

Shrewsbury Sixth Form College

REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
2000-01

THE
FURTHER
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FUNDING
COUNCIL

***THE FURTHER EDUCATION
FUNDING COUNCIL***

The Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) has a legal duty to make sure further education in England is properly assessed. The FEFC's inspectorate inspects and reports on each college of further education according to a four-year cycle. It also inspects other further education provision funded by the FEFC. In fulfilling its work programme, the inspectorate assesses and reports nationally on the curriculum, disseminates good practice and advises the FEFC's quality assessment committee.

College inspections are carried out in accordance with the framework and guidelines described in Council Circulars 97/12, 97/13 and 97/22. Inspections seek to validate the data and judgements provided by colleges in self-assessment reports. They involve full-time inspectors and registered part-time inspectors who have knowledge of, and experience in, the work they inspect. A member of the Council's audit service works with inspectors in assessing aspects of governance and management. All colleges are invited to nominate a senior member of their staff to participate in the inspection as a team member.

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Grade Descriptors

Inspectors assess the strengths and weaknesses of each aspect of provision they inspect. Their assessments are set out in the report. They use a five-point scale to summarise the balance between strengths and weaknesses.

The descriptors for the grades are:

- grade 1 – outstanding provision which has many strengths and few weaknesses
- grade 2 – good provision in which the strengths clearly outweigh the weaknesses
- grade 3 – satisfactory provision with strengths but also some weaknesses
- grade 4 – less than satisfactory provision in which the weaknesses clearly outweigh the strengths
- grade 5 – poor provision which has few strengths and many weaknesses.

Audit conclusions are expressed as good, adequate or weak.

Aggregated grades for aspects of cross-college provision and curriculum areas, for colleges inspected during 1999-2000, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1	2	3	4	5
	%	%	%	%	%
Curriculum areas	6	44	44	7	0
Cross-college provision	9	45	38	8	0

Source: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1999-2000: Chief inspector's annual report*

Sample size: 112 college inspections

Note: sources subject to rounding

Student Achievements

Where data on student achievements appear in tables, levels of achievement are shown in three ways:

- as number of starters, which is the number of enrolments on qualifications where the student was expecting to complete the qualification that college year. For example, a student on a two-year programme who began their programme in October 1996, would appear in the results for 1997-98 because this is the year in which they expected to complete their qualification
- as a retention rate, which is the percentage of qualifications which students have completed as expected or where they are continuing their studies beyond the expected end date of the qualification. For programmes of study of two years or more, retention is calculated across the whole programme, that is, from the start to the end of the qualification
- as an achievement rate, which is the number of qualifications students have fully achieved as a percentage of completed qualifications with a known outcome. Partial achievements are not included.

Summary

Shrewsbury Sixth Form College

West Midlands Region

Inspected September 2000

Shrewsbury Sixth Form College was established in 1981. Staff, governors and students were involved in the self-assessment process. The college's self-assessment report, its fourth, was comprehensive and clearly presented. It provided a good basis for planning and carrying out the inspection. Clear and detailed action plans accompanied the report. Progress had been made in addressing some weaknesses prior to the inspection. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses in the report, but identified some additional strengths and weaknesses.

Most of the college's students are aged 16 to 18 and most are recruited from nine local secondary schools. The college offers courses in five of the 10 FEFC programme areas. Provision in three of these areas was inspected, together with aspects of cross-college provision. The college provides mainly GCE A level courses. Some part-time provision for adult students has been developed. Much of the teaching is excellent. Students' achievements are outstanding on most courses. Retention rates are generally above the national average for sixth form colleges. Students receive a great deal of help and support and sound careers education and guidance. Most students progress to further or higher education, or to employment. Tutorial arrangements are well

managed and effective. There are strong links with other educational providers. Most accommodation is of a high standard. The college's learning centre is an outstanding facility. Quality assurance arrangements are effective in raising achievement. Governors contribute productively to strategic planning and the monitoring of academic performance. There is a clear management structure with effective leadership. The college should improve: some weaker aspects of teaching; students' use of IT as a resource for learning; social facilities for students; staff access to IT; the operation of the audit committee. It should also develop performance standards for business support areas and ensure that staff reviews are completed in the planned timescale.

The grades awarded as a result of the inspection are given below.

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Mathematics	1	Support for students	1
Business studies	2	General resources	2
English	1	Quality assurance	2
Sociology	1	Governance	2
		Management	1

Context

The College and its Mission

1 Shrewsbury Sixth Form College was established in 1981 as part of a reorganisation of secondary education in Shrewsbury. It opened with 600 full-time students aged 16 to 19, and now has 1,045 full-time students.

2 Shrewsbury has a population of 70,000. It is the county town of Shropshire and serves as the administrative and market centre for the county and the surrounding rural area. Most employment in the town is in small to medium-sized enterprises which provide financial, legal, banking, administrative, retail and tourism services. The biggest single employment sector in the county is public administration, education and health, with 27% of employees. Agriculture is an important economic activity in the region and provides 5.4% of employment in Shropshire.

3 Of the students aged 16 to 19, 99% are on advanced level programmes, with 92% on general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) and advanced supplementary (AS) courses. Last year, the students' overall GCE A level pass rate for all subjects, excluding general studies, was 95.8%. The average Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) points score per candidate, was 21.5. The college has been in the top eight sixth form colleges in the country since the performance tables published by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) were introduced. Courses for 16 to 19 year olds include a general education programme and a number of options involving sport, music and drama. During 1999-2000, more than 100 students were involved in the pilot for the new key skills qualification.

4 The college is located in the town centre. Its premises have been significantly developed in recent years. Since incorporation, the college has implemented an accommodation strategy to cater for growth in demand, to improve its accessibility and to extend facilities. In 1994,

nearby premises were purchased in which the library was relocated and expanded, and a business and information centre was established. In 1999, these premises were reorganised. The adjoining warehouse was converted into Shrewsbury Learning Centre, housing a range of learning resources, student support services and additional classrooms for media studies and modern foreign languages. Significant developments have been undertaken to improve access for those with restricted mobility as part of the college commitment to inclusive learning.

5 In partnership with Shrewsbury College of Arts and Technology, the college has developed an information technology (IT) training centre in the learning centre. This is a significant feature of the adult education and community programme which has been developed in the last four years. There are some 700 enrolments each year, on a range of IT, leisure and languages courses from basic to advanced level, offered mainly in the evening and on Saturday mornings. The learning centre is an accredited learndirect learning centre.

6 The college has good relations with partner 11 to 16 secondary schools. Of the college's entrants, 82% come from these nine schools. The Shrewsbury Partnership in Education and Training is a forum in which the two colleges in Shrewsbury and partner schools meet to discuss students' needs and curricular developments.

7 The college mission is 'to provide educational and training opportunities of the highest quality to enhance the development and achievements of all its students and customers'.

The Inspection

8 The college was inspected during the week beginning 25 September 2000. The inspection team had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and studied information about the college held by other directorates of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC).

Context

Inspectors used data on students' achievements drawn from the college's individualised student record (ISR) returns to the FEFC for 1998 and 1999. The college submitted its own data on students' achievements for 2000 which were checked against primary sources such as class registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies. Data on students' achievements were mainly reliable; the college was easily able to rectify the few minor errors or omissions.

9 The college was notified approximately two months before the inspection of the sample of its provision which was to be inspected. The inspection was carried out by eight inspectors and an auditor working for a total of 38 days. They observed 44 lessons, examined students' work and college documentation. Meetings were held with governors, managers, staff and students. Inspectors reviewed the contacts the college has with Shropshire Chamber Training and Enterprise Council (TEC). They discussed the work of the college with representatives of partner schools, the local education authority (LEA), the careers service, and other appropriate local organisations.

10 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1999-2000. Of the lessons inspected, 89% were judged to be good or outstanding. This is well above the national average of 62% for all colleges inspected in 1999-2000. None was judged to be less than satisfactory.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level and GCSE	13	23	4	0	0	40
GNVQ	2	1	1	0	0	4
Total (No)	15	24	5	0	0	44
Total (%)	34	55	11	0	0	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1999-2000 (%)	17	45	31	6	0	100

Source for national average: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1999-2000: Chief inspector's annual report*

Note: percentages subject to rounding

Context

11 The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1999-2000.

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Shrewsbury Sixth Form College	14.5	89
National average, all inspected colleges 1999-2000	10.3	76

Source for national average: Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1999-2000: Chief inspector's annual report

Curriculum Areas

Mathematics

Grade 1

12 Inspectors observed 12 lessons covering the courses offered by the mathematics department. Inspectors agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- students' consistently high achievement rates on GCE A level and further mathematics courses
- well-managed and effectively organised courses
- good teaching and learning in carefully planned lessons
- good range of learning materials and resources
- careful monitoring of students' progress
- good liaison with local schools

Weaknesses

- insufficient use of IT by students

13 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that mathematics courses are well managed, thoroughly planned and effectively organised. There is effective record-keeping and monitoring of students' progress. The department offers a variety of GCE A/AS level and further mathematics courses with mechanics, discrete mathematics and statistics options. Links with the University of Birmingham provide students with additional learning opportunities in a higher education environment. Students from the college participate in the United Kingdom senior mathematics challenge and the mathematics Olympiad. There are strong links with local schools. Staff give 'taster' mathematics lessons to year 10 students. They have regular meetings with school mathematics teachers. A three-day induction helps new entrants to select appropriate options prior to starting their

course. At induction, all students receive an informative course handbook and an individual interview. Almost 30% of all level 3 students at the college study a GCE A level or GCE AS mathematics subject, or take a further mathematics course. Of these, around 12% take further mathematics in year two. There is a good mix of male and female students in mathematics classes. All full-time students undertake key skills application of number to a level commensurate with that of their main subjects of study. Students have yet to develop the key skills of application of number at level 4 as the self-assessment report acknowledges.

14 Mathematics lessons are planned thoroughly and teachers follow comprehensive departmental schemes of work. Teaching is good. Students readily demonstrate their understanding of mathematical principles and theory in lively lessons. Teachers encourage students to extend their understanding of topics through structured discussion and debate. One-year, 'fast-track' GCE A level courses are offered to meet the needs of the most able students. Homework and assessed coursework are set regularly and marked to a common departmental mark scheme. Marked work is returned promptly with constructive comments. Course books are augmented by study guides and written information on relevant topics. Study support sessions are provided for students who are identified as having weaknesses. IT and other resources are used to illustrate mathematical concepts and to strengthen learning. There are few opportunities for groups of students to use IT equipment in classrooms.

15 Teachers are appropriately qualified and suitably experienced. A college intranet with a mathematics section is being developed but does not yet have materials to help students to learn on their own. Students can use modern computer equipment and mathematically related software in the learning centre. Mathematics classrooms are well equipped and have a

Curriculum Areas

distinctive subject identity. Questionnaires are used to obtain the views of students. Action plans are produced. Departmental targets are set, are being met and, in the case of those for student retention and achievement rates, exceeded. There is a strong departmental identity. Teachers work together to develop new courses, write schemes of work and course materials. By holding departmental meetings regularly, staff aim to ensure that problems are identified early and that improvements are made to courses. The few students who fail to achieve are interviewed to identify the causes of their failure.

16 Students' written work is of a high standard. By their responses in class, students demonstrate good understanding of mathematical concepts. Students develop appropriate mathematical skills. The self-assessment report identified that, over the last

three years, the proportion of students achieving grades A to E and A to C in both mathematics and further mathematics has been significantly above the average for sixth form colleges. In the last three years, all students on the GCE A level further mathematics course have passed and almost all have achieved high grades. Some 16% of students take their GCE A level in one year and most pass with high grades. Over the last three years, the number of students achieving grade C or above in general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) mathematics has been above the national average. Many students with modest GCSE grades achieved high grades at GCE A level. Around 65% of students progress to higher education to work towards mathematical or mathematically related degrees, a strength identified in the self-assessment report.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in mathematics, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
GCSE mathematics	2	Number of starters	79	34	60
		Retention (%)	80	91	78
		Achievement (%)	55	43	47
GCE A level mathematics	3	Number of starters	113	142	126
		Retention (%)	80	87	88
		Achievement (%)	97	94	98
GCE A level further mathematics	3	Number of starters	9	16	8
		Retention (%)	100	100	100
		Achievement (%)	100	100	100
GCE AS mathematics	3	Number of starters	6	6	15
		Retention (%)	83	50	73
		Achievement (%)	100	100	100
GCE AS further mathematics	3	Number of starters	18	8	16
		Retention (%)	100	100	100
		Achievement (%)	100	57	94

Source: ISR (1998 and 1999), college (2000)

Curriculum Areas

Business Studies

Grade 2

17 The inspection covered GCE A/AS level business studies, general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) intermediate and advanced levels, and the advanced vocational certificate of education (AVCE) in business. Eleven lessons were observed. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report, but identified additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- students' outstanding achievements on GCE A level and GNVQ advanced business
- well-developed links between theory and current business practice
- careful monitoring of students' progress
- students' success in progressing to employment, or further or higher education
- attractive and well-resourced learning environment

Weaknesses

- some unimaginative and over-directive teaching
- few links with the local business community
- insufficient use of IT as a teaching resource

18 Business courses have been revised to take account of curriculum 2000. Planning is good. Teachers work well together as a team. Common procedures are in place for recruitment, induction and additional learning support for GCE AS and AVCE students. A weakness noted in the self-assessment report is the lack of local business links.

19 Most teaching is good. In the best lessons, teachers use examples from current business practice to illustrate points. They give clear explanations of the topic to be covered. Teachers question the students skilfully to challenge them to think carefully and to provoke them into lively discussion which helps them to develop skills of analysis and evaluation. The strengths in teaching were understated in the self-assessment report. In a lesson on the trade cycle, students were invited to assume different roles and to compare their different analyses of a common problem. Most lessons are appropriately planned and structured, although a few have over-ambitious aims which teachers fail to achieve in the time available. Students value the support that they receive from teachers. A few lessons proceed too slowly and students are given undemanding tasks that do not extend their skills and knowledge. In one lesson, students spent a great deal of time drawing a series of graphs. The teacher failed to ask them questions about their findings, engage them in discussion about the value and purpose of graphs, or relate theory to practice. GCE A/AS level students rely heavily upon the teacher to provide information and set tasks. They are not encouraged to find things out for themselves and demonstrate initiative by working on their own. They are not encouraged to develop research skills, or gain a wider understanding of the business environment. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report.

20 On GCE A/AS level programmes, homework tasks are largely based upon examination questions. GNVQ assignments are demanding and require students to demonstrate a wide range of knowledge and skills and present their work in an appropriate format. Students value the opportunity to develop skills that have a clear vocational relevance. Marking is thorough at all levels and students find the feedback they receive helpful. Teachers'

Curriculum Areas

criticism is constructive and praise is used judiciously to boost students' confidence.

21 The self-assessment report has identified the consistently high achievement rates on GNVQ advanced and GCE A level courses, which have been significantly above the national average for three years. Students on the GNVQ course produce work of a high standard in their assignments that shows they can use key skills well. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that GNVQ students are successful in progressing to further education, higher education, or relevant employment, and that many GCE A level students go on to higher education. In 1999, 65% of GNVQ intermediate students progressed to a higher level course in further education, and 75% of GCE A level students began courses in higher education.

22 Courses are managed effectively. Course documentation is effective. Students' progress is monitored and recorded regularly. Individual action plans are drawn up for students who are

falling behind in their work. The self-assessment recognised this strength. Students learn how to improve their performance by working with their teachers in study support sessions and subject tutorials. Internal moderation procedures for GCE A level courses are effective in ensuring that appropriate standards are upheld across all subjects.

23 Business students generally benefit from a good learning environment. Most lessons are held in the learning centre. Rooms are well furnished and suitably equipped. Occasionally, classes have to use rooms too small for them. In these, it is difficult for the students to engage in group work and activities requiring flexible use of space. Students have good access to IT, including the Internet. There is a good range of relevant CD-ROMs, textbooks for reference and videos but students do not use these resources much. Business staff have not yet fully exploited IT as a resource for learning.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in business studies, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
GNVQ intermediate business	2	Number of starters	15	18	21
		Retention (%)	93	94	71
		Achievement (%)	100	100	79
GNVQ advanced business	3	Number of starters	27	26	21
		Retention (%)	67	69	81
		Achievement (%)	94	100	94
GCE A level business studies	3	Number of starters	104	103	112
		Retention (%)	77	74	82
		Achievement (%)	94	99	98

Source: ISR (1998 and 1999), college (2000)

Curriculum Areas

English

Grade 1

24 The inspection covered all English courses. Eleven lessons were observed. Inspectors broadly agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- strong emphasis on skills for learning
- well-developed support for individual learners
- clear feedback to students on their performance
- careful monitoring and recording of students' progress
- achievement rates significantly above national averages
- students' high retention rates
- teachers' excellent and self-critical teamwork

Weaknesses

- there are no significant weaknesses

25 In all lessons, teaching and learning were good or outstanding. Classroom management is excellent. Teachers share the objectives of lessons with students. Lessons are brisk and lively. In all lessons, there is a strong emphasis on the development of skills for learning. Students receive careful guidance on how to make notes and how to plan and carry out assignments. The skills the students need to use in each part of the course are explained to them clearly and concisely. Students develop skills of analysis and of close scrutiny of language systematically in all courses, through both oral and written work. The teaching team has recently begun to develop the use of IT in lessons. However, some students make little use of IT in their work.

26 Teachers convey their enthusiasm for the subject. They build a good rapport with their

students, encouraging and valuing their responses. In an English literature lesson, the teacher skilfully helped students to explore the images in a complex poem. The students' concentration and commitment were impressive. In most lessons, students were fully involved in an appropriate variety of relevant and demanding learning activities. In a minority of lessons, however, the learning tasks were dull, monotonous and insufficiently demanding and they failed to hold the students' attention. The weaknesses of these lessons were not acknowledged in the self-assessment report.

27 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that there is excellent support for students. Students speak highly of the ready accessibility of their teacher. Lunchtime study support sessions have been introduced. Students work individually on coursework and receive regular and rigorous tutorials. They learn how to work on their own and to pursue areas of personal interest.

28 Departmental planning and organisation are excellent. Staff have clear roles and responsibilities. They receive clear guidelines on all important aspects of teaching and learning. Staff meetings are held regularly to monitor teaching and learning and students' progress. Part-time staff are fully involved in these. Schemes of work are thorough and their effectiveness is monitored regularly. Staff work closely as a team, particularly in planning courses, units of work and materials. They have produced a useful range of relevant resources, matched to particular areas of the course. The assessment of students' work is extremely thorough. Students receive detailed feedback on written work, with clear and specific guidance on how to improve it. Often, students have a detailed breakdown of how marks have been awarded, so that they can identify their own strengths and weaknesses. Staff keep detailed records of students' progress and monitor it regularly against targets. The arrangements for

Curriculum Areas

standardising teachers' assessment of coursework and internal examinations are rigorous.

29 As identified in the college's self-assessment report, students' achievements are outstanding. Pass rates in GCE A level English literature and English language and literature are consistently above the national average for sixth form colleges. The proportion of students who achieve high grades in these subjects is significantly above the relevant national average. The pass rate in GCE A level English language has been above the national average in two of the last three years. Analysis of GCE A level results shows that students obtained higher grades than those predicted for them on the basis of their GCSE achievements. Results

in GCSE English are well above the national average for sixth form colleges. Retention rates on all courses are above the national averages. Students' punctuality and attendance at lessons are good.

30 The department is well resourced. Students are issued with texts and study booklets. There is a suite of well-maintained classrooms. Students' work is displayed in the classrooms and helps to make them a stimulating working environment. Links with the library and learning centre are strong. English language students in particular make effective use of these facilities. Teachers are well qualified and experienced. Students have opportunities to participate in visits to enhance their studies.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in English, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
GCSE English	2	Number of starters	33	26	31
		Retention (%)	88	92	90
		Achievement (%)	63	75	85
GCE A level English language	3	Number of starters	79	119	131
		Retention (%)	81	81	89
		Achievement (%)	97	90	88
GCE A level English literature	3	Number of starters	56	58	61
		Retention (%)	84	81	95
		Achievement (%)	100	98	100
GCE A level English language and literature	3	Number of starters	52	34	27
		Retention (%)	100	82	78
		Achievement (%)	94	100	100

Source: ISR (1998 and 1999), college (2000)

Curriculum Areas

Sociology

Grade 1

31 Inspectors observed 10 lessons covering GCE A/AS level courses in sociology. They agreed with the judgements in the college's self-assessment report and identified an additional strength. By the time of the inspection, progress had been made in addressing the identified weakness in student retention rates.

Key strengths

- students' outstanding achievements over three years
- high standard of students' work
- teachers' careful marking of students' work
- outstanding displays in teaching rooms
- effective and well-organised teaching and learning
- well-managed department

Weaknesses

- insufficient use of IT in aspects of teaching and learning

32 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the quality of teaching and learning is good. Lessons were well planned. Teaching techniques are varied and good. Group work is well managed. Students are given well-presented handouts to help them understand the topics being discussed. Teachers use audiovisual aids effectively. In the best lessons, the teacher makes sure the students understand the topic under consideration and gives them opportunities to develop their own ideas. In a lesson concerned with the definition and evaluation of crime statistics, students read press reports on industrial injury and corporate crime. The teacher then discussed with them the validity of crime statistics. Lesson plans are well developed. All lessons begin with a clear

introduction and recapitulation of previous work. In some lessons, students are not given enough opportunity to make contributions based on their own thinking. Careful attention is paid to promoting equal opportunities through teaching, for example in the study and development of gender role models. The department has sought to increase the number of male students taking the subject. Students also attend external conferences at which they can hear key speakers in the field of sociology.

33 The department is well managed. The introduction of curriculum 2000 has been carefully planned. In July, prospective students, who are mostly unfamiliar with sociology, are offered an introduction to the subject. Whilst the numbers of students on courses have been increasing, student achievement rates have remained high and student retention rates have improved. Departmental meetings are held regularly. Their minutes indicate that careful attention is given to key issues such as the checking of students' progress, the appropriateness of teaching and learning resources, and staff development. There is effective liaison between the head of department and the senior management on the setting and achievement of targets. The detailed information held on students' destinations indicates that many students proceed to higher education.

34 Inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that students' achievements at both GCE A level and GCE AS are outstanding. Pass rates at grades A to E and A to C are well above national averages for sixth form colleges. Student retention rates, which had been noted as a weakness in the self-assessment report, have improved and were above national averages in the last year. Students achieve significantly higher grades in GCE A level sociology than those predicted for them on the basis of their GCSE grades. Students whom staff think might have difficulty in passing GCE A level sociology are encouraged

Curriculum Areas

to take GCE AS sociology. The quality of most students' written work is generally good and is up to the standards required for the task set. Teachers aim to help students improve their performance in their examinations by giving them model answers to examination questions. Subject handbooks give students a clear understanding of assessment requirements. Teachers mark to an appropriate standard and students find their feedback and comments helpful. One particularly well-devised and imaginative induction task for prospective students aimed to give them some initial understanding of sociological principles by requiring them to produce a book review in poster form.

35 The staff in the department have all been appointed within the last three years. They are

well qualified and work well as a team. They have received useful staff development training. In general, the library carries an adequate stock of books for the subject. By the third teaching week of term, however, some students still had no textbook. The library also has some relevant CD-ROMs. The teaching rooms are well furnished and suitably equipped but there is some intrusive noise from one room to the next. The display of students' work and other information relevant to sociology is outstanding. As noted in the self-assessment report, the use of IT as an integral part of the curriculum is not well advanced. The department is planning a sociology section for the college intranet but it is not yet in use.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in sociology, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
GCE AS	3	Number of starters	22	22	21
		Retention (%)	77	86	90
		Achievement (%)	100	93	100
GCE A level	3	Number of starters	89	76	103
		Retention (%)	75	78	85
		Achievement (%)	99	93	99

Source: ISR (1998 and 1999), college (2000)

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 1

36 Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- excellent pre-entry guidance and information for students
- excellent enrolment and induction processes
- well-organised tutorial provision
- rigorous monitoring of students' progress and attendance
- thorough and comprehensive careers advice for students
- well-managed arrangements for supporting students

Weaknesses

- there are no significant weaknesses

37 Inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that potential students receive excellent, impartial pre-course information and guidance. The college's effective recruitment methods include a well-established programme of visits to local secondary schools and advertising in newspapers. Publicity material is attractive and informative. Joint application arrangements with Shrewsbury College of Arts and Technology offer prospective students a broad range of educational opportunities. Where this is more appropriate for them students are directed to provision elsewhere. There are effective procedures for admissions. Potential students and their parents are informed of the range and nature of courses through visits to partner schools, 'taster' events, publicity materials and at interview. The entry criteria for the college and for each course are clear. Tutors make sure students are on an appropriate course and that they understand the changes for curriculum 2000.

38 Enrolment and induction procedures are excellent. Most students consider that enrolment is efficient. After their interviews, prospective students benefit from follow-up interviews to ensure that they have chosen the right course. These were also identified as a strength at the last inspection. All full-time students have an induction programme. Induction is valuable and informative. Students feel well supported at the start of their studies. Staff explain the content of courses thoroughly and help students to settle into the college successfully. During induction, students are given well-presented documentation on college facilities and services, including a student handbook, leaflets from student services and the charter. Students are informed of their rights and responsibilities.

39 The planning and organisation of tutorial provision are thorough and comprehensive. Tutors are provided with a college tutorial programme, detailed verbal and written briefings, and supporting documentation. Subject teachers, tutors and senior tutors operate a well-established and thorough system of monitoring students' attendance and progress. Unauthorised absences are dealt with promptly and efficiently. Progress reviews are outstanding. Tutors provide students with a detailed account of their progress. Tutors' comments are helpful and relevant and they are made with sensitivity to take account of students' concerns. Records of students' progress are well maintained and they provide a clear picture of how any student is performing. However, many action plans for improving students' performance lack clear targets. Parents of students aged 16 to 18 are kept well informed about their son's or daughter's progress through written reports and parent evenings.

40 The range of useful and appropriate services for additional learning support includes help with communications, numeracy, study support and IT. The college provides a range of adapted materials, equipment, IT and specialist

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support services to meet students' individual learning requirements. Students can obtain support through individual appointments or by visiting the learning centre. Students' attendance at learning support sessions is good. Staff assess students' support requirements by liaising closely with partner schools, interviewing students, identifying their prior achievements, and by holding termly meetings with them to review their progress. Students can refer themselves for support. There is close liaison between learning support staff and curriculum teams.

41 The college provides effective support for students progressing to the next stage of their careers, a strength recognised in the self-assessment report. Of students applying to higher education, 90% are successful. Only 1.5% of students do not progress to employment, a gap year, higher or further education or training. The careers area is organised effectively with up-to-date information, including software packages, books, guides, videos and university and college prospectuses. Full-time students receive a comprehensive careers guidance programme. Part-time students can obtain careers guidance by making appointments with the college careers adviser or the local careers service. Other useful services include a weekly careers bulletin, talks from universities and local employers and a guide to Internet sites giving information on jobs. The college holds an annual careers fair supported by employers and higher education providers. After the publication of examination results, the college offers guidance on courses and career options to students and their parents.

42 Support for students is co-ordinated well. Staff are clearly aware of their roles and responsibilities. The teams which provide support services work well to meet students' differing needs. A personal counselling service is available, staffed by a qualified counsellor. Students are referred to external agencies for

help, where appropriate. Tutors receive training and detailed written guidance on how to ensure students receive the support they require. The college does not have its own childcare facilities but it gives students with young children financial assistance with childminding costs, out of its access fund.

43 As the self-assessment report indicates, there is a wide range of enrichment activities. The musical life of the college is strong. The college has an orchestra and a number of choirs, bands and ensembles. Students go on visits, nationally and abroad. There is a comprehensive sports programme. The student council provides a programme of social events and raises money for good causes through the annual charities week.

General Resources

Grade 2

44 Inspectors mainly agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report although they considered some strengths had been overstated. Some weaknesses had been rectified by the time the inspection took place. Inspectors found weaknesses the college had not identified.

Key strengths

- much excellent accommodation
- easy access to most of the college for students with restricted mobility
- extensive use of attractive and stimulating wall displays
- up-to-date IT facilities and guidance on how to use them

Weaknesses

- inadequate social facilities for students
- insufficient IT facilities for staff

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45 The college is located on two attractive sites close to each other; the larger of which overlooks the River Severn. The main site consists of a large, grade II listed two-storey building, a grade II listed building housing administration offices and the reception area, and other teaching and service accommodation. The learning centre is a former warehouse 100 metres from the main site. This centre and some administration areas have recently been excellently refurbished. Most teaching accommodation is good and most areas of the college are well maintained. Noise is a problem in a few adjoining classrooms. Accommodation is subject to good daily maintenance. The college is clean and tidy. Subject areas have their own clearly identified spaces within the college. Some staff workrooms are in need of redecoration and many have insufficient storage space. Several toilets are in need of refurbishment. There are impressive wall displays of students' work, achievements and learning materials in all parts of the college.

46 Since the last inspection, the college has done much to improve access for students with restricted mobility. Ramps and chair lifts have been installed. The majority of the college is now accessible to all students. As the self-assessment acknowledges, students' social and recreational areas are inadequate, especially at lunch and break periods. The college uses sports fields on the edge of Shrewsbury. It acknowledges that changing-room facilities there are poor. There are insufficient directional signs in the main college building. College car parking is restricted to staff and visitors and a few students with transport problems or restricted mobility.

47 The well-used library is located on two floors in the learning centre. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the learning centre is an outstanding learning resource, offering a useful selection of learning materials. Students and staff can undertake work individually and in groups in a

well-designed learning environment. The study area is of an appropriate size and there are many private study spaces. Storage facilities and work areas for staff are good. The learning centre offers a restricted service during vacation periods. The bookstock, periodicals and journals are adequate for students' learning needs. The present library budget is sufficient, and most of the stock is up to date. Well-qualified staff offer an effective service. There is close and productive liaison between library staff and teachers.

48 The learning centre is split into zones which are clearly signed and contain subject-specific resources. Each zone also houses paper-based resources, computers, printing facilities and CD-ROMs. Some departments, such as modern foreign languages, provide additional specialist audiovisual resources. An enthusiastic team prepares helpful guidance notes on the use of the Internet, IT facilities, CD-ROM and other resources. Students value the learning centre and use it responsibly.

49 There are 154 networked computers for students' use, providing an adequate ratio of one terminal for every seven full-time equivalent students. Most computers are for use in the teaching of IT, business studies, design and key skills IT. One-third are available in the learning centre for students to use outside timetabled lessons. Most terminals on the curriculum network can connect to the Internet. Students who agree to abide by college guidelines can register for an electronic mail address. The college has an effective equipment enhancement, maintenance and replacement programme. High specification workstations, cabling and an additional CD-ROM server have recently been installed. Students have access to the latest version of industry standard software for general use and a range of specialist software packages is also available.

50 The college information learning technology strategy includes plans for staff and students to access learning materials

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electronically from home. An intranet is being developed through successful collaboration between staff from technical, learning support and curriculum teams. Opportunities for staff to contribute to the development of this intranet project, improve their IT skills and develop further the use of information learning technology in their teaching, are limited significantly by the inadequate IT facilities for staff.

Quality Assurance

Grade 2

51 Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report. They found additional strengths and one area of weakness which the college had considered to be a strength.

Key strengths

- students' outstanding achievements
- strong commitment to the continuous review and improvement of provision
- good quality assurance arrangements
- rigorous and well-organised self-assessment process
- thorough analysis of added value in students' achievements

Weaknesses

- lack of clear performance standards for some areas of the college's work
- insufficient publicising of action on feedback from students
- failure to carry out individual reviews of the performance of all staff

52 The college's quality assurance arrangements are outlined clearly in a well-written policy and additional guidance documents. Responsibilities for quality assurance are clearly specified. A quality assurance group effectively reviews the quality

assurance arrangements in the college and reports to the college management team and corporation. There is a clear and helpful schedule of quality assurance activities for the year. Quality assurance arrangements cover all areas of the college's work. They require further development in non-teaching areas where there is little use of service standards.

53 The college's mission states that the college aims to provide educational and training opportunities of the 'highest quality'. Students' achievements are outstanding in many areas. The college's quality assurance arrangements are effective. Over a three-year period, during which staff have monitored students' performance rigorously and have set targets for improving it, examination pass rates for some subjects have improved. Performance indicators are used well and the college has identified the need to improve some aspects of its support services for students.

54 Arrangements for reviewing subject areas are thorough. Section leaders and college managers hold review meetings covering all the subjects offered. Progress on implementing action points agreed at earlier reviews is monitored. Data on students' achievements are analysed carefully. Good use is made of benchmarking data to evaluate the college's performance. The reviews include a comparison of students' actual examination grades with those predicted for them on the basis of their qualifications on entry. The college produces clear reports on the overall achievements of students. During reviews of students' achievements, targets are set for future performance. Action plans to address weaknesses are carefully scrutinised and their implementation is monitored.

55 The self-assessment process is well organised and involves all areas of the college. Staff teams in teaching and business support areas compile self-assessment reports which are used as a basis for the main report for the whole college. There are clearly written

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guidelines for staff on the self-assessment process. A substantial amount of evidence is provided for teams prior to their self-assessment meetings. Comprehensive reports containing findings from lesson observations are available to help teachers identify strengths and weaknesses in teaching and learning. They also take the views of students into account when making their judgements. A validating team, which includes a member from outside the college, conducts a thorough scrutiny of team assessments and confirms or adjusts grades. Action plans are produced to address key weaknesses and their implementation is carefully monitored. Requisite actions are included in the college's operational plans.

56 Questionnaires are used extensively to gather perceptions of the college. There is a general questionnaire, given to students after induction, and one given to those who attend open evenings. A questionnaire on the curriculum is given to students in the final year of their course. The college administers questionnaires effectively using a scanner to input data and a software package to calculate responses. Students' responses to questionnaires are summarised to each subject area team and to relevant managers in other areas of the college. Few overall conclusions have been drawn from the responses and details of recommended action are not communicated widely across the college. The college has recognised this weakness and is taking action to remedy it. Details of improvements made following action on students' responses are not made widely known.

57 Although the college operates an annual individual staff review scheme, some staff do not benefit from it. Around 18% of staff did not have an individual review by the target date last year and in the previous year, a similar proportion of the staff did not have a review. The reviews include an opportunity for staff to identify their training needs. The links between the staff development programme and the college's strategic and operational plans and

other quality assurance processes are not made sufficiently clear. Staff development activities are reviewed and a report is written on them each year. A large amount of staff development activity that takes place in the college is provided out of the college's own resources and with financial help from the standards fund, although the annual budget for staff development activities is small. In April 2000, the college was re-accredited as an Investor in People.

58 The college charter is readily available to students. There is a clear procedure for dealing with complaints. Records are kept of complaints received and of the ensuing action on them.

Governance

Grade 2

59 Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report but considered that others were no more than normal practice. They identified additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- effective monitoring of students' performance
- governors' involvement in strategic planning
- excellent clerking and conduct of corporation and committee business

Weaknesses

- aspects of the operation of the audit committee
- no formal training and development programme for governors

60 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is adequate. The corporation substantially conducts its business

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in accordance with the instrument and articles of government. It also substantially fulfils its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC.

61 The corporation has 15 members. The present membership includes six business governors, one co-opted governor, two staff governors, two local authority governors, one local community governor, one co-opted governor, one student governor and the principal. There is a second student representative with observer status only. The corporation has a clear strategy and procedures for the recruitment of new governors. The search committee operates effectively in seeking candidates and advising the corporation on the appointment of governors. Attendance at corporation and committee meetings is good. Governors have a clear understanding of the distinction between governance and management.

62 Governors regularly review the college's academic performance against targets and benchmarks for sixth form colleges. This strength was recognised in the self-assessment report. Members take a particular interest in the use of value-added data in assessing the work of the college. This involves discussion of students' achievements in individual subjects. Explanations are sought for any untoward trends in students' achievements or pass rates that fail to meet agreed targets. Governors' links with students and staff are underdeveloped, a weakness recognised in the self-assessment.

63 Governors have a clear understanding of the college's mission and strategic plan. These are reviewed during an annual planning day that takes place away from the college. Members draw effectively upon their particular occupational experience in strategic decision-making. For example, governors' professional expertise proved useful when the college carried out an imaginative conversion of a builders' merchant's premises into the learning centre.

64 Governors have a wide range of skills and expertise covering business, premises management, engineering, legal, local authority, financial, and careers guidance. The range of members' skills is considered when making new appointments. New governors are provided with an induction pack. There is no formal training and development programme for governors, but last year's annual training event included training in finance from the chair of the corporation. Training is sometimes given during corporation meetings, but it is not based on a structured programme. A governor has recently been nominated to draw up proposals for a formal programme of training for governors.

65 All governors annually update the register of interests. The corporation has revised its code of conduct to include the Nolan committee's seven principles of public life. The corporation has established eligibility criteria and 'whistleblowing' procedures. Agendas, papers and minutes are not easily accessible for public inspection. The corporation has only recently established and formally approved policies for determining the confidentiality of corporation business and for dealing with complaints against the corporation.

66 The clerk to the corporation provides the corporation and individual governors with excellent support. This strength was recognised in the self-assessment report. Agendas and supporting papers for corporation and committee meetings provide a good basis for decision-making. Agendas and reports are distributed to governors at least a week before the meetings. Draft minutes are available within a week. Corporation and committee agendas identify when decisions have to be taken on particular items. There is an annual calendar of corporation and committee meetings. The clerk services all committees and has access to legal advice.

67 The corporation has an appropriate committee structure that includes committees

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for finance, audit, remuneration, search, emergency, and a special committee for appeals, complaints, grievance, discipline and suspension. All committees have terms of reference that clearly identify their responsibilities and relationship to the corporation, although the terms of reference have only recently been updated. The terms of reference of the audit, finance and remuneration committees were approved during the inspection week. All meetings of the corporation in the past year have been quorate. The chairs of the corporation and the finance committee receive monthly management accounts. The finance committee and the corporation receive the accounts at each term's meeting.

68 The audit committee does not report annually to the corporation on the state of the whole system of internal control within the college. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment. It has not established performance indicators for internal or external audit. It has not prepared a schedule to monitor the implementation of recommendations from internal and external audit reports.

Management

Grade 1

69 Inspectors agreed with most of the college's judgements in the self-assessment report on the quality of management, but considered that some weaknesses had been overstated.

Key strengths

- clear management structure
- effective leadership
- rigorous target-setting for students' performance
- productive links with a range of educational institutions, especially partner schools
- effective financial monitoring

Weaknesses

- there are no significant weaknesses

70 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that there is a clear management structure and effective management. The principal and senior managers provide strong and effective leadership. The college management team comprises the principal, four assistant principals, and a finance manager. Weekly meetings are well minuted. Previous action points are followed up at the start of each meeting. In addition to having a detailed job description for their particular roles, all senior managers have individual plans showing what is expected of them in terms of action to benefit the college as a whole, such as strategic planning, formulation of the accommodation strategy or curriculum development. Since the last inspection, the roles of section leaders and subject area heads have been redefined. Section leaders now have a clearer remit in relation to improving the quality of provision, and self-assessment. The college has conducted research into the effectiveness of communications. This has highlighted a need for some meetings to be better managed and for support staff to be better informed. Steps are being taken to address these issues.

71 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that there are comprehensive procedures for monitoring students' attendance, retention and achievement rates in subject areas and across the college. At all levels, staff involved in monitoring have a clear understanding of their responsibilities. Teachers monitor the performance of individual students and where it falls below expectations, an improvement action plan is agreed with them. As a means of improving students' attendance, tutors are told promptly of students who have been missing classes and they are expected to take swift action to find out why the students have been

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absent. Student achievement rates for the three years to 1998-99 have been consistently above the national averages for sixth form colleges. Retention rates, despite a fall, remain well above national averages. In the same period, the college exceeded its funding unit targets and increased the number of full-time students aged 16 to 18.

72 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is good. Management accounts are produced every month and include an income and expenditure account with a detailed commentary, a balance sheet, and a rolling 12-month cashflow forecast. A detailed income and expenditure variance report is produced monthly for the college management team meetings. The management accounts do not include staff costs as a percentage of income, yet monitoring of staff costs is one of the financial objectives in the three-year financial forecasts. A suitably qualified accountant under contract to the college supports the finance team. Budget holders receive informative monthly reports on expenditure that include commitments, profiled budgets and variances of expenditure against budget. The financial regulations are comprehensive. Neither the internal nor the external auditors have identified any significant weaknesses in the college's systems of financial control.

73 There have been significant improvements in the reliability and accuracy of the management information system. Comprehensive student records, data relating to attendance, and target minimum grades are provided for tutors. Moves to make data readily available for staff across the main network have proved unsuccessful. The college has recently installed an intranet but it is at an early stage of development. The college plans to upgrade the management information system in the current academic year.

74 There is an equal opportunities policy, an anti-bullying policy and a disability statement. Managers have specific responsibilities for implementing policies. Although these contain a requirement to monitor applicants in terms of their ethnic origin and gender, in practice monitoring relates to gender only. Each subject area self-assessment report contains comments on equal opportunities issues. Managers are well aware that in some subject areas, there is a disproportionate number of students of one particular sex, or that female students obtain better examination results than male students, or vice versa. They have taken action to address these issues. The college partially fulfils the requirements of sections 44 and 45 of the *Further and Higher Education Act 1992*. There is no formal daily act of worship. The college has an active Christian Union, however, and close links with a local church. The general studies programme undertaken by all level 3 students, covers cultural and moral issues.

75 The college has productive links with a range of external organisations involved in education. Managers are closely involved in these and they are committed to making them work. There are also close links with local secondary schools. College staff attend parents information evenings in these schools. They provide the schools with information about the progress of pupils who have transferred to the college. Managers have access to information from partner schools about numbers of pupils and this is taken into account in the college's strategic planning. The college co-operates with other colleges in the county and has run some courses and some staff development activities jointly with them. The college's well-equipped IT training centre for adults was established through a joint funding agreement with a local general further education college.

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Conclusions

76 The college's self-assessment report is comprehensive and clearly presented. It provided a good basis for carrying out the inspection. Staff, governors and students were involved in the self-assessment process. Evidence to support the college's judgements is clear. Sources of evidence are clearly identified. Curriculum area reports include reference to national benchmarks and grades from lesson observations. The report included detailed action plans for curriculum and cross-college areas. Since the self-assessment report was written, progress has been made in addressing a number of identified weaknesses. Inspectors agreed with most strengths and weaknesses in the report, although they found some strengths and weaknesses the college had not identified. Of the grades given in the self-assessment report, inspectors agreed with all the grades for the four curriculum areas inspected. They agreed with three of the grades for cross-college provision and considered one to be too low and another to be too high.

77 Strengths and weaknesses identified during the inspection are listed under each section of this report. The main strengths and weaknesses are identified in the summary.

College Statistics

Student numbers by age (September 2000)

<i>Age</i>	<i>%</i>
Under 16	0
16-18 years	78
19-24 years	1
25+ years	15
Not known	6
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (September 2000)

<i>Level of study</i>	<i>%</i>
Level 1 (foundation) and entry level	2
Level 2 (intermediate)	4
Level 3 (advanced)	81
Level 4/5 (higher)	0
Level not specified	13
Non-schedule 2	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (September 2000)

<i>Programme area</i>	<i>Full time</i>	<i>Part time</i>	<i>Total provision %</i>
Science	341	171	38
Business	95	60	12
Hotel and catering	10	0	1
Art and design	63	18	6
Humanities	536	43	46
Total	1,045	292	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1998-99 ISR data, the college recruited 0% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions' Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (September 2000)

	<i>Perm- anent</i>	<i>Fixed term</i>	<i>Casual</i>	<i>Total</i>
Direct learning contact	58	7	0	65
Supporting direct learning contact	11	0	0	11
Other support	21	1	0	22
Total	90	8	0	98

Source: college data, rounded to nearest full-time equivalent

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1998	1999	2000
Income	£2,675,000	£2,857,000	£2,975,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	£17.05	£16.77	£16.88
Payroll as a proportion of income	77%	72%	77%
Achievement of funding target	103%	112%	98%
Diversity of income	5%	5%	4%
Operating surplus	£78,000	£136,000	£49,000

Sources: Income – Council Circular 00/10 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)

ALF – Funding Allocations 1997-98 (1998), Funding Allocations 1998-99 (1999), college (2000)

Payroll – Council Circular 00/10 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)

Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1997-98 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)

Diversity of income – Council Circular 00/10 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)

Operating surplus – Council Circular 00/10 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)

Students' achievements data

Level	Retention and pass	Students aged 16 to 18			Students aged 19 or over		
		1998	1999	2000	1998	1999	2000
1	Number of starters	96	1,213	823	5	3	n/a
	Retention (%)	93	88	90	100	100	n/a
	Achievement (%)	45	61	81	75	100	n/a
2	Number of starters	172	109	106	1	n/a	15
	Retention (%)	81	89	83	100	n/a	73
	Achievement (%)	91	92	90	100	n/a	86
3	Number of starters	2,395	2,287	2,289	7	4	16
	Retention (%)	84	82	86	86	75	94
	Achievement (%)	88	91	87	33	100	86
4 or 5	Number of starters	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Retention (%)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Achievement (%)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Short courses	Number of starters	84	201	236	173	191	155
	Retention (%)	99	99	97	97	98	96
	Achievement (%)	99	72	97	90	95	90
Unknown/unclassified	Number of starters	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Retention (%)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Achievement (%)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Source: college
n/a not applicable

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