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Education 2011

A sporting chance of future success

St Mary's University College is helping students get on the right track with great training facilities and a friendly approach

WHEN Mo Farah won gold in the 5,000 metres at the World Athletics Championships in South Korea earlier this month, a university college in west London was delighted to join in the celebrations – and confident that he won't be their last alumnus to achieve international sporting success.

St Mary's University College in Twickenham was founded in 1850 as a Catholic teacher-training college, and about a third of its students still take teaching courses, including PGCEs.

But alongside its highly regarded education department (and its other courses in drama, humanities, media, social science theology and management), St Mary's is the Institute of Sport's leading centre in London and has many Olympic hopefuls currently training on its campus.

In the past three years, St Mary's has provided more runners for international cross-country teams than any higher education institution or club in the country.

According to its principal, Professor Philip Esler, St Mary's is a modern, friendly university college offering the best of both



Class act: Mo Farah is one St Mary's alumnus



worlds. He says: "With just under 4,000 students it's easy to feel at home quickly but we're big enough to offer you all the challenges and excitement of a full and rewarding student life. Our friendly, caring atmosphere ensures a warm welcome."

On the banks of the River Thames – and 10 miles from central London – the campus is an excellent location for visiting athletic teams. South African, Irish and Chinese Olympic squads

have chosen St Mary's as their Pre-Games training camp for next year.

The athletes will be based at the university college and the Lensbury hotel complex and will also use a number of top quality club venues in the area.

Key to its selection as a pre-Games training camp was the building of a new £8.25million sports centre, which enhances the provision for elite sport at St Mary's.

The facility creates a single centre by linking the new facility to the existing games hall and original Sixties sports block, which has also been refurbished. In addition to giving a huge boost to

sport at the university college it will also facilitate the work of academic programmes in sport, health and physical education, as well as enabling St Mary's to do even more for the external community through a number of partnerships.

The new sports centre will form part of St Mary's Sports Village and will include a state-of-the-art fitness suite and a high performance sports hall catering for a range of physical activity, from five-a-side football to sport-specific training and competition.

The hall will consist of six badminton courts, four cricket lanes, a basketball court, a netball court and a handball



College life: St Mary's offers the ideal atmosphere for both students and Olympic sporting hopefuls alike

court, while there is also a separate strength and conditioning suite.

The teams are here to compete well and win as many medals as possible, and the provision of a high quality living and training experience is the prime consideration for St Mary's and its partners.

The university college was granted its own degree-awarding powers in 2007 (it had previously been awarding Surrey University degrees) and it plans to slightly increase its size to gain university status.

"St Mary's has a strong academic performance with an excellent track record of placing graduates in good employment or postgraduate study," says Professor Esler. "Research and postgraduate study attract students from all over the country and abroad, while our foundation degrees and short courses are open to everyone."

The next undergraduate/foundation degree open day will be held on October 26, with an open evening scheduled for November 2. PGCE open mornings will be held on November 2 and 30, and open evenings on October 4 and November 1.

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