently some 547 full-time students aged 16 to 18 enrolled on these courses. Key skills are offered as part of each student's programmes, with opportunities for participation in enrichment activities.

### *Achievement and standards*

61. Students achieve well across the range of arts-based courses. Retention rates are broadly in line with the national average for most courses, but higher than average in drama and theatre studies and performance studies. Pass rates on most courses are higher than the national average. In 2004, the pass rates in GCE A2 art and design, drama and theatre studies, media studies, music, music technology and photography reached 100%. There is good added value, with many students achieving better grades than predicted based on their GCSE scores. Compared to the national averages, a large proportion of students achieve high grades in AS-level drama and theatre studies, media studies and performance studies and in GCE A2 art and design and photography. The percentage of students achieving high grades has shown considerable improvement across many courses, however, in AS-level and GCE A2 music and music technology and in GCE A2 drama and theatre studies, students do not achieve as well as expected and the percentage of high grades achieved is below the national average.

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62. Students' work is of a high standard across the curriculum area. Students respond well to teachers' high expectations of them and exhibit strong independent learning skills. In one GCE A-level media studies lesson, teams of students worked very effectively in researching primary and secondary source material to test the hypothesis of gender stereotyping in men's magazines. In AS-level music, groups of students creatively presented their findings on the features of European music throughout the ages, using a broad variety of resources. Students work confidently across art forms and media processes and some GCE A2 art sketchbooks show lively development of images and ideas through manipulation of materials, annotation and text.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2002	2003	2004
AS-level media studies	3	No. of starts	111	110	145
		% retention	90	95	88
		% pass rate	93	94	98
AS-level art studies/find arts	3	No. of starts	98	93	100
		% retention	94	98	84
		% pass rate	96	92	98
GCE A-level performance studies	3	No. of starts	44	44	42
		% retention	89	89	93
		% pass rate	100	97	92
GCE A-level photography	3	No. of starts	36	49	55
		% retention	94	96	95
		% pass rate	97	100	100
GCE A-level drama and theatre studies	3	No. of starts	30	26	33
		% retention	100	100	100
		% pass rate	97	88	100

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2002	2003	2004
GCE A-level art and design	3	No. of starts	48	66	64
		% retention	100	98	94
		% pass rate	98	91	100

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

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

63. Most teaching is good or very good. In the best lessons, teachers use good classroom management skills and strong subject expertise to integrate theoretical and practical concepts into exciting learning activities for the students. Teachers communicate energetically through a rich variety of stimuli and aim to accommodate students' preferred ways of learning. Students are usually very aware of what it is they have to do, with teachers adept at setting clear tasks and making explicit links to future assessment requirements. There are mature working relationships between teachers and students that help to create a supportive and safe environment in which to explore and experiment. The pace of the best classes helps to maintain students' focus. In the majority of lessons, students are engaged and highly motivated. They are encouraged to develop independence in their learning and respond well to the responsibility placed on them. Sometimes teaching does not fully engage those students experiencing more difficulty with the subject. In art and design, there is little whole group work which limits the opportunities for students to learn from each other.

64. Resources are satisfactory and sufficient to meet the needs of students across the curriculum area. Whilst specialist accommodation is poor and storage facilities are limited, teachers make every effort to ensure that students are not adversely affected. Students enjoy working in specialist base rooms in which their work is displayed. Some good specialist equipment is available and photography, media studies and music technology students use digital recording and editing facilities. Students use the college's virtual learning environment and receive materials in their college e-mail accounts. Lessons benefit from well-prepared resources such as course and module handbooks and high quality handouts. Teachers are well qualified and highly committed. There is a strong curriculum team culture and technicians make a valuable contribution.

65. Teachers provide students with regular assessment. Students receive constructive verbal and written feedback on their practical and written work which clearly identifies their strengths and areas for improvement. In photography, useful written and moderated feedback is given to students, highlighting their development points and broad grade parameters. Students clearly value teacher feedback. Teachers set target grades and agree actions with students which are monitored termly through individual tutorial reviews. On art, design and photography courses, no formal grading is given and some students are unclear about the

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standard of their work and their predicted grades. Cross-marking of student work takes place. Parents are kept well informed of students' progress through reports and parents' evenings.

66. The range of courses available is appropriate to the needs and aspirations of students. They provide students with several options within both visual and performing arts, which have vocational as well as academic flavours. Many students participate in enrichment activities such as visits, exhibitions, performances and sporting activities. Students' understanding of key skills is limited and they do not see them as relevant. While key skills are signposted in most schemes of work, there is little evidence of their implementation in lessons.

67. Support for students is very good. Students receive clear information about the courses available. They have a good induction. All students are initially assessed and support needs are met through individual lessons and time-tabled subject support. Daily briefings keep students in touch with their tutors and help new students to settle quickly into their new environment. Students speak highly of the support available and benefit from regular tutorial reviews which monitor and support their progress. Student support services offer help and advice and students receive much informal support from their teachers outside lessons.

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

68. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Individual courses are well managed by specialist subject leaders and subject teams display a strong commitment to success and improvement. The subject self-assessment reports are largely accurate, but are insufficiently rigorous in their evaluation of teaching and learning. The potential for cross-curriculum collaboration and sharing of good practice is not exploited as each subject area operates autonomously. There is a clear commitment to equality and diversity. Student achievements are analysed by gender and ethnicity, and curriculum materials reflect cultural diversity.

## Humanities

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

### *Strengths*

- very good pass rates in GCE A-level subjects
- very good progress relative to prior attainment in most subjects
- much very good teaching
- good support for students
- good curriculum management.

### *Weaknesses*

- decline in retention rates at AS level in 2004
- insufficient opportunities for students to demonstrate learning.

### *Scope of provision*

69. The college offers AS-level and GCE A-level courses in geography, government and politics, history, psychology, religious studies and sociology. In addition, most students study general studies as a fourth GCE A level. At the time of the inspection, there were 738 enrolments on these courses.

### *Achievement and standards*

70. Pass rates on GCE A-level subjects are very good. In GCE A-level government and politics, and religious studies, pass rates in 2004 were outstanding. In geography, general studies, history, psychology and sociology, pass rates exceeded national averages. Pass rates have been consistently good over the last three years. In AS-level geography and history, pass rates are above national averages. Students make very good progress relative to their prior attainment. Data for the last three years show consistently high student attainment when compared to their performance at GCSE. Students do particularly well in GCE A-level general studies, government and politics and sociology and in AS-level geography, religious studies and sociology. In 2004, there was a marked decline in retention rates, particularly in AS-level history, religious studies and sociology, which fell below national averages. There is good progression from the AS-level to the GCE A2 course in religious studies. About one third of college students who progressed to HE went to study humanities courses.

71. The standard of students' written work is good. In the best pieces, students write fluently and produce reasoned and evaluative arguments which are supported by evidence. In GCE A-level history, a student produced a well-researched extended essay on a topic of local

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interest related to Chartism. In a GCE A-level geography lesson on the health and welfare of the United Kingdom, students correctly interpreted information displayed in choropleth maps to evaluate the power of key indicators.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2002	2003	2004
AS-level geography	3	No. of starts	76	91	98
		% retention	95	95	93
		% pass rate	92	97	99
AS-level history	3	No. of starts	92	96	113
		% retention	92	97	88
		% pass rate	82	84	98
AS-level psychology	3	No. of starts	252	280	309
		% retention	89	92	90
		% pass rate	89	86	84
GCE A-level general studies	3	No. of starts	40	404	529
		% retention	95	95	98
		% pass rate	95	86	90
GCE A-level religious studies	3	No. of starts	24	28	33
		% retention	100	96	100
		% pass rate	100	100	100
GCE A-level sociology	3	No. of starts	35	57	43
		% retention	97	96	93
		% pass rate	94	98	100

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

***Quality of education and training***

72. There is much very good teaching. Lessons are well planned and have clear aims and objectives. Schemes of work are detailed and incorporate homework and extension activities. Teachers make use of a variety of learning methods and activities. Lessons are well structured and contain clear links with previous material. The best lessons set a appropriate pace which is maintained throughout. There is a strong focus on learning and on the development of the academic skills necessary to do well in assignments and external examinations. Students on AS-level courses receive good support in making the transition from their GCSE studies. Teachers make skilful use of open and targeted questioning to encourage participation by all students, to increase their contributions and to check understanding. Teachers establish excellent rapport with students and treat them as adults, which they value. Teachers support individual students well, challenging the most able and provide opportunities for others to demonstrate and extend their understanding. In a small minority of less effective lessons, students are not given sufficient opportunity to demonstrate learning. These lessons are largely teacher led with minimal opportunities for participation by students. Small group activity is poorly structured and managed.

73. Staff are well qualified and experienced. Many are examiners in their subject. Classrooms are adequately equipped and there is adequate storage for resources. However, there are insufficient IT resources to support students and teachers in lessons. Teachers use high-quality materials to support learning and there are good handbooks on individual topics. These are used effectively in lessons and to support independent learning. Teachers use many well-produced and stimulating course handouts.

74. Students' work is marked accurately and teachers provide constructive feedback which helps students to improve. Students receive homework regularly. Marked work is returned promptly.

75. The range of humanities courses available is satisfactory. There is limited provision for students wishing to study AS level in their second year. The largest humanities subject is general studies which most students are required to take in their second year. There are good enrichment activities for students. There is a wide programme of visits and guest speakers. Government and politics courses are enhanced by opportunities to meet local politicians and to visit Parliament.

76. Students are well supported. There are brief daily tutorials and comprehensive termly tutorial reviews. There is good additional support for students. There are timetabled subject support sessions that students value highly.

***Leadership and management***

77. Leadership and management are good. Managers set clear direction for staff and provide strong leadership. Arrangements for quality assurance are satisfactory and include classroom observations, student feedback and analysis of student performance data. Teachers are consulted thoroughly and are actively involved in preparation of the subject self-

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assessment report. Staff are appraised regularly and benefit from access to good staff development opportunities. Promotion of equal opportunities is satisfactory. Staff have good understanding of their duties under equal opportunities legislation and they incorporate equal opportunities issues in their teaching.

## **English and modern foreign languages**

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

Contributory grade for modern foreign languages is **good (grade 2)**

### ***Strengths***

- very good pass rates on most English and communication studies courses
- high standard of written work in English and communication studies
- very good teaching
- rigorous assessment and monitoring of students' progress
- extensive curriculum enrichment
- very good support for students
- good curriculum management.

### ***Weaknesses***

- decline in retention rates on AS-level English literature and AS-level French courses in 2004
- limited use of multimedia resources in modern foreign languages lessons.

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

78. There is a broad range of provision in English and modern foreign languages including AS levels and GCE A2s in English language, English literature, communication studies, French, German and Spanish. GCSE courses are also available in English, Spanish and Latin. All students are full time, aged 16 to 18. English and communication studies attract the majority of students with 687 enrolments at the time of inspection and 175 on modern foreign languages courses.

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

79. Pass rates are very good in English and communication studies, often above the national averages. In 2004, pass rates in GCE A2 English literature were 100%. Retention rates in some AS-level subjects have declined in 2004. Students achieve well relative to their prior attainment. Pass rates are very good in GCSE English and GCE A-level English literature and the incidence of high grades is significantly above the national averages. Progression of students from AS level to GCE A2 has improved significantly from 2002/03 to 2003/04 in English literature, French and Spanish, and is good in English language and communication studies, but poor in German.

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80. The standard of students' work is very high. In English language and literature, most students communicate clearly, in an appropriate style and show good understanding of literary texts. Students at the lower end of the achievement scale still display a clear style of writing and good command of the language, although their analysis is often superficial. The work of high-achieving students is impressive. They tend to be fluent and articulate and display confident use of critical vocabulary. In modern foreign languages, the standard of students' work is generally good. Some students display a high level of accuracy and confident use of a range of lexis and grammar structures.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2002	2003	2004
AS-level communication studies	3	No. of starts	64	60	68
		% retention	88	90	90
		% pass rate	95	98	98
AS-level English language	3	No. of starts	139	149	146
		% retention	92	95	92
		% pass rate	96	96	99
AS-level English literature	3	No. of starts	109	101	138
		% retention	90	95	87
		% pass rate	93	94	95
AS-level French language	3	No. of starts	39	40	42
		% retention	92	93	81
		% pass rate	86	84	82
GCE A2 English language	3	No. of starts	80	98	106
		% retention	99	98	97
		% pass rate	100	99	100

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2002	2003	2004
GCE A2 English literature	3	No. of starts	58	66	56
		% retention	98	97	96
		% pass rate	98	98	100

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

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

81. Much teaching is very good, some is inspirational. Many teachers deliver lessons in an imaginative way that stimulates students' interest and engages them in the learning process. In some English lessons, teachers often bring the subject to life using an extrovert, almost dramatic, presentation style that stimulates the students and fosters their appreciation, for instance, of literary texts. In English, a wide range of activities, resources and skilful classroom management are used to provide variety to lessons. Teachers and students make good use of ILT resources to enhance learning. In some English and communication lessons, students perform at a very high level. Modern foreign languages teachers make good, constant use of the foreign language and deploy effective strategies to facilitate students' understanding. However, in some of these lessons, there are limited opportunities for students to practice and develop their speaking skills. Teaching is planned carefully and takes into account the different needs of students and the requirements of the syllabus. Some modern foreign languages lessons are solely based on paper resources (books and handouts) and the use of the whiteboard. Lack of variety at times fails to stimulate students' interest and participation. Key skills are signposted regularly in schemes of works, but teachers do not highlight opportunities for their development during lessons.

82. Teachers are very well qualified and experienced. They all have academic and teaching qualifications; many also have higher degrees in subjects that are relevant and complementary to their area of teaching. Some teachers have valuable experience from examining and moderating for Examination Boards. English and communication classrooms have excellent audio-video resources and attractive displays that create a welcoming and stimulating learning environment. Some classrooms are too small for the large groups they accommodate and tend to become very hot due to poor ventilation. English and French students have access to a comprehensive site on the college virtual learning environment to supplement their classroom study. Some teachers have produced impressive students' handbooks for their courses. All modern foreign languages students have regular access to a well-equipped language laboratory. However, basic, essential modern foreign languages equipment is not readily available in classrooms.

83. Assessment of students' work is rigorous. Teachers provide constructive and comprehensive feedback on achievement and on how students can develop and improve. Examiners' reports praise the high standards of assessment practices and coursework.

Minutes of moderation meetings show a rigorous and detailed process. Teachers monitor their students' progress extremely well through an effective tutorial system and by keeping comprehensive records. Assessment and tutorials are used in the planning of learning, target setting and to provide feedback to students.

84. Students have the opportunity to enhance their experience and personal development through a broad variety of enrichment activities. In addition to GCSE Latin and Spanish, GCSE English is offered as a re-sit to students who did not achieve at least grade C. English literature students benefit from a variety of visits to specific productions related to their study and general cultural trips. In 2003/04, these included productions of *Hamlet*, *Twelfth Night*, *Othello* and visits to the Lake District, Imperial War Museum and Westminster Abbey. In modern foreign languages, there are well-established links with France and Germany and many students have the opportunity to take part in work-experience exchanges abroad to improve their language skills and cultural awareness.

85. Support for students is very good. Tutorials provide practical advice and guidance to help students to succeed in achieving their targets and to prepare them for HE. Attendance is carefully monitored and prompt action is taken on non-authorized absences. Specific students' needs are well catered for. Subject teachers are promptly informed by the student support team of any student in need of support.

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

86. Curriculum management is good. Roles are clearly defined and staff feel extremely well supported by their managers and colleagues. Staff development opportunities are widely available and induction of new team members is extremely thorough. Internal communication is good. There are regular, minuted, subject team meetings that clearly benefit the quality and consistency of teaching across the area. Teachers find observation of teaching and learning, both formal and informal, useful for their professional development and for exchanging good practices. The grading of teaching and learning is consistent with the inspections findings. All teachers are aware of, and involved in, quality assurance procedures and there is a proactive team approach to the completion of the self-assessment report. This is generally accurate, although some of the strengths have been overemphasised. Staff are aware of, and embrace, the college mission statement. Selection of teaching materials generally promotes inclusion, both socially and educationally and promotes learning opportunities for all students. However, there is no proactive promotion of equality of opportunities in planning and teaching and teachers do not actively draw upon diversity in lessons to enhance learning. In a small minority of lessons, above average group sizes adversely affect the learning of some students.

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**Part D: College data**
**Table 1: Enrolments by level of study and age 2003/04**

Level	16–18 %	19+ %
1	0	0
2	2	0
3	98	0
4/5	0	0
Other	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>0</b>

*Source: provided by the college in 2004*

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

Curriculum area	16–18 No.	19+ No.	Total Enrolments (%)
Science and mathematics	1,031	0	16
Land-based provision	0	0	0
Construction	0	0	0
Engineering, technology and manufacture	44	0	1
Business administration, management and professional	373	0	6
Information and communication technology	1,363	0	21
Retailing, customer service and transportation	0	0	0
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	159	0	2
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	0	0	0
Health, social care and public services	0	0	0
Visual and performing arts and media	729	0	11
Humanities	2,266	0	33
English, languages and communication	665	0	10

Curriculum area	16-18 No.	19+ No.	Total Enrolments (%)
Foundation programmes	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,630</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: provided by the college in 2004

**Table 3: Retention and achievement**

Level (Long Courses)	Retention and pass rate	Completion year					
		16-18			19+		
		2001	2002	2003	2001	2002	2003
<b>1</b>	Starters excluding transfers	357	12	*	*	*	*
	Retention rate %	100	100	*	*	*	*
	National average %	81	75	***	***	***	***
	Pass rate %	58	0	*	*	*	*
	National average %	67	75	***	***	***	***
<b>2</b>	Starters excluding transfers	118	300	156	*	*	*
	Retention rate %	90	93	92	*	*	*
	National average %	80	81	81	***	***	***
	Pass rate %	87	48	93	*	*	*
	National average %	84	84	86	***	***	***
<b>3</b>	Starters excluding transfers	**	3,546	4,819	*	*	*
	Retention rate %	**	94	96	*	*	*
	National average %	**	89	90	***	***	***
	Pass rate %	**	91	90	*	*	*
	National average %	**	87	88	***	***	***

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 sixth form colleges).

Sources of information:

- National averages: Benchmarking Data 2000 to 2003: Retention and Achievement Rates in Further Education Colleges in England, Learning and Skills Council, September 2004.
- College rates for 2001 to 2003: College ISR/ILR.

\* numbers too low to provide a valid calculation

\*\* data unreliable

*\*\*\*not applicable*

**Notes**