



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE



Office for Standards
in Education

Somerset College of Arts and Technology

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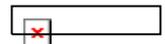
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Basic information about the college



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Basic information about the college

Name of college:	Somerset College of Arts and Technology
Type of college:	General Further Education College
Principal:	Alison Scott
Address of college:	Wellington Road Taunton Somerset TA1 5AX
Telephone number:	01823 366 366
Fax number:	01823 366 346
Chair of governors:	Ian Smith
Unique reference number:	130804
Name of reporting inspector:	Margaret Swift
Date of inspection:	12-16 May 2003

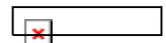
Part A: Summary

Information about the college

Somerset College of Arts and Technology is a large general further education (FE) college. The main campus is in Taunton, the county town of Somerset. There are four other sites in and around Taunton. The college draws students predominantly from the Taunton area and from the surrounding towns and villages. The higher education (HE) courses attract students from other parts of the country and overseas. Within Taunton there is a sixth form college, which provides an extensive range of General Certificate of Education Advanced Subsidiary and Advanced-level (GCE AS and A-level) courses. Given the close proximity to the sixth-form college, Somerset College of Arts and Technology concentrates on providing vocational courses and has only a small programme of full-time general education courses. The college provides courses in all 14 areas of learning recognised by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) for funding purposes. These range from entry to post-graduate level. The college has work-based learning contracts in engineering, hospitality and catering, and hair and beauty. It also provides sub-contracted work-based learning in construction. The college has been recognised as a Centre of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) for construction (crafts, professions and sustainability).

In 2001/02, there were approximately 2,200 full-time students and approximately 12,000 part-time students funded by the LSC. Some 84% of the students were aged 19 or over and 4.4% were from minority ethnic groups (compared with just over 2% in the local population). The gender balance was fairly even, with 47% of students being male and 53% female. Unemployment in the area is low, at 1.3%. In its mission, the college stresses its commitment to 'making a significant contribution to the economic, cultural and social life of Somerset, the Southwest and the United Kingdom through being a learning organisation and creating a broad range of high standard learning opportunities'.

How effective is the college?



The college provides good teaching and support for students aged 16 to 18 and for adults. Overall, the range of provision is broad, but there are no courses at levels 1 and 2 in some curriculum areas. Provision is satisfactory in six curriculum areas and good in five. Provision for work-based learning is satisfactory in engineering, but is unsatisfactory in hairdressing and beauty therapy.

Key strengths

- good support for students

- generally good teaching

- social and educational inclusion

- good external links

- well equipped and well used learning centres

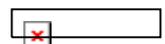
- wide range of courses and progression opportunities
- effective management information systems (MIS)
- good leadership and management
- effective self-assessment.

What should be improved

- retention rates, particularly at levels 1 and 2
- key skills
- students' punctuality
- management of work-based learning
- targets for students.

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



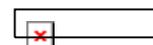
The table below shows overall judgements about provision in subjects and courses that were inspected. Judgements are based primarily on the quality of teaching, training and learning and how

range: Outstanding (grade 1), Good (2), Satisfactory (3), Unsatisfactory (4), Very Poor (5)

Area	Overall judgements about provision, and comment
Construction	Good. There is good teaching and effective learning. Students undertake practical work to a high standard. The range of provision is wide. There are good links with local employers. The support for students is very good. Retention rates were low on some courses in 2002, but are now improving.
Engineering	Good. The teaching is well planned and takes account of the diverse needs of the students. Tutorials and progress reviews are effective. The arrangements for assessment and internal verification are good. Students produce work of a high standard. The retention rate on the first diploma is poor. Employers make valuable contributions to all aspects of work-based learning, but the completion rate on the modern apprenticeship programme is low.
Business, management and administration	Satisfactory. There is good teaching, which engages and motivates students. The up-to-date learning centres are used well by students. Although pass rates are good on administration and secretarial courses, those on accounting and management courses are generally poor. Attendance and punctuality are poor, particularly among younger students.
Information and communication technology)	Satisfactory. Retention rates on full-time courses are high. Pass rates were high in 2002 on the City and Guilds certificate and the national diploma courses. Full-time students' attainments in some lessons are poor. There is an extensive range of additional qualifications. Retention rates for adults on computer literacy and information technology (CLAIT) courses are low. Unreliable computer systems disrupt some students' learning. There are good assessment and monitoring of full-time students' progress, but the monitoring of adult students' progress in the centres away from the college is inadequate.
Hospitality, leisure and tourism	Satisfactory. Management of the curriculum area is satisfactory. Communication between staff is effective. Students acquire appropriate practical and social skills in the college's realistic working environments. On most courses, pass rates are close to national averages, but retention rates are low. Some teaching is poorly planned and ineffective.
Hair and beauty therapy	Satisfactory. Pass rates are good on National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) courses in body massage and hairdressing at level 1, but poor on beauty therapy courses at level 2. Retention rates are low on some courses but are improving. Teaching and learning are good on the national diploma in beauty therapy. There are good progression routes to HE and employment in beauty therapy. Poorly managed assessment of practical skills contributes to slow unit completion. The management of work-based learning programmes is poor.
Health, care and public services	Satisfactory. There is a wide range of full-time courses from level 1 to degree level. There are very good pass rates on some courses, but retention rates on some courses are low. Work placement experience is well managed and carefully assessed. Theory and practice are linked effectively. There are good progression rates to higher-level courses and to related employment.
Visual and performing arts	Good. Teaching is very good and students produce work of a high standard. Pass rates on full-time level 3 courses are high. Specialist resources are excellent. Retention and pass rates are low on the part-

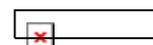
	time courses for adults.
Humanities	Satisfactory. Teaching is generally good but in some lessons teachers fail to take account of students' differing needs and abilities. Pass rates are good on General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and access courses and at least satisfactory on GCE AS and A-level courses. Until recently, retention rates were unsatisfactory, but actions to improve them are beginning to have some effect. Teachers provide strong tutorial support, but their assessment of students' work is not sufficiently thorough.
Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	Good. The quality of teaching is often good and students learn effectively and make good progress against their challenging learning targets. Some adults working as support staff are insufficiently qualified or experienced. Resources are good and teachers are well trained. Leadership and management are strong and effective.
Literacy and numeracy, and English for speakers of other languages	Good. There is much good teaching and effective support for students, who have good access to information technology (IT) and other resources. Initial assessment is effective and leads to individual learning plans that are used effectively. Links with the community are good. Pass rates are poor on adult literacy and numeracy courses, but have improved this year. The quality assurance of courses is inadequate.

How well is the college led and managed?



Leadership and management are good. The principal, governors and managers have provided good leadership throughout the college's period of financial recovery. They produced ambitious plans which include the rebuilding and refurbishing of the main campus, redesigning the curriculum and integrating IT with other aspects of learning. Management of college-based and work-based learning is mostly satisfactory. The decline in enrolments has been arrested, apart from that in enrolments on courses at level 3. Retention rates in general are below national averages and are declining further at level 1. Strategies to improve retention rates have been strengthened recently. The self-assessment and quality assurance processes have helped to raise the quality of teaching since the last inspection, and are contributing to improvements in students' support and achievements. The college promotes equal opportunities well. MIS have improved significantly since the last inspection and information is accurate and readily available. The finance allocation model for divisions, the financial recovery plan and new building plans, are all designed to make the college more cost effective.

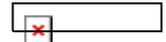
To what extent is the college educationally and socially inclusive?



The college's response to educational and social inclusion is good. It provides an extensive range of full-time and part-time courses from pre-entry to postgraduate level. The college is responsive to students with additional social or learning needs and those with disabilities, who are well supported on separate specialist courses and in mainstream provision. All staff have received equality of opportunity training and considerable thought has gone into ways of promoting equality of opportunity in lessons and throughout the college. Some 4.4% of students are from minority ethnic

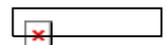
There are strong links with employers and local agencies, and formal partnerships with many local schools and a university. The college has successfully widened participation. Many courses are designed to persuade students to remain in, or return to, education and training. For example, in partnership with the local authority and at the request of the police, the college is successfully running assertiveness training courses for women from a local refuge. In partnership with University of Plymouth, HE is successfully promoted to Year 8 pupils from deprived areas at meetings using current HE students as ambassadors.

How well are students and trainees guided and supported?



Students receive good support and guidance. The management of cross-college support and guidance is effective and there is a wide range of additional support services available to students. The college has been successful in its recent application for a Charter Mark Award. The college provides effective pre-course guidance. Students value the efficient interview process, which helps them to choose a course matched to their needs. Induction is thorough and comprehensive. Most students receive a good initial assessment of their learning support needs and in most cases any additional support needed is organised promptly. The initial assessment of some part-time adult students is inadequate. Tutorial support is very good for most students. All full-time and part-time students have a designated tutor. A subject teacher undertakes this role for students who attend college for only a few hours a week. There is very good support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and good tutorial support for those on work-based learning programmes. Tutorials are well planned and clearly structured. They are used effectively to review students' progress and set short-term targets. However, the targets set for some students are insufficiently precise. There are very good relationships between students and their personal tutors and students value the support they receive.

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

- personal and academic support

- teachers who are enthusiastic and knowledgeable, helpful and approachable

- the integrated learning centres

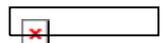
- being treated as adults

- college resources and facilities
- the friendly atmosphere
- good enrichment activities
- range and content of courses.

What they feel could be improved

- the price of food in the canteen
- car parking
- the computer network
- timetabling on some courses
- childcare facilities
- some accommodation.

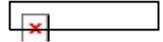
Other information



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

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 is responsible for ensuring that, where inspectors have judged there to be unsatisfactory or poor provision in a curriculum area or in leadership and management, the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) receives the college's post-inspection action plan within the stipulated two months.

Part B: The college as a whole



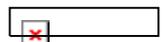
Summary of grades awarded to teaching and learning by inspectors

Aspect & learner type	Graded good or better (Grades 1 to 3) %	Graded satisfactory (Grade 4) %	Graded less than satisfactory (Grades 5 to 7) %
Teaching 16-18	66	29	5
19+ and WBL*	73	22	5
Learning 16-18	64	32	4
19+ and WBL*	69	29	2

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

*work-based learning

Achievement and standards



1. The college offers a wide range of courses that can be studied full time or part time. All 14 areas of learning recognised by the LSC are covered as Table 2 in Part D of the report shows. Over recent years, retention rates have improved at levels 2 and 3 but declined at level 1. In 2002, retention rates were at or below national averages at levels 1, 2 and 3. Pass rates have improved at all levels and are now at or above national averages. Overall attendance during the inspection was 74%, which is just below the national average. The average number of students in lessons was 9.5.

16 to 18 year olds

2. Most students aged 16 to 18 study full time. They take courses leading to a wide range of vocational and general education qualifications. In 2001, the retention rates for students in this age group were below the national averages at levels 1, 2 and 3. In 2002, the retention rates remained below national averages at levels 1 and 2, despite an improvement at level 2. At level 3, the retention rate was close to the national average. Retention rates were poor on one or more of the courses inspected in over half of the curriculum areas. Retention rates improved on many courses in 2003. In 2001, pass rates on courses at levels 1, 2 and 3 were around the national averages. In

2002, the pass rates at levels 1 and 3 improved significantly and were above the national averages. Pass rates at level 2 remained around the national average.

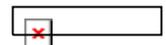
3. Work-based learning programmes are producing poor outcomes. Many work-based learners fail to complete their programmes within the expected times.

4. Students are generally making good progress. Their attainments were judged to be good in visual and performing arts, construction, engineering and humanities. Most students are well motivated, work hard, and learn effectively. In construction, students produce practical work of a high standard and many have won prizes in national competitions. Students on hospitality and travel courses develop good social and interpersonal skills, which they demonstrate when dealing with customers in the college restaurant and travel shop. The technical skills of hairdressing students, when colouring and styling clients' hair, are good. Art and design students demonstrate very good practical skills. They develop and apply sophisticated ideas in art and design and have a mature and independent attitude to their work. In humanities, students express their knowledge and understanding with clarity and confidence. They ask thoughtful questions and make perceptive observations. Students on language and literacy courses are able to apply what they learn to their work and home lives, which increases their confidence and self-esteem. In most curriculum areas, students are well prepared for progression to further study or employment.

Adult learners

5. Most adult students study part-time, either on the main college site or in community centres. In 2002, retention rates for adults were below national averages at levels 1 and 2, although at level 2 there had been a significant improvement. At level 3, the retention rate was close to the national average. Pass rates for adults in 2002 improved dramatically at level 1, rising to 15% above the national average. Pass rates also improved at levels 2 and 3 and were above the national average. There is good teaching on courses for adults and the attainment of adults on business and management courses is particularly good.

Quality of education and training



6. Teaching, learning and attainment were graded by inspectors in 216 lessons. Teaching was at least good in 69% of lessons, satisfactory in 26% and less than satisfactory in 5%. Teaching was best in visual and performing arts and business administration. Some 3% of lessons were outstanding and these were spread across six curriculum areas. The teaching of adults was slightly better than that of students aged 16 to 18.

7. In the best lessons, teachers ensured that students understood what was expected of them and checked their learning regularly. In vocational curriculum areas, they provided relevant, topical learning materials and appropriate tasks relating to industrial practice. In a construction lesson, for example, students developed their statistics skills by analysing delivery weights of crushed rock from a quarry.

8. In an outstanding lesson in performing arts on sub-text and its role in the portrayal of character, students responded enthusiastically to inspirational teaching. The teacher used a range of imaginative teaching methods. At the end of the lesson, students demonstrated how much they had learned by the distance they walked into the centre of the room, all starting from a wall. In a communication lesson for adults with acquired brain injuries, the teacher sensitively managed a role-play and students made impressive progress in terms of recovering spoken language. In another lesson, the teacher very skilfully used a range of methods to develop engineering students' understanding of capacitors, using excellent learning resources.

9. In a minority of lessons, teachers' expectations were too low and students were not given sufficiently challenging tasks. For example, some teachers asked questions requiring one simple factual response, without giving students opportunities to develop their analytical skills. In a few lessons, teachers talked too much and students spent too much time copying notes. In one anatomy and physiology lesson for students on a hair and beauty course, students spent too long colouring in a diagram and quickly became bored. Poor punctuality by students disrupted lessons in hair and beauty, business administration, information and communications technology (ICT), engineering, hospitality and catering, and travel and tourism.

10. In most lessons, learning is satisfactory and levels of attainment are appropriate. Most students work productively in lessons and also when working on their own in the integrated learning centres. They use computing facilities with confidence to undertake research and to complete their assignments. Many are able to analyse factual information thoughtfully and critically. For example, in a business lesson, students on a certificate course in personnel practice were able to analyse the reasons for employees' lateness and absence and to compare and contrast strategies for dealing with the problems. The standard of practical work is particularly high in visual and performing arts and in construction. However, students' attainments in some ICT lessons were below the required standard.

11. Most students have access to good resources and accommodation. The college is part way through a major campus redevelopment project, which involves the development of new buildings and the demolition of unsuitable accommodation.

12. Students from all curriculum areas speak positively about the new integrated learning centres, which are being developed for each major curriculum area. They provide a stimulating environment for learning and were highly commended in the Beacon Award Scheme in 2002. Students value the help provided by teachers, support staff and library staff in these centres and the fact that computers and printed and electronic resources are all located in one area. The art and design centre is the latest to be developed and is particularly well equipped with computers, specialist software and slide and video libraries.

13. Classrooms, workshops and social areas in the new buildings, such as the technology centre, are of a very high standard. The workshop facilities for motor vehicle engineering at the Galmington centre are good. Travel and tourism students benefit from a travel shop, where real holiday bookings can be made. There is a good range of specialist workshops for art and design, most of which are of a high standard. However, some students learn in unsuitable accommodation and are taught in poorly furnished huts. History students have lessons in an unsuitable science laboratory. Students on beauty therapy courses work in cramped salons and the kitchens used by catering students are poorly resourced. The accommodation problems are expected to be resolved when the building programme is completed in 2004/05.

14. Managers have invested significantly in new IT facilities since the last inspection and students across the college use up-to-date computing facilities. However, some unreliability in the network has made it difficult for some students to complete coursework and assignments on time, particularly in computing and in health and social care. Appropriate action is being taken to rectify these difficulties.

15. Most teachers are appropriately qualified. Some 79% of full-time and 40% of hourly paid teachers have a teaching qualification. Many staff use information and learning technology (ILT) to good effect in their lessons. Approximately 40 staff have successfully completed the college's own ILT course, and many more are currently undertaking the course.

16. Assessment and the monitoring of students' progress are good. Most vocational courses have well-planned assessment schedules linked clearly to the cycle of internal and external verification. All full-time and many part-time students have an initial assessment. For most of them this is effective in identifying their key skills abilities and any additional support needs. Staff make good use of the results from this assessment to start developing individual learning plans with students during induction. However, the short-term targets in these plans are often insufficiently precise, particularly in ICT. Target setting for students on level 3 programmes, including GCE AS and A-level courses,

does not routinely make use of information about prior achievement to establish likely future performance. Assignments for students include clear guidance on assessment criteria. In most areas, students regularly receive feedback on their work. In some areas, this is useful and shows clearly what students need to do to improve.

17. Assessment of work-based learners is of mixed quality. In engineering, practice is good with strong employer involvement in the planning and carrying out of assessments. In construction and hairdressing, insufficient use is made of workplace assessment, and there is an over-reliance on assessing students in simulated work environments.

18. Key skills achievement is poor. The pass rate in 2001/02 declined to 14%, which is well below the national average. The college is aware of this weakness and is committed to improving matters. There is a clear policy for key skills provision. Attendance at key skills tests has been increased in areas such as construction and staff have put considerable effort into integrating key skills assignments with other aspects of students' courses. This approach has been successful in some areas, for example, ICT and health and social care, but not in others such as visual and performing arts. There is little integration of key skills with other aspects of courses in hairdressing and beauty therapy or humanities. The number of students submitting portfolios of evidence for assessment is increasing, but remains low. Attendance at lessons designed specifically to develop students' key skills is often poor. Many students have little understanding of the value of key skills. Poor achievement of key skills by work-based learners has contributed significantly to low completion rates on modern apprenticeship programmes.

19. The college provides an extensive range of full-time and part-time courses from pre-entry to postgraduate level. There are clear progression routes in most curriculum areas, although in some areas there are gaps at levels 1 and 2. There are strong links with local agencies and formal partnerships with many local schools and one university. The college works closely with the pupil referral unit to support young people at risk of being excluded from school. Links with employers are good. The college has achieved CoVE status in construction (crafts, professions and sustainability).

20. Students receive good personal and academic support. Specialist services are well managed and include counselling, finance, accommodation, chaplaincy, family planning and careers guidance. Students are aware of the services on offer and make good use of them. Pre-course guidance, interviews, enrolment and 'taster' days for Year 10 school pupils and adults, are all effective.

21. There is good support for students with dyslexia, dyspraxia, epilepsy and mental health problems. Students benefit from effective help with literacy and numeracy, most notably in construction. The college has recently introduced systems to formalise links between subject teachers and the learning support team to obtain support for those who disclose a need. Some adult students on part-time courses have not received an initial assessment of learning support needs.

22. A thorough and comprehensive induction programme provides students with a good introduction to their courses. Students appreciate their induction programme and feel that it settles them into college life effectively. Adult students on ICT courses found the induction process particularly useful. Important subjects such as health and safety are regularly reinforced.

23. Tutorials are regular, frequent and well planned. Each student has a personal tutor who follows a structured tutorial programme outlined in the college's guidance manual. Students' progress is reviewed effectively and short-term targets are set and are recorded on the students' individual learning plan. The college also organises themed weeks each term on topics such as health, careers and equality and diversity. Tutors conduct tutorials in a manner which is sensitive to individual needs and equality of opportunity. The personal support is highly valued by students. Some students following courses in hairdressing and beauty therapy, and most of the adult part-time students at the college's site in town, have not received regular tutorial support.

24. There are currently no childcare facilities within the college, but the college operates an extensive childcare network using local child minders. They also offer an out-of-school club for children aged up to 12 years. A new nursery is in the process of being built and will be available in

September 2003.

Leadership and management



25. Leadership and management are good. The principal, governors and senior managers have provided good leadership throughout the college's period of financial recovery and its change in strategic direction. Following the last inspection, the college's financial position was weak, student enrolments were declining, some data were unreliable and there was poor target setting and insufficient monitoring of college performance. Most of these weaknesses have been remedied.

26. In March 2001, the governors and senior managers took action to address the financial deficit. They produced an ambitious four-year recovery plan and a four-year strategic plan. Both plans are based on a complete reshaping of the college's provision including the rebuilding and refurbishing of the main campus, redesigning the curriculum, integrating IT with other aspects of learning and reducing costs. The new strategy and associated policies and management structures were introduced in September 2001. Progress towards the objectives in the plans is monitored regularly at all levels within the college. Staff understand the importance of the strategies to raise standards and have helped to minimise disruption to students throughout the changes. It is too early to judge the impact of many of the new arrangements. However, in 2003, the quality of teaching has improved and the decline in enrolments has been arrested at levels 1 and 2. Although there are indications of improved retention rates in some curriculum areas, retention rate targets have not been achieved. Retention rates in general remain below national averages and continue to decline at level 1. Strategies to improve retention rates have been strengthened, including the appointment of student support officers to identify students at risk of leaving; detailed initial assessment to ensure students are on the right course; and the use of individual learning plans and personal tutors.

27. Governors have a clear understanding of the college's strategic plan; set challenging targets; and are purposeful and enthusiastic in their commitment to the plan's successful accomplishment. The college's role in the raising education and training standards in the area is central to their purpose, and their ambitions for the college have been a significant force in improving its performance. The governors monitor students' performance and progress towards agreed targets thoroughly. They systematically review quality assurance reports and student surveys, and meet with managers and teachers to discuss teaching and learning issues frankly. Each governor is linked to a curriculum area, providing effective liaison between governors and staff.

28. Communications in the college are good. The values and objectives of the college are understood and promoted by staff at all levels. Senior managers are open and consultative. Staff feel well informed through formal team meetings, team briefings and informal meetings with senior managers and line managers. The executive team comprises the principal, deputy principal, the director of finance and the director of human resources. The senior management team comprises the executive team, the directors: of curriculum, quality improvement, marketing, learning resources, and special projects, the registrar, and the six heads of division. The principal manages these groups effectively. Both teams are committed to the strategic plan and minutes of meetings indicate a clear understanding of college's intention to continue to improve. There are good working relationships between managers. Decisions are taken quickly to address issues as they arise. The structure of the executive and senior management team is to be changed in order to increase effectiveness and efficiency, and to further improve the focus on teaching and learning and the students' experience. The college organization has been changed from 13 schools to 6 divisions. This has led to better teamwork, in most curriculum areas, better communication and a more systematic approach to the provision of student support. Staff roles are clear. Since the last inspection, there has been considerable improvement in operational planning. The introduction of curriculum managers has contributed to better teamwork at course level in most curriculum areas. Most significantly, effective teaching is now seen as a priority. However, there is still some ineffective curriculum management at course level. In some areas, the management of work-based learning is

less than satisfactory. Management of student support services is generally good.

29. Since the last inspection, the college has improved its quality assurance arrangements. Quality assurance procedures are overseen effectively by heads of division and 'health check teams', whose main roles are to monitor progress against division targets and to manage strategies to improve teaching effectiveness and students' achievements. Most course reviews lead to effective self-assessment and thorough analysis of data. Each division and support area prepares a self-assessment report and an operating plan, which includes clear targets for improvement. These reports are combined into an overall college self-assessment report, which is based on the common inspection framework. This report identified most of the strengths and many of the weaknesses noted during the inspection.

30. The college's well-established lesson observation programme is a central element of its strategy to improve the quality of teaching and learning. In 2002, regular 'health checks' were established, based on the common inspection framework. All full-time and part-time teachers are observed regularly by their managers or by members of the health check team and the lessons observed are graded. The internal observers judged 78% of lessons to be good and better, compared with 69% of lessons judged to be good or better by inspectors. Observers are trained in lesson observation and feedback is thorough and focused on improving teachers' performance. Comprehensive health check reports provide clear judgements on all aspects of the common inspection framework and identify areas for improvement and areas of good practice which could be shared. Curriculum teams prepare an action plan and progress is monitored regularly and by subsequent health checks. This process is welcomed by curriculum teams and is leading to improvements in the quality of students' support and achievement. Health check teams periodically report on generic areas, such as students' induction.

31. Appraisal and staff development arrangements in the college are good. Members of the remuneration committee appraise the principal and she appraises the executive and senior managers. Appraisals are conducted against agreed objectives. All other staff are appraised by their managers and have individual action plans and targets. Lesson observation provides information for these appraisals. Training opportunities for teaching and support staff are clearly linked to the college's objectives and to improving students' performance. The evaluation of training is not effective in some curriculum areas. There are clear procedures for monitoring and inducting new teachers that include lesson observations. Staff feel well supported by their managers and share common goals. The college achieved Investor in People status in 2002.

32. The college has developed a range of successful partnerships and collaborations. It provides courses for pupils from local 11 to 16 schools who are deemed to be at risk, which are helping to reduce social exclusion. It works with the local hospital to provide excellent rehabilitation training for patients with acquired brain injuries and those recovering from strokes. Strong links have been developed with the University of Plymouth for the provision of HE courses. Collaboration with the construction sector has led to the establishment of a CoVE in construction crafts, professions and sustainability. As part of a consortium of colleges and universities, the college has New Technology Institute status.

33. The college is committed to pursuing equality of opportunity. The college charter clearly identifies the college's support for equal opportunities for all students and staff through all its activities. Equal opportunities matters, including complaints, are reported to the governors through the standards committee. All staff have received equality of opportunity training and considerable thought has gone into ways of promoting equality in lessons and throughout the college. The college complies with the requirements of the recently amended Race Relations Act and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Discrimination Act. It has policies relating to harassment and bullying, a thorough policy to promote race equality, and an action plan which identifies clear action points and timescales. It also monitors, by ethnic group, the admission and progress of students, and the recruitment and career progress of staff. Data relating to examination results, retention rates and student surveys are analysed using a wide range of criteria.

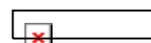
34. MIS have improved significantly since the last inspection. Information is accurate and readily available. Managers have access to a range of reports and data on recruitment and students'

achievements. Use of information for planning purposes is increasing and staff in most curriculum areas use the data systematically to set targets and monitor performance. Financial reporting to senior managers and governors is good. The finance allocation model for divisions is clearly linked to students' recruitment and performance. The financial recovery plan and the new building are intended to make the college more cost effective. Following the elimination of the deficits, the college is anticipating a more secure level of financial health. At the time of the inspection, progress towards the targets in the recovery plan was on target.

Part C: Curriculum and occupational areas



Construction



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

Strengths

- high standard of practical work

- good teaching and learning

- comprehensive range of provision

- good external links

- very good support for students.

Weaknesses

- some poor retention rates

- slow rate of completion in electrical installation at level 1.

Scope of provision

35. The college provides craft, technician, and supervisory and management courses from entry level to level 3. It also provides a range of short courses for workers in industry. Students can progress from schools link and taster courses through craft or technician studies on to HE or courses leading to membership of professional bodies. The craft courses cover bricklaying, painting and decorating, plumbing, carpentry and joinery, and electrical installation. National certificate and diploma courses are provided in construction, civil engineering and surveying, and cartography. Supervisory and management courses include the Chartered Institute of Building site management certificate and diploma courses, and the Construction Industry Training Board site management safety-training certificate. At the time of inspection, there were 497 students, of which 95 were on full-time courses and 402 on part-time courses: 105 were aged 16 to 18 and 392 were aged 19 and over. The college also provides off-the-job training and assessment for local and national training providers.

Achievement and standards

36. Retention rates are at or above national averages on most courses. However, in 2002, retention rates were low on level 2 painting and decorating courses and the national diploma course in construction. The college has implemented measures to improve retention rates and at the time of the inspection all courses showed significant improvements, including those for painting and decorating.

37. Pass rates are at or above national averages on all courses. However, many students on electrical installation courses make slow progress, achieving their qualifications after their planned completion date.

38. Students produce practical work of a high standard. For example, plumbers shape lead to industry standards and painters and decorators, bricklayers, electrical installers and technicians have been prize winners in national skills competitions. Carpentry and joinery, and bricklaying students are able to work from drawings that they have downloaded from computers in the learning centre. Students are able to work with a wide range of powered hand tools safely and with confidence. When students from different trades undertake key skills work in mixed groups, they are able to communicate effectively, as is required on industrial sites. Painting and decorating students are able to produce good risk assessments to industrial standards.

39. There is good achievement of key skills. Of those students who were retained in 2002, 90% took key skills examinations and 58% passed.

A sample of retention and pass rates in construction, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
City and Guilds electrical installation	1	No. of starts	24	20	26
		% retention	80	85	85
		% pass rate	83	100	32
NVQ carpentry and joinery	2	No. of starts	51	35	21
		% retention	67	69	76
		% pass rate	73	89	69
NVQ plumbing	2	No. of starts	25	79	38
		% retention	44	72	71
		% pass rate	0	41	76

NVQ painting and decorating	2	No. of starts	24	20	26
		% retention	58	45	19
		% pass rate	93	83	100
National diploma in construction	3	No. of starts	10	6	11
		% retention	60	50	36
		% pass rate	100	100	100
Site management diploma	3	No. of starts	12	6	11
		% retention	92	100	100
		% pass rate	100	83	91

Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

Quality of education and training

40. Teaching is good on all courses and lessons are well prepared. In practical lessons students demonstrate very good skills. Professionals from industry give lectures on specialist subjects and new developments. Students benefit from frequent visits to construction sites and from the college's enrichment programme, which includes team building activities, sports, and visits to sustainability sites such as the Eden project.

41. There is good integration of key skills with other aspects of the courses and students use examples from their vocational work as evidence of attainment in key skills. There is a key skills co-ordinator for construction who works with staff and students to ensure that they understand the relevance and importance of key skills. Students from different trades work together in key skills sessions. This is used to develop their communication skills and prepares them for the real work environment.

42. Assessment and monitoring of students' progress are satisfactory. The college has worked hard to establish and train a network of 60 workplace supervisors who co-ordinate the collection of work-based evidence for assessment. However, college assessors do not assess students in the workplace enough.

43. Staff are well qualified and there is sufficient technical support in the workshops. Many of the teachers have recent industrial experience and demonstrate good occupational skills and knowledge. Resources are good in electrical installation and painting and decorating, but some workshops are in need of upgrading. This has been recognised by the college and CoVE funding is being used to upgrade these facilities. There is good access to a well-resourced construction learning centre.

44. Support for students is very good. Students' needs are identified through initial assessment at the start of their courses. Help with literacy and numeracy is given sensitively, either individually, in the integrated learning centre, or collectively in theory lessons. Qualified and experienced specialist teachers provide the support and there is effective contact between the specialist support staff, teachers and students. The tutorial procedures for full-time and part-time students are good. Students receive good personal support and their progress is monitored effectively.

45. External links are good. The college is a partner of the local Construction Industry Training Board construction curriculum centre. The centre works closely with primary and secondary schools to promote opportunities in the construction industry, especially to under-represented groups. The effective links with schools have been recognised by a Business Education Award and a British Telecommunications Aim Higher Award. There is an active industry liaison group that acts as a forum for sharing good practice, ideas and concerns. Teachers provide leadership in local and national professional bodies. The college has been approved as a CoVE in construction. It has just completed its first CoVE self-assessment, which has been approved by the local LSC, and is making

good progress towards achieving its targets. In response to requests from local industry, specialist courses are provided such as geographic information systems. The college is also widening its provision to cover skill gaps identified through labour market information.

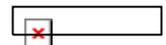
Leadership and management

46. Leadership and management are satisfactory. However, managers and course teams have difficulty in interpreting data held in different formats on different systems. This makes it difficult for them to use the data to monitor the retention and pass rates of students effectively.

47. There is good promotion of equality of opportunity. Students are aware of the college's bullying, harassment, and grievance and appeals procedures. The college has piloted the Construction Industry Training Board's 'Women into Construction' initiative and recently had an awareness week to promote equal opportunities.

48. The self-assessment report identified the strengths and most of the weaknesses noted by inspectors. A number of the weaknesses identified before the inspection had been addressed.

Engineering



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

Contributory grade for work-based learning is **satisfactory (grade 3)**

Strengths

- good teaching and learning

- high pass rates on the national diploma and certificate courses

- thorough assessment

- effective support for students

- good involvement of employers in work-based learning.

Weaknesses

- low achievement of modern apprenticeship frameworks

- o poor retention rates on the first diploma

- o poor pass rates for additional qualifications.

Scope of provision

49. The college provides automobile, mechanical, electrical and electronic engineering courses from levels 1 to 4. Most students study at level 3. Work-based learning programmes are provided in motor vehicle service and repair, and in engineering at foundation and advance level. Adult students generally attend courses alongside younger students, but some welding and computer aided design courses are offered in the evening and these attract predominately older students. At the time of the inspection, there were 268 students, of which 104 were full time. Eleven of the full-time students and 129 of the part-time students were aged 19 or over. There were 45 students on work-based learning programmes.

Achievement and standards

50. Pass rates on the national certificate and diploma courses have been consistently high for the last three years. Retention rates for these courses are also good. However, retention rates for the first diploma course have been consistently below national averages and at 45% in 2002 were unsatisfactory. Full-time engineering students undertake additional qualifications, but the pass rates on most of these courses are unsatisfactory. Work-based learning programmes are currently producing poor outcomes and many work-based learners are failing to complete within the expected time frame.

51. All engineering students work safely and many produce work of a good standard, particularly in practical lessons. National diploma students working on a project were able to apply scientific and design skills to manufacture a model land yacht. Mechanical engineering students used the measurements of machine tolerances to complete a spreadsheet for data manipulation and statistical analysis as part of an integrated key skills assessment. Most motor vehicle students in a mathematics lesson were able to transpose the subject of algebraic equations. In electronics lessons, students applied theoretical principles to the practice of testing components in circuits. Students operate engineering machinery and equipment safely and demonstrate good practical skills in welding and motor vehicle repair work.

A sample of retention and pass rates in engineering, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
NVQ in vehicle maintenance -service replacement	1	No. of starts	10	16	21
		% retention	30	69	43
		% pass rate	100	86	39
NVQ in engineering manufacture (foundation 2 year)	2	No. of starts	22	24	22
		% retention	82	71	86
		% pass rate	56	41	31
City and Guilds 4351-	2	No. of starts	58	35	21

draughting and design using auto-CAD (1 year)		% pass rate	82	81	93
First diploma in engineering	2	No. of starts	22	15	20
		% retention	23	67	45
		% pass rate	60	100	78
National certificate in engineering (2 year)	3	No. of starts	43	32	16
		% retention	77	75	81
		% pass rate	89	77	83
National diploma in engineering	3	No. of starts	54	48	45
		% retention	63	67	71
		% pass rate	67	81	85

Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

Quality of education and training

52. Teaching and learning in this area are good. Lessons are carefully planned and schemes of work are comprehensive. Most lessons build on previous work, which is usually recapped at the start of the lesson. Teachers use a variety of aids including handouts, overhead projectors and slide projectors, which are sometimes connected to a computer. In the best lessons, teachers make frequent checks on learning through the use of questions directed at individual students. Teachers often draw on their own and their students' experiences to illustrate points. They emphasise the relevance of the topics under discussion to the workplace. In a very good electronics lesson, the teacher used a projector, well-prepared notes and a whiteboard to help the students understand the characteristics of zener diodes. The teacher asked relevant questions and used many illustrative examples. Teachers praise good work, which encourages the students to improve their performance. In many lessons, students are encouraged to work at their own pace but insufficient additional learning material is provided to allow the more able students to progress faster.

53. Assessment practices in the engineering programme area are thorough. Most performance criteria and assignment briefs are clearly stated, internal verification is rigorous, and feedback to assessors makes a significant contribution to improving the quality of the courses. Assignments are well marked. Punctuation, grammar and spelling are corrected and feedback to students is challenging but supportive. Some employers involved in work-based learning programmes have their own accredited NVQ assessors. In such cases, assessment, and the recording and tracking of learners' progress, are particularly effective. One employer issues internal certificates to students when they achieve an NVQ unit, which helps to motivate them. Work-based assessment carried out by college assessors is also good.

54. Teachers are well qualified, both professionally and vocationally. Many have recent industrial experience and benefit from a good range of staff development and training opportunities. An appropriate number of technicians and administrators support the teachers and students. There is suitable access to good computer resources and many staff make effective use of IT to produce good learning material and assignments. Accommodation in the new technology building is excellent and provides a stimulating working environment. The machine and welding workshops are unsatisfactory and do not conform to industry standards, but new workshops are to open in September 2003. The integrated learning centre contains a good range of books, periodicals and electronic media materials. Engineering students are making increasing use of this resource. The engineering programme area is well equipped, but the motor vehicle stock is old and does not reflect modern technology.

55. There is a good range of learning opportunities for technician students at level 3 in motor vehicle, mechanical and electronic engineering. Many of these students progress to the level 4 courses

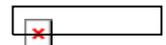
offered at the college. Full-time and part-time students are able to study for additional qualifications and there are some good enrichment activities such as visits to a large company manufacturing excavators. The staff have developed strong and mutually beneficial links with employers. For example, a surplus computer-controlled machine has been loaned to an employer. Students have the opportunity to train on the machine in a real working environment and college staff have enhanced their industrial experience.

56. Support and guidance for students in engineering are effective. An initial assessment of basic skills is carried out during the first two weeks of a course. When students are identified as needing additional support, this is provided and their teachers are kept fully informed of their progress. Tutorial support is well planned and timetabled to ensure that teachers meet with students individually at least once each term. Employers make an effective contribution to the support of work-based learners and contribute to the regular progress reviews carried out by college staff. Work-based learners are given a wide range of on-the-job learning opportunities. One student is undergoing training on cars, motorbikes and quad bikes. In the larger engineering companies, students have formal training plans and structured training, and they benefit from working with well-qualified and experienced people.

Leadership and management

57. Management is good and staff work effectively as a team. Staff appraisals are regular and effective. Teachers keep up to date and develop their skills and professional practice. Teams meet regularly to monitor students' progress, oversee teaching and learning and ensure effective administration of the courses. Student perception surveys and focus groups contribute to ensuring the quality of the provision. Inspectors agreed with much of the college's self-assessment of the engineering programme area.

Business, management and administration



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

Strengths

- high pass rates on administration and secretarial courses

- well-planned and effective teaching

- up-to-date and well-used resources.

Weaknesses

- low pass rates on accounting and management courses

- inadequate assessment of part-time students' learning needs

- poor attendance and punctuality.

Scope of provision

58. The college provides full-time courses in business at advanced level and courses leading to NVQs in administration at levels 2 and 3. They also provide a wide range of part-time courses, in subjects such as management, accounting, personnel, and administration, and skills such as word processing and shorthand. Students can attend on a part-time day or evening basis, either at the college or at the open learning centre in the town centre. At the time of the inspection, there were 761 students, of which 55 were aged 16 to 18. Most full-time students are aged 16 to 18 and most part-time students are aged over 19.

Achievement and standards

59. Pass rates on secretarial courses are good, particularly on the NVQ courses in administration at levels 2 and 3 and the higher diploma in administrative procedures. Pass rates on shorthand, audio typing, and word processing courses have been well above national averages for the last two years. Although overall pass rates on accounting courses at levels 2 and 4 are unsatisfactory, most students achieve a pass when they take the external assessments for the second time. Pass rates are poor on management courses and the level 3 course in personnel practice. Students working towards the Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE) achieve additional qualifications in IT and NVQ students gain certificates in secretarial skills. All full-time students work towards key skills qualifications and the intermediate certificate in employability skills. Retention rates on most courses were at or approaching national averages until 2002, but all have improved significantly in 2003 since strategies were implemented to monitor students' progress more closely and to provide support for those considered at risk of dropping out.

60. The level of attainment in most lessons is good, particularly for adults. Students are able to explore business issues and work to deadlines. They can apply business theory to practice and are knowledgeable about topical business issues. Students' work demonstrates their good command of computing and research skills. There is good progression to higher-level courses in accounting and administration. Most students on full-time courses progress to HE or obtain employment.

A sample of retention and pass rates in business, management and administration, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
NVQ in accounting	2	No. of starts	11	20	13
		% retention	73	45	77
		% pass rate	81	100	60
Certificate in personnel practice	3	No. of starts	4	8	10
		% retention	75	88	80
		% pass rate	33	100	75
GNVQ/AVCE business	3	No. of starts	41	28	32
		% retention	77	66	67

		% pass rate	75	71	77
NVQ 4 in accounting	4	No. of starts	13	7	14
		% retention	62	100	79
		% pass rate	60	29	64
Higher diploma in administration	4	No. of starts	28	21	26
		% retention	88	86	85
		% pass rate	78	83	87
Certificate in management studies	4	No. of starts	15	25	19
		% retention	80	82	75
		% pass rate	75	56	40

Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

Quality of education and training

61. Most teaching is well planned and effective. Teachers use teaching methods that are appropriate to their students' abilities and needs. For example, in a GCSE revision lesson, the teacher organised a mixture of theory and practical activities to help students with learning and social needs to recall and debate difficult concepts such as market segments and population sectors, and to differentiate between qualitative and quantitative information. Challenging behaviour was handled in a non-confrontational way, maintaining dignity and respect. Teachers draw on their own and students' experience and use up-to-date business examples. For example, adults on a part-time personnel course learned how to analyse reasons and remedies for lateness and absence at work by contrasting and comparing practices in their own workplaces. The teacher facilitated the animated discussion and summarised the conclusions. In a minority of lessons, insufficient account was taken of individual learning needs and there was no differentiation in the work set for students of different abilities.

62. Assessment practices are satisfactory, although there is insufficient work-based assessment on the NVQ programmes. The standard of work on most business courses is satisfactory or better. Feedback to students on their assignments is constructive and work is usually returned promptly. Assignments are appropriately challenging. For example, students on the AVCE course developed organisational, communication, finance and team-working skills by organising a fundraising event. They wrote to local businesses for sponsorship, booked the venue and entertainment, designed and sold tickets and kept accounts of income and expenditure. Part-time students on professional courses make extensive use of their work experience in projects and in their responses to examination questions. Projects have included an analysis of the online accounting system of a local authority, a review of a subcontractor payment system, and a study of the effect of the landfill tax on wastage costs on construction sites.

63. Attendance and punctuality are poor on many courses, particularly in the first lesson of the day. During the inspection the average attendance was 65%, and for key skills lessons attendance has been less than 50%. Attendance on the AVCE course is regularly less than 70%. The college is working hard to address this problem.

64. Learning resources are good. Teachers are appropriately qualified, and take opportunities to update their experience of current commercial practices through contacts with employers and professional associations. Classrooms are bright, airy and well equipped. Teachers have easy access to digital projectors and video players. Many rooms have furniture that can be moved easily to provide different layouts. In the integrated learning resource centres, students make full use of up-to-date computing facilities, the Internet and the wide stock of books and periodicals. There is a well-equipped open learning suite in the town centre where students can drop in at their own convenience to learn computer skills.

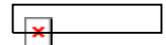
65. Tutorials for part-time students are arranged to fit in with students' commitments. Teaching staff are approachable and provide advice and guidance to students with concerns or difficulties. On the NVQ courses, the three-monthly reviews of progress are satisfactory, but target setting and action planning are weak. Parents, and employers of sponsored students, are regularly informed of students' progress. There is good careers guidance, but insufficient guidance on the demands of the courses and the importance of meeting assignment deadlines.

66. There is inadequate initial assessment of the learning needs of part-time students. Problems such as dyslexia are often not identified until the student is experiencing difficulties with coursework, which may be several months into the course. Once a problem is identified, good support is given, either in the learning support centre or during lessons by a learning support assistant. Although all full-time students have an initial assessment of their literacy and numeracy skills, those identified as needing support do not always take it up, and some students struggle, particularly on the AVCE course.

Leadership and management

67. Management of the curriculum is satisfactory. Course teams meet weekly and share good practice. The annual course reviews are effective and result in improvements to the courses. Most course files contain detailed schemes of work. Equal opportunities are actively promoted and diversity is valued. Any form of oppressive behaviour is dealt with promptly. There is insufficient contingency planning for staff absence and timetable changes are not always communicated to students.

Information and communication technology



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

Strengths

- good retention rates on full-time courses

- high pass rates on City and Guilds certificate and national diploma courses in 2002

- effective teaching of key skills on full-time courses

- good assessment and monitoring of full-time students' progress

- extensive range of additional qualifications on full-time courses.

Weaknesses

- poor retention rates for adults on City and Guilds certificate and computer literacy and IT courses

- poor attainment of students in some lessons

- unreliable computer systems

- inadequate monitoring and support for students at the centre in town.

Scope of provision

68. The college provides full-time courses leading to the first diploma in IT and the national diploma in computing for IT practitioners. There are progression opportunities from level 2 to advanced level and to HE within the college. However, there is no full-time course at level 1. Part-time courses provided by the college include the European computer driving licence (ECDL), introductory courses in computer literacy and information technology (CLAIT) and courses leading to City and Guilds qualifications. A variety of short courses are offered including word-processing, spreadsheets, databases and exploring the Internet. At the time of inspection, there were 535 students on part-time courses and 82 students on full-time courses. Ninety students were aged 16 to 18 and 527 were aged 19 and over.

Achievement and standards

69. Retention rates are good on the full-time first diploma and national diploma courses and the pass rate on the national diploma course was particularly high in 2002, at 96%. The retention rates for adults are low on the City and Guilds certificate and CLAIT courses. However, the pass rate on the certificate course was high in 2002. This year, the college has taken steps to improve the retention rate of adults who use the centre in the town by offering a wider range of courses, particularly short courses with intermediate goals, and ensuring students understand the commitment they are making when they enrol on the course.

70. There is poor attainment by students in some subjects. In two lessons, there was insufficient understanding of health and safety issues, and in some lessons students' projects demonstrated poor application of project management concepts. Despite this, students' attainments overall were satisfactory or better. Some students demonstrated good web management skills, others showed a good understanding of cost-benefit analysis and were able to identify the difference between tangible and intangible benefits. The standard of students' work was satisfactory or better and occasionally outstanding. Many students produce work that is used commercially by local small and medium size enterprises. Attainment of adult students is satisfactory. They demonstrate knowledge and skills appropriate to the stage and level of their course. In one web design lesson adult students, new to the subject, were making good progress and producing web pages with a variety of design features.

A sample of retention and pass rates in information and communication technology, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
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City and Guilds 7261 certificate	1	No. of starts	459	720	707
		% retention	69	63	49
		% pass rate	58	58	85
CLAIT	1	No. of starts	792	852	398
		% retention	80	77	66
		% pass rate	66	37	43
NVQ using IT	2	No. of starts	25	23	35
		% retention	88	83	76
		% pass rate	27	94	48
First diploma in IT	2	No. of starts	24	19	22
		% retention	75	95	95
		% pass rate	61	82	43
Integrated business technology	2	No. of starts	50	162	44
		% retention	96	63	75
		% pass rate	65	41	64
National diploma computing	3	No. of starts	23	22	34
		% retention	74	82	78
		% pass rate	71	67	96

Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

Quality of education and training

71. The teaching is satisfactory or better. Teachers prepare their lessons adequately and use resources well. They deal competently with students' queries. Skilful questioning by teachers encourages students to think through and often solve problems. In one lesson, students who had done a practice test were given a thorough de-briefing, which not only covered subject issues, but also provided valuable advice on examination techniques. Adult students who attend drop-in centres away from the college receive effective support. However, there is an over-reliance on commercially produced workbooks and computer-based training packages in these centres. Teaching of key skills is effective. Key skills are taught and assessed within the vocational courses and lesson plans clearly identify the assessment criteria. Assignment briefs are well written and include clear grading criteria. Written feedback from teachers helps students to improve. Assessment practices are fair and accurate and internal verification is well planned and effective. The progress of students who attend college is thoroughly documented and monitored as part of an effective tutorial process, but there is inadequate monitoring of students who use the centre in the town. Initial assessment for these students is not thorough and is confined to IT competence.

72. In the summer of 2002, the college installed a new computer network and started a software upgrade programme. There are also many new desktop computers. Students have had difficulty logging on to their accounts. They have also had difficulty storing and retrieving their work, and some work has been lost. There are also problems associated with running application programmes. Actions have been taken to improve matters. Students have been provided with memory sticks to store work. Nevertheless, some problems remain unresolved. In one lesson, some students had to move to different computers to carry out a practice test, as the computers they were working on could not run the relevant software.

73. Teaching staff are suitably qualified. The staff development programme enables them to update their industrial and subject knowledge, improve their teaching skills, and acquire new ICT qualifications. Most ICT equipment in the learning centre in town is modern and reliable and has

appropriate software installed. Accommodation at the main college is new and of a very high standard. Classrooms are spacious and well equipped.

74. Students on the national diploma courses successfully undertake an extensive range of additional activities to enhance their skills and qualifications. For example, all students take a course leading to an NVQ in using IT. There is also a wide range of courses available to part-time adult students.

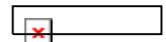
75. All full-time students undertake diagnostic and learning-style tests. As a result of these, the students are placed on a key skills programme at an appropriate level. Learning support needs are thoroughly documented and effective support is provided as needed. All full-time students have weekly tutorials, which are well planned. Targets are set for students, but these are not always sufficiently precise. All students studying at the main college site receive an effective induction, which prepares them well for their courses.

76. There is no systematic assessment of additional learning or language support needs for students at the centre in the town. In some cases, a teacher identifies a need and in other cases students request help. Where needs are identified they are not well documented; teachers are not informed about the level or frequency of the support provided. There are no adaptations to handouts to meet the wide range of students' abilities, apart from large print versions of standard learning materials. Students receive a basic two-hour induction. However, there is no information given on the wider support facilities available in the college such as careers guidance and counselling.

Leadership and management

77. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Targets are set by managers for their staff and reviewed through the personal development process. Meetings are documented, but it is not always clear if actions have been carried out. There is little sharing of good practice. All courses are reviewed at the end of each year. A new mid-year review has recently been established, but it is not yet clear if this has contributed towards any improvements. There is insufficient consultation between ICT system support staff, curriculum management staff and college administrative staff, about ICT resource issues. The college has taken measures to increase the number of women on ICT courses. These have included presentations in schools by female ICT students and staff. There is an early indication that this work is producing results. The self-assessment report identified most of the key strengths and weaknesses noted by the inspectors.

Hospitality, leisure and tourism



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

Strengths

- good range of additional qualifications

- good rate of progression to employment and further study

- particularly good range of enrichment activities

- good specialist resources in travel and tourism.

Weaknesses

- low retention rates on most courses
- poor planning of some lessons
- poor punctuality in most lessons
- inadequate resources in hospitality and catering.

Scope of provision

78. The college provides a wide range of courses in hospitality and catering. These include NVQ programmes in food preparation and cooking at levels 1, 2 and 3; food and beverage service at level 2; and restaurant supervision and AVCE courses in hospitality and catering at level 3. Part-time students achieve a range of qualifications through study in the workplace or through combined study at the college and at work. In sports, there are national diplomas in sports development and fitness, and applied science (sports studies) and an NVQ level 2 course in sport and recreation. Travel and tourism courses include AVCE travel and tourism, GNVQ intermediate leisure and tourism and NVQ travel services at level 2. At the time of inspection, there were 114 students aged 16 to 18 and 10 adults on full-time programmes. On part-time programmes, there were 24 students aged 16 to 18 and 496 adults, many of whom were studying in community venues. There were six foundation modern apprenticeships and one advanced modern apprentice in hospitality and catering.

Achievement and standards

79. Retention rates on most courses are unsatisfactory. Action is being taken to address this issue and the retention rate in the current year is good and is above the national average on most courses. Pass rates are satisfactory except on the NVQ level 2 travel services course. Attendance on some programmes is low. There are good progression rates into employment and further study. For example, 81% of students on the NVQ level 2 food preparation course gained employment and 85% of students on the national diploma in applied science (sports studies) went on to further studies.

80. The standard of students' work is satisfactory. Assignments are well presented and students use ICT to good effect. Working in the college restaurant and the travel shop, students develop their communication and interpersonal skills. They are polite to customers and to each other and deal well with enquiries and complaints. Many travel students demonstrate good research skills, investigating tourist destinations and calculating the costs of different itineraries. Most students have good customer care skills and telephone techniques. In sport studies, students work effectively in teams and, when coaching others, they recognise and respond to participants' varying abilities and needs.

A sample of retention and pass rates in hospitality, leisure and tourism, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
NVQ preparing and serving food	1	No. of starts	8	6	8
		% retention	100	67	88
		% pass rate	86	80	80
NVQ food preparation and cooking	2	No. of starts	28	40	29
		% retention	68	67	54
		% pass rate	83	91	71
NVQ sport and recreation (coaching)	2	No. of starts	10	13	42
		% retention	80	85	62
		% pass rate	86	100	81
NVQ travel services	2	No. of starts	24	14	12
		% retention	63	64	50
		% pass rate	29	100	33
National diploma in travel and tourism	3	No. of starts	13	16	17
		% retention	54	69	41
		% pass rate	43	90	86
National diploma in science (sports studies)	3	No. of starts	29*	22*	20*
		% retention	67	59	60
		% pass rate	75	77	83

Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

* college data

Quality of education and training

81. Most teaching is satisfactory. In one good lesson, students successfully organised and managed a football tournament for local school pupils. They enjoyed the session and demonstrated good organisational skills. However, in some lessons, planning is poor, teaching is unimaginative and activities do not provide students with enough challenge. In a few lessons, the students did not have a clear understanding of what was expected of them. Students' late arrival at many lessons is disruptive, but teachers do not always tackle the problem effectively.

82. Assessment is well managed and effectively used to monitor students' progress. Hospitality and sport students are aware of the progress they are making towards their qualifications. Assignments in hospitality and sport are vocationally relevant and well structured. Those in travel and tourism are not sufficiently demanding. Feedback on assignments by teachers does not always indicate how students can make improvements in order to achieve a higher grade. Work placements in hospitality and sport provide useful opportunities for students to develop their knowledge and skills and often contribute to their assessment. Students also benefit from visits to local organisations, overseas trips and the acquisition of additional industry-relevant qualifications, such as the certificate in employment skills.

83. Students speak highly of the help they get from staff on academic and personal matters. Pre-entry guidance and interviewing are effective. A student support officer is working with students and staff to improve attendance and retention rates. Initial assessment identifies students' additional learning needs and appropriate support is provided. Students' action plans are reviewed in regular

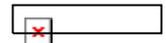
tutorials, and consolidation weeks, held twice a term, provide useful opportunities to review progress and complete assignments.

84. There are good specialist resources for travel students. These include the college's travel agency as well as extensive texts and computer-based resources in the integrated learning centre. However, resources for food preparation and service are poor and do not reflect the range and standard found in industry. The public restaurant is good, but there are sometimes too few customers to provide students with enough opportunities to prepare meals. New facilities for hospitality are expected to open in 2004. All staff are well qualified and most have teaching qualifications.

Leadership and management

85. Leadership and management in this area are satisfactory. Course teams set and monitor targets for retention and pass rates effectively and use national averages to measure success. The self-assessment process works well in identifying strengths and areas for development, but does not provide a sufficiently detailed action plan.

Hair and beauty therapy



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

Contributory grade for work-based learning is **unsatisfactory (grade 4)**

Strengths

- high pass rates on NVQ level 1 body massage and hairdressing courses

- good teaching on the national diploma course in beauty therapy

- well-equipped and effectively used integrated learning centre

- good progression rates to HE and employment.

Weaknesses

- poor retention rates on NVQ level 1 hairdressing and national diploma beauty therapy courses

- low pass rate on NVQ level 2 beauty therapy course

- poorly managed assessment

- poor management of the work-based learning curriculum.

Scope of provision

86. Full-time courses include hairdressing and beauty therapy at levels 1 and 2, and national diplomas in beauty therapy, and beauty therapy and media make-up. There are 71 students aged 16 to 18 and 34 students aged 19 or over on full-time courses. There are 19 students aged 16 to 18 and 563 students aged 19 or over on part-time courses in body massage, wig making, aromatherapy, reflexology, Indian head massage, salon hygiene, barbering and hairdressing. There are 10 advanced modern apprentices and 25 foundation modern apprentices in hairdressing. There are established school link courses and many pupils progress from these courses to full-time courses at the college.

Achievement and standards

87. Pass rates in 2002 were high on the body massage certificate course at 95%, and the NVQ level 1 course in hairdressing at 100%. The pass rate on the NVQ level 2 course in beauty therapy is low and declining. There have been low and declining retention rates on the NVQ level 1 course in hairdressing and the national diploma course in beauty therapy. However, retention rates improved on most courses in the current year. Completion rates for the modern apprenticeship framework are low. Advanced modern apprenticeship completions were 50% in 1999, 11% in 2000 and 33% in 2001. Completion rates for the foundation modern apprenticeship were 0% in 1999, 7% in 2000 and 13% in 2002.

88. While attendance in most lessons is good, punctuality is sometimes poor. Students on all courses demonstrate a high level of professionalism and good practical skills. The standard of students' written work is good. For example, assignments completed by students on the national diploma course in beauty therapy demonstrated a thorough understanding of Indian head massage. Students made good use of ILT in the preparation of a presentation on muscle groups. Some students demonstrated particularly good technical competence with hairdressing processes such as colouring and perming. Students on the NVQ level 3 hairdressing course produced and recorded creative hairstyles for a presentation. Students participate in the college fashion show as artistic stylists to the models. Some students achieve good results in regional and national competitions for hairdressing, holistic therapies and electrolysis.

A sample of retention and pass rates in hair and beauty therapy, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
NVQ hairdressing	1	No. of starts	35	34	26
		% retention	77	74	58
		% pass rate	81	91	100
NVQ beauty therapy	2	No. of starts	18	11	23
		% retention	67	64	87
		% pass rate	92	67	42
Indian head massage	2	No. of starts	*	37	27

diploma		% retention	*	78	93
		% pass rate	*	75	68
National diploma beauty therapy	3	No. of starts	17	15	23
		% retention	82	73	59
		% pass rate	93	70	100
Body massage certificate	3	No. of starts	31	30	25
		% retention	97	83	88
		% pass rate	100	84	95

Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

* different mode of delivery

Quality of education and training

89. Most teaching is satisfactory or better and is effective in meeting the needs of individual students and the awarding bodies. Students' learning was satisfactory in most lessons. In weaker lessons, students were not aware of the aim of the lesson and teachers failed to maintain their interest or to summarise what had been learned. Key skills are not integrated with other aspects of the courses, and students fail to see their relevance or to collect evidence of competence in key skills during vocational lessons.

90. In some second-year practical hairdressing lessons, there were too few clients to reflect a realistic working environment and students did not have the opportunity to work at commercial speeds or to be assessed. Some students had only one client for the duration of a long lesson. Others worked in pairs, losing valuable practice time while acting as the client. Health and safety procedures are implemented rigorously in beauty therapy.

91. Hairdressing and beauty therapy staff are well qualified, have recent commercial experience and regularly update their skills. The hairdressing salons are satisfactory, but much of the equipment is dated. The beauty salons are too small and contain insufficient resources. Often, students do not have a couch to work on during practical lessons. As part of the refurbishment of the college, the beauty therapy salons are to be redesigned and located in purpose-built accommodation which is to open in 2004.

92. Written work is clearly marked and teachers provide constructive comments on how students can improve their work. Students make good use of the integrated learning centre for research and private study. Students particularly appreciate the high level of IT support, especially in key skill lessons.

93. Students make slow progress on both hairdressing and beauty therapy programmes. There are insufficient work-based assessments. Some students who are nearing the end of their training have not completed general units, such as shampooing, and assessments start too late on beauty therapy courses. There is little acknowledgement of students' prior achievements and some are repeating assessments already passed on other courses. There is ineffective monitoring of students' progress. Targets set during work-based learning reviews are too vague and comments are too general. They do not make clear the progress students have made or the standards they have achieved.

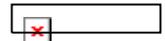
94. During their induction programmes, students undertake an effective initial assessment. Those who need it receive effective help from specialist staff. A number of students make good use of voice activated dictaphones and they also have access to a scribe. A student support officer follows up students' absences to improve retention rates. The integrated learning centre is well used by the students, mainly for additional learning support in IT.

95. Students benefit from a wide range of additional training opportunities, such as manufacturers' workshops and visits to external events. There are particularly good progression routes into a range of HE courses. Employment opportunities are good and many students achieve an employment skills qualification. Most students undertake work placements, which provide valuable opportunities to develop their skills and knowledge.

Leadership and management

96. Managers have started to address weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report, particularly in relation to retention and pass rates. Management of practical assessments is poor and as a result students are making slow progress. There is poor management of the work-based learning curriculum. Co-ordination between the college and the workplace is ineffective.

Health, care and public services



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

Strengths

- high pass rates on the GNVQ health and social care and counselling courses

- effective links between theory and practice

- good achievement of additional qualifications by full-time students.

Weaknesses

- poor retention rates on some courses

- insufficient attention to the individual learning needs of students

- low pass rates on the national diploma course in public services.

Scope of provision

97. The college provides a wide range of full-time courses in care and early years education from level 1 to degree level courses validated by the University of Plymouth. There are currently 81 full-time and 24 part-time students on care and early years programmes funded by the LSC. There are

70 students following part-time courses in counselling and 11 students enrolled on the national diploma course in public services. The full-time students are predominantly aged 16 to 18 and the part-time students aged 19 and over.

Achievement and standards

98. There are some good pass rates on courses at all levels, but retention rates on a number of courses are below national averages. In 2003, the retention rate on the national certificate early years course has continued to decline and retention rates on the first diploma early years course and the national diploma course in health studies are below national averages. There are good retention rates, but there is some slow progress in achieving NVQs at levels 2 and 3 in care, which are provided through a franchised partnership.

99. There is good progression from levels 1 and 2 to higher-level courses and from level 3 to related employment and HE. In 2002, 91% of students who achieved the national diploma in early years and 90% of students who achieved the national diploma in health studies progressed to HE or to vocationally related employment.

100. There are good pass rates on a wide range of additional courses taken by full-time students, including those leading to qualifications in first aid, food hygiene and counselling skills.

101. The standard of students' work in most lessons is good. The students' contributions to class discussion indicate a thorough understanding of vocational issues. National diploma students maturely discussed issues relating to the protection of young children from abuse. The students following a level 4 course for managers skilfully identified how a range of government initiatives would influence the services they provided. In counselling skills lessons, students worked with care applying good practice within a clear and explicit ethical framework.

102. Students at all levels are able to apply theoretical concepts to practical health and care issues. The foundation and intermediate GNVQ students and the national diploma students are able to discuss and make clear notes on how a range of socio-economic factors may effect the health and well being of individuals and communities. Students on the counselling skills course are able to apply introductory theory to their skills practice in lessons.

A sample of retention and pass rates in health, care and public services, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
GNVQ foundation health and social care	1	No. of starts	17	10	7
		% retention	65	80	43
		% pass rate	82	71	100
GNVQ intermediate health and social care	2	No. of starts	19	17	18
		% retention	84	88	89
		% pass rate	94	73	81
National diploma in early years	3	No. of starts	15	14	15
		% retention	73	86	73
		% pass rate	100	75	67
National diploma in public services	3	No. of starts	17	16	13
		% retention	47	69	46
		% pass rate	88	91	50
National certificate in	3	No. of starts	10	15	7

early years		% retention	70	53	57
		% pass rate	80	100	100
Advanced certificate in therapeutic counselling	3	No. of starts	20	12	7
		% retention	85	92	100
		% pass rate	94	73	100

Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

Quality of education and training

103. Lessons are carefully planned and well matched to course requirements. Some schemes of work, however, lack detail, and are little more than lists of topics to be covered, with little reference to the range of teaching and assessment methods or resources to be used.

104. In some lessons, teachers rely too heavily on questions directed at the whole group to reinforce learning. In a minority of lessons, students spent too much time copying notes from overhead projector slides. In these lessons, individual students' understanding of the subject matter was not carefully checked.

105. In several effective lessons, students used ICT to find policy documents and other sources of information to support their research. First diploma students used the Internet to find out about childhood illnesses. Links between theory and practice are appropriately emphasised. Teachers draw on their professional experience in nursing, counselling and in the mental health services to illustrate theoretical issues. A student on work placement was able to describe how knowledge and understanding gained on college-based courses had been valuable at work. She referred specifically to college work on children's diet and health, creative studies and to the professional practice unit.

106. Staff are well qualified and have considerable vocational experience in the health and care services, but many are inexperienced teachers. There is a well-planned and systematic mentoring programme to support unqualified and inexperienced teachers, but this has not fully overcome the weaknesses in the teaching.

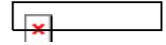
107. The library resources in health and care are good, but students do not have adequate access to ICT and make insufficient use of ICT in the preparation and presentation of assignments.

108. Students speak highly of the academic and personal support they receive from teachers. Tutorials take place regularly and are well structured. Individual learning plans are agreed, clear targets are set, and progress towards previously agreed targets is reviewed. Any additional learning needs of full-time and part-time students are carefully identified. Adapted computers are made available to students with epilepsy, students who are dyslexic or dyspraxic are supported during lessons and additional time in examinations is arranged when required.

Leadership and management

109. Management of the curriculum area is satisfactory. Team meetings are held regularly, but the records of some meetings are insufficiently detailed and fail to specify clear timescales for implementing decisions. Clear targets are set for all courses and progress towards them is monitored by teachers and managers. The self-assessment report lacks detail and pays insufficient attention to students' achievements and the quality of teaching, training and learning. There is no action plan to address the weaknesses identified. Internal verification is systematic and thorough. Internal verifiers give clear and focused feedback to assessors. The verification processes have been used constructively to provide support and assistance to new teachers.

Visual and performing arts



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

Strengths

- high pass rates on full-time level 3 courses

- very good teaching

- high standard of students' work

- good rates of progression to HE

- wide range of additional learning activities.

Weaknesses

- low retention rates on some part-time courses

- low achievement on part-time Open College Network (OCN) courses

- poor pass rates in key skills tests in 2002.

Scope of provision

110. There is a wide range of full-time courses at level 3 including courses leading to national diplomas in communication design, three-dimensional design (with a unique media make-up option), fine art and textiles, foundation studies, and performing arts and drama. There is a good range of life-long learning courses in a range of skills including textiles, photography and printmaking. The college also offers HE courses at Higher National Diploma (HND) foundation degree and degree level. These provide progression opportunities, and there are examples of students beginning on level 1 part-time courses and progressing to HE study. There are currently 275 full-time students, of which 38 are aged 19 or over. There are 547 part-time students and all but 2 are adult students.

Achievement and standards

111. Students demonstrate very high levels of practical craft skills and they develop and apply sophisticated ideas in art and design. The work of graphic design students is particularly impressive. There is good practical and written work in performing arts. In a performing arts lesson, students learned how to incorporate underlying emotions and body language to add depth and range to characterisation and performance. Through a series of small group improvisations performed to the whole class it was possible to see students' skills grow and flourish.

112. Students on all courses show a very mature and independent attitude to their work. There is a good attitude to study, and original research of materials and media. The standards of finish and presentation are high.

113. Pass rates on full-time level 3 courses are at or above national averages. Four courses achieved 100% pass rates in 2002 and two courses achieved pass rates of 96% and 94%. Retention rates on some part-time courses are poor. Courses in photography, ceramics, textiles, creative studies and part-time foundation studies were 30% below national averages in 2002. During 2001/02, 295 students started on a level 2 OCN course, but only 19 achieved the qualification. In 2002, 162 students started the course and only 45 achieved the qualification. The college is reorganising these courses to help improve retention rates.

114. Progression rates to HE are good. In 2002, 69% of all level 3 students went on to HE, 22% of these students progressed to HE courses in the college.

115. The pass rates in key skills tests are unsatisfactory with average pass rates in 2002 of 10% in IT and 18% for communication.

A sample of retention and pass rates in visual and performing arts, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
GNVQ intermediate in art and design	2	No. of starts	17	16	12
		% retention	69	75	92
		% pass rate	73	83	73
NOCN general art and design courses	2	No. of starts	*	295	164
		% retention	*	58	85
		% pass rate	*	11	28
National diploma in performing arts/drama	3	No. of starts	36	24	17
		% retention	79	87	71
		% pass rate	77	95	100
National diploma foundation studies art and design	3	No. of starts	55	59	54
		% retention	91	95	91
		% pass rate	96	100	94
National diploma in communication design	3	No. of starts	23	25	23
		% retention	87	72	87
		% pass rate	100	100	100
National diploma general art and design/fine art	3	No. of starts	44	40	36
		% retention	72	70	64
		% pass rate	87	75	96

National diploma foundation art and design part time	3	No. of starts	9	6	14
		% retention	44	100	36
		% pass rate	100	67	100

Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

* course did not run

Quality of education and training

116. Teaching is very good. The lessons are well planned and take account of students' individual needs. Most teachers are skilled artists or performers. Adult students learn from the specialist craft skills and experience of their teachers, and gain confidence in their own work. The innovative and challenging project briefs used across the courses for full-time students list tasks and assessment criteria and include useful handouts to stimulate learning. Students are encouraged to research project topics thoroughly, and to make frequent references to contemporary and historical ideas in art and design. The teaching on the GNVQ intermediate art and design course is of a high standard. The learning materials have been very carefully prepared in terms of language and style to meet the needs of level 2 students. There is a wide range of additional learning opportunities available for students. All students at level 3 in art and design take additional qualifications in basic art and design skills. There is an extensive range of trips and visits including overseas trips to France, New York and Berlin and there is a programme of visiting lecturers and exhibitions of work.

117. Students are supported well in their studies. There is extra support in the classroom for students with additional needs and very effective tutorial support. There are regular group and individual tutorials. Much of the teaching in art and design is one-to-one and records of these meetings contribute to students' individual learning plans.

118. Assessment on all courses is thorough. Teachers' written feedback to students is detailed and supportive. The regular use of group critiques encourages students to develop their confidence in talking about their work and using of specialist vocabulary. The progress of part-time adult students is thoroughly documented by the teachers.

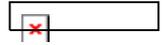
119. The access course is isolated and narrow in focus. Access students are not introduced to basic skills such as photography and computer image manipulation. There are no level 2 courses in performing arts or media.

120. The accommodation is of a high standard. There is a good range of specialist workshops dedicated to specific crafts. The facilities are well managed by support staff. The new visual and performing arts integrated learning centre provides an excellent resource with very good IT hardware and software, a slide bank and a good range of books and journals. This facility is well used by all students who get valuable help from the support staff. The Bishops Hull site for performing arts is isolated from the main college site and has only very basic facilities and no stage.

Leadership and management

121. Management of the curriculum area is good. Staff and managers work closely together to identify strengths and weaknesses and implement effective plans for improvement. The transformation of the buildings to create the integrated learning centre, mezzanine and new reception area was achieved while maintaining the quality of teaching and learning. There is a clear curriculum development plan for the division created in close consultation with all staff. Managers have worked to improve the range of courses. Staff are directly involved in the quality assurance process at course and strategic levels. Annual quality reviews have been augmented by mid-year reviews and this has led to improvements in the courses.

Humanities



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

Strengths

- high pass rates on sociology and access courses in 2002
- thorough understanding of research methods by students
- well-designed course materials
- strong tutorial support
- effective management of humanities.

Weaknesses

- unsatisfactory retention rates on GCSE and GCE AS/A-level courses
- insufficient attention to students' differing abilities and needs in some lessons
- poor assessment practices
- ineffective teaching and assessing of key skills on level 3 courses
- some unsatisfactory accommodation.

Scope of provision

122. The college provides GCE AS and GCE A-level courses in psychology, sociology, law, history, ancient history, geography and archaeology, and GCSE courses in general studies and sociology. Most students are aged 16 to 19, apart from a small group of adults who study GCE AS psychology in the evening. At the time of inspection, there were approximately 50 enrolments on GCE A-level, 135 on GCE AS and 35 on GCSE courses. In 2002/03, a low proportion of students progressed from GCE AS to A-level humanities courses. Three GCE A-level classes have three or fewer students. The access to HE course in humanities and social sciences includes history, archaeology, psychology and sociology. It caters for 25 adult students. There are no level 2 courses for adult students.

Achievement and standards

123. The standard of work done in lessons is generally high. Most humanities students express their knowledge and understanding with clarity and confidence. Higher attaining students, including many adults, ask thoughtful questions or make perceptive observations about the subjects they are studying. In psychology and sociology lessons, students on access, GCE AS and A-level courses are able to analyse and evaluate the effectiveness of different methods used in psychological studies or sociological research. In contrast, in a revision lesson, GCSE sociology students had difficulty in defining basic concepts about the family. The standard of students' written work is at least satisfactory. The best examples display a depth of understanding and fluent expression.

124. Pass rates on most courses have improved. In 2002, pass rates were particularly good for adults on the access course and for students aged 16 to 18 on sociology courses, where the proportion of students with high grades significantly exceeded national averages. Whilst retention rates for younger students improved between 2001 and 2002, they remained below national averages. At the time of inspection, college data suggested that retention rates for GCSE students had risen steeply and that high retention rates had been maintained on the access course. At GCE AS and A level, improvement is patchy with retention rates approaching, but still somewhat below national averages. Attendance at lessons during inspection was good for students aged 16 to 18 and satisfactory for adult students.

A sample of retention and pass rates in humanities, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
GCSE sociology	2	No. of starts	20	22	21
		% retention	60	36	52
		% pass rate	75	50	64
GCE A-level psychology (1 year)	3	No. of starts	17	20	13
		% retention	88	45	85
		% pass rate	33	78	91
GCE AS psychology	3	No. of starts	*	31	53
		% retention	*	68	76
		% pass rate	*	86	73
GCE AS sociology	3	No. of starts	*	21	27
		% retention	*	57	85
		% pass rate	*	83	96
GCE AS history	3	No. of starts	*	20	32
		% retention	*	60	59
		% pass rate	*	75	83
Access to HE	3	No. of starts	35	18	14

(humanities/ social science)	% retention	89	50	93
	% pass rate	70	67	100

Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

* course not running

Quality of education and training

125. Teaching is good or better in most lessons. Students are interested and responsive. They are encouraged to clarify their understanding through discussion. In many lessons, explicit learning objectives are translated into activities that help to deepen students' understanding and provide practice in appropriate skills. In a GCSE general studies lesson, students were intrigued by a quiz using artefacts and images designed to help them understand the nature of truth. Students made good use of this understanding when they compared different newspapers' treatment of the same story. In less effective lessons, students make slow progress in their learning because they are given insufficiently demanding tasks. Teachers do not adapt methods of teaching and learning to meet the needs of students when the group is very small or consists of a mixture of adult and younger students. The arrangements for teaching and assessing key skills are effective for the small group of full-time GCSE students aged 16 to 18, but are ineffective for students aged 16 to 18 on GCE AS and A-level courses.

126. Assessment in the humanities is of variable quality. It is more consistently effective on GCSE and access courses than on GCE AS and A-level courses, where teachers work in relative isolation. Here, assessment practice ranges from good to poor. Some teachers do not provide enough opportunities for suitable assessment. They do not define the grading criteria or provide adequate explanations of how work can be improved. Reports used to review students' progress on GCE AS and A-level courses are poorly designed. They do not provide sufficient space for teachers' comments. Students have regular meetings with their teachers to review progress. These meetings are well structured and purposeful. Issues are carefully explored. Action plans are helpful and suitably recorded.

127. Humanities teachers are appropriately qualified. Students appreciate the enthusiasm and depth of knowledge that their teachers display. Appraisal and staff development are beginning to have an impact on improving the quality of teaching and learning, but they have not yet eliminated some poor practice. Teachers produce well-devised learning resources. These include attractive handbooks covering course content, related tasks and advice. In geography, handouts for homework are well structured and enable students to work productively on their own. In the integrated learning centre, staff provide helpful and wide-ranging assistance to individual students. However, the amount of space for private study is inadequate and some of the books are out of date and little used. Whilst humanities students are directed by teachers to specific web sites, the wider use of ILT is undeveloped. Most teaching of humanities students takes place in huts or in accommodation shared with an unrelated area of the curriculum. They have been brightened by some attractive displays but lack computers or interactive whiteboards and are unsuitable for some learning activities.

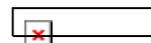
128. Initial advice and guidance are effective in meeting the needs of students, in particular those on GCSE and access courses. Careers advice provided by the college careers service is poorly regarded by students, who turn instead to their teachers who offer helpful and often detailed advice. GCSE students receive good careers guidance during group tutorials and individually. Additional learning support is effectively provided to individual students in lessons or by specialist support officers outside lessons. Students' attendance, in particular that of students aged 16 to 18, is carefully monitored and action is taken in response to poor attendance. There is effective liaison between teachers and the student support officer responsible for monitoring attendance.

Leadership and management

129. The provision is effectively led and managed. The systems for monitoring courses and the

performance of staff are thorough. Self-assessment has identified weaknesses. Action taken to address them is leading to improvements in students' attendance, retention and pass rates, and in the consistency of tutorial support and guidance. Recent initiatives to improve the quality of teaching and learning are having some effect, but more remains to be done. There is insufficient sharing of good practice, in particular amongst GCE AS and A-level teachers. The college has been slow to introduce a system to compare students' achievements on GCE AS and A-level courses with what would be predicted on the basis of their GCSE performance. Equality of opportunity is effectively promoted in the way humanities students are recruited and taught. At programme level, management is generally good, but poor timetabling and the use of unsuitable teaching accommodation have had an adverse impact on some students.

Provision for students with learning difficulties and or disabilities



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

Strengths

- students' good achievements

- good teaching and learning

- strong external links

- effective widening of participation

- very good support for most students.

Weaknesses

- ineffective management of support staff not directly employed by the college.

Scope of provision

130. The college provides a range of full-time and part-time courses for school leavers and adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. There are 28 full-time or part-time students aged 16 to 18. The pre-entry course for these students lasts two years and the entry course is a one-year programme to prepare them for entry to mainstream college courses or employment. Most students work towards achievement of the essential skills award. There are 109 adults following a range of

full-time and part-time courses. Link programmes are provided for local schools and there are very good partnership arrangements with schools, social services, care homes and the local National Health Service trust. Innovative specialist courses are provided for adults with an acquired brain injury and those with profound and complex difficulties and/or disabilities. Successful students are trained as 'recruiters' for other potential students. Another short course provides training in appointment selection strategies.

Achievement and standards

131. Students aged 16 to 18 follow programmes leading to the essential skills award and, in addition, most work towards a key skills award at level 1. Most adult students on the OCN course achieve one or more units and others are successful in achieving the college's own award. In addition, many students have achieved basic food hygiene certificates.

132. Students make good progress towards their individual learning goals. These goals are negotiated with each student and are designed to be challenging, focusing on achieving independence and making progress in standards of behaviour. These personal goals are reviewed at weekly tutorials. The college is particularly successful in supporting students with challenging behaviour. Students on the course for adults with acquired brain injury make significant gains in confidence and the recovery of lost linguistic skills.

133. The college is successful in preparing entry-level students to progress on to mainstream vocational courses. Of twelve leavers in 2002, six progressed to NVQ level 1 courses within the college, three started other courses at Somerset College or other colleges, two went into employment and only one had an unknown destination. Students attend a wide range of practical courses in specialist college facilities. These include painting and decorating, hairdressing and beauty therapy, cookery, gardening, pottery and printmaking. Lessons taking place in the integrated learning centre are very successful. Students work successfully alongside other users, despite the bustle and background noise of a large and well-used centre.

134. Attainment is good. Students are able to listen to directions, follow simple instructions, support each other when appropriate and describe activities they have undertaken. In tutorials, they are able to reflect on their courses and make judgements on their performance and that of their teachers.

Quality of education and training

135. Most teaching is good or better. Schemes of work are detailed and planning for lessons and activities is good. Most teachers include specific planning to meet individual needs into their lesson plans.

136. Students are enthusiastic about their learning. They are able to remain focused on challenging tasks for 20 to 30 minutes. When some students find this difficult, carefully directed learning facilitators provide support.

137. Students with sensory, physical, mental health and other needs receive good technical and personal support that enables them to study alongside other students. The college has very effective strategies for supporting students with communication difficulties. Many teachers and learning facilitators have been trained to use these strategies.

138. The progress and achievement of some adult students with severe learning difficulties and/or disabilities is not satisfactory. Some staff employed by other organisations, external to the college, accompany students to lessons as part of an agreed support package. Most of these staff do not have the technical competence to fulfil this role. In one computer lesson, much of the teacher's time was taken in improving the skills of the support staff who otherwise would not have been able to help the students.

139. Students aged 16 to 18 negotiate their individual learning plans around the requirements of the essential skills award. The targets for this award are primarily related to developing independence

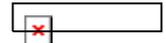
and social skills. The targets agreed are appropriate to the needs of the students and are applied across each curriculum area. Individual learning plans for adult students, most of whom are part time, are more focused on the achievement of qualifications. All plans contain sufficient detail to measure progress and are reviewed on a regular basis.

140. Teachers are well qualified as well as being skilled and experienced at working with students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Staff bring a broad range of additional skills and training to their work. They establish good working relationships with students and give them timely and effective personal support. Staff who support the course for adults with acquired brain injury all received multi-disciplinary training before the start of the course.

Leadership and management

141. There is a commitment to social inclusion throughout the college. This commitment is demonstrated by the creation of a number of innovative courses that have attracted students who might not otherwise have thought of attending college. There are thorough procedures for checking and validating students' progress. These procedures are also used to provide feedback to staff on aspects of teaching and learning. The management of the small number of support staff not directly employed by the college is not satisfactory.

Literacy and numeracy, and English for speakers of other languages



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

Strengths

- effective use of individual learning plans

- good use of open learning workshops

- good teaching on adult literacy and numeracy courses

- effective use of ILT in teaching

- good links with community partners

- effective initial assessment of students on adult literacy and numeracy courses.

Weaknesses

- low pass rates on basic adult literacy and numeracy courses
- inadequate quality assurance of adult basic literacy, numeracy and ESOL.

Scope of provision

142. The college has introduced the new national qualifications for adult literacy and numeracy at levels 1 and 2 and also provides courses in ESOL. At the time of the inspection, 246 students were enrolled on literacy courses, 180 on numeracy courses and 63 on ESOL courses. The majority were adults. The college offers courses on the main campus, at the Staplegrove centre and in 12 community locations such as the library, the women's refuge centre and church halls. Currently, the college is working with employers to raise the literacy and numeracy skills of employees. Training is also provided through open learning workshops, literacy and numeracy support in the integrated learning centres and online training. In 2002/03, 277 students were identified as needing additional learning support.

Achievement and standards

143. There have been poor pass rates on basic adult literacy and numeracy courses. However, pass rates on the new adult literacy and numeracy tests this year are very good at 89% for literacy level 1, 100% for literacy level 2 and 93% for numeracy level 1. Retention rates are generally satisfactory.

144. Students make steady progress through the small steps of learning identified in their individual learning plans towards the achievement of what, in many cases, is their first qualification. The achievements help to improve students' confidence and self-esteem. For example, a classroom assistant now understands the mathematical concepts of ratio and mean and is able to use this understanding in her support role at school. Other students have gained the confidence to apply for a job, to help with their children's homework, or to speak up at work.

A sample of retention and pass rates in literacy and numeracy, and English for speakers of other languages, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
OCN basic literacy 1 year	pre-entry	No. of starts	493	294	175
		% retention	85	88	76
		% pass rate	67	239	47
OCN basic literacy short	pre-entry	No. of starts	39	57	49
		% retention	79	88	84
		% pass rate	67	33	32
ABE basic literacy	pre-entry	No. of starts	*	199	236
		% retention	*	82	76
		% pass rate	*	88	42
ABE numeracy	pre-entry	No. of starts	*	97	122
		% retention	*	70	73

		% pass rate	*	93	54
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Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

* course did not run

Quality of education and training

145. There is much good teaching. Most lessons are well planned and organised and include a good balance of individual and group work. Teachers use information from students' initial assessments to help them set appropriate targets. They use skilful questioning to check students' understanding. A set of readers has been produced for entry-level adult literacy students, as appropriate texts at this level are difficult to find. A wide range of strategies and materials to integrate speaking, listening, reading and writing are used with ESOL students.

146. There is effective initial assessment of students on literacy and numeracy courses, leading to the agreement of long and medium term targets which are recorded in the students' individual learning plans. Students receive good oral and written feedback on their progress towards these targets. Initial assessment for ESOL students is less well developed and the targets they are set are not always sufficiently challenging. As a result, some students on ESOL courses do not progress as rapidly as they might.

147. The open learning workshop is used effectively. The room has good learning resource materials and a range of ILT resources including specialist software, which interest and motivate the students. Experienced staff help students to develop the skills identified on their individual learning plans. The temporary classrooms used for some ESOL lessons are bare and poorly furnished and do not contain all the necessary resources. Effective use is made of ILT in most literacy and numeracy lessons and students enjoy working on the computers.

148. There are good links with community partners. A number of projects have widened participation, including work with parents, in the library, in care homes, in a women's refuge and with a local employer who arranged for production workers and team leaders to study towards national certificates at levels 1 and 2. The company reports that staff who were successful have improved in confidence.

Leadership and management

149. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The provision is managed within the division of student entitlement. This new structure provides an appropriate location for the developing work in adult literacy, numeracy, ESOL and additional learning support. Teachers are involved in planning and reviewing provision, and contribute to marketing and quality assurance through attendance at meetings and informal discussion. There is inadequate monitoring of progress towards individual targets and insufficient learning materials to ensure a consistent quality of teaching across all literacy, numeracy and ESOL programmes. There is insufficient dissemination of good practice between basic skills and ESOL staff.

Part D: College data

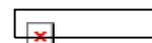


Table 1: Enrolments by level of study and age

Level	16-18%	19+%
1	12	25
2	52	41
3	28	14
4/5	0	1
Other	8	19
Total	100	100

Source: provided by the college in 2003

Table 2: Enrolments by curriculum area and age

Curriculum area	16-18 No.	19+ No.	Total Enrolments %
Science and mathematics	768	1,038	8
Land-based provision	74	386	2
Construction	181	474	3
Engineering, technology and manufacture	479	276	3
Business administration, management and professional	322	1,139	7
Information and communication technology	1,133	3,393	20
Retailing, customer service and transportation	6	85	0
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	651	826	7
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	356	174	2
Health, social care and public services	505	4,842	24
Visual and performing arts and media	616	993	7
Humanities	415	899	6
English, languages and communication	909	329	5
Foundation programmes	538	781	6
Total	6,953	15,635	100

Source: provided by the college in 2003

Table 3: Retention and achievement

Level (Long Courses)	Retention and pass rate	Completion year					
		16-18			19+		
		1999	2000	2001	1999	2000	2001
1	Starters excluding transfers	695	529	304	2,557	838	1,782
	Retention rate	81	85	77	91	81	72
	National average	80	80	79	78	78	78
	Pass rate	66	76	66	51	63	47
	National average	59	65	68	60	66	68
2	Starters excluding transfers	1,101	1,082	1,108	1,790	1,236	2,441
	Retention rate	72	77	71	82	66	58
	National average	76	76	76	79	79	78
	Pass rate	60	58	69	72	68	43
	National average	65	66	69	62	65	69
3	Starters excluding transfers	999	975	1,166	1,008	903	963
	Retention rate	72	73	73	76	76	76
	National average	75	76	77	78	78	78
	Pass rate	79	74	76	71	62	76
	National average	72	74	76	62	66	69
4/5	Starters excluding transfers	48	25	40	279	256	141
	Retention rate	94	100	85	75	77	86
	National average	83	79	82	84	81	84
	Pass rate	31	92	71	78	69	63
	National average	64	66	55	56	56	53

Note: summary of retention and achievement for the last three years by age and level of course, compared against national averages for colleges of the same type (that is general FE/tertiary colleges or sixth form colleges).

Sources of information:

1. National averages: Benchmarking Data 1999 to 2001: Retention and Achievement Rates in Further Education Colleges in England, Learning and Skills Council, September 2002.

2. College rates for 1999 to 2002: College ISR.

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

Courses	Teaching judged to be:			No of sessions observed
	Good or better %	Satisfactory %	Less than satisfactory %	
Level 3 (advanced)	64	28	8	103
Level 2 (intermediate)	74	23	3	57
Level 1 (foundation)	56	44	0	18
Other sessions	81	16	3	38
Totals	69	26	5	216

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