

East Devon College

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1998-99**

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL**

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

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

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Grade Descriptors

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

Audit conclusions are expressed as good, adequate or weak.

Aggregated grades for aspects of cross-college provision and curriculum areas, for colleges inspected during 1997-98, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1	2	3	4	5
	%	%	%	%	%
Curriculum areas	9	60	29	2	-
Cross-college provision	18	54	24	4	-

Source: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1997-98: Chief inspector's annual report*
Sample size: 108 college inspections

Student Achievements

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

- as expected completions, which is the number of initial enrolments on qualifications where the student expected to complete the qualification in a given year. For example, a student on a two-year programme who began their programme in October 1995, would appear in the results for 1996-97 because this is the year in which they expected to complete their qualification
- as a retention rate, which is the percentage of qualifications which the students have completed as expected (or are continuing with the prospect of late completion). For programmes of study of two years or more, retention is calculated across the whole programme, that is, from the start to the end of the qualification
- as an achievement rate, which is the number of qualifications students have fully achieved as a percentage of completed qualifications with a known outcome. Partial achievements are not shown.

Summary

East Devon College

South West Region

Inspected March 1999

East Devon College is a tertiary college in the town of Tiverton in mid-Devon. The self-assessment process involved most full-time teaching staff, but many key support staff, governors and the college's collaborative partners were not involved. The corporation did not approve the college's self-assessment report before its receipt by the FEFC. The self-assessment made little use of evidence drawn from lesson observations and the analysis of students' achievements. Inspectors identified many key weaknesses not included in the report. The significance of the weaknesses identified by inspectors led them to lower grades awarded by the college in seven out of the 10 areas inspected.

The inspection covered aspects of cross-college provision and work in five of the nine programme areas offered by the college. Prospective students are well informed about the range of courses and opportunities available. Students benefit from some good teaching and good individual support from tutors. Recent restructuring has clarified management roles. Achievements on some courses are above the national average. Since the last inspection, the college has made insufficient progress in addressing the many significant issues it faces. Delays in appointing a new principal resulted in an 18 month period of uncertain leadership.

The college should develop a clear strategy to address key issues, including declining enrolments and small class sizes. It should improve: retention and achievement rates in some subjects; the links between financial, strategic and operational planning; some important aspects of governance; quality assurance and self-assessment procedures; the monitoring of learning support; the range of books and other learning resources for some courses; and the use and planning of accommodation.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Science, mathematics and computing	3	Support for students	2
Business	2	General resources	3
Art, design and media studies	2	Quality assurance	4
Humanities	4	Governance	4
Basic education	3	Management	4

Context

The College and its Mission

1 East Devon College is a tertiary college serving mid and east Devon. The main campus is located on the outskirts of the town of Tiverton. It shares the site and some common facilities with Tiverton High School, an 11 to 16 school, since a local reorganisation in 1992. The college has a base for adult basic education in Bampton Street near to Tiverton town centre and a training centre in the town of Honiton, 20 miles from the main campus. The college has a largely rural catchment area which includes the mid-Devon towns of Tiverton, Cullompton and Uffculme and the towns of Honiton, Axminster, Ottery St Mary and Crediton in east Devon.

2 The total population of the mid and east Devon area is 144,000 with 17,500 living in Tiverton. The local economy relies heavily on manufacturing and land-based industries, including agriculture and quarrying. The largest employers are a textile manufacturer and a meat processing company. The number of jobs in the service sector is growing. Overall unemployment rates are low and falling. Unemployment in the Tiverton area is currently 3.2%, lower than the south-west region figure of 3.9%. The average income for the area is below the national figure and there are significant pockets of rural deprivation. In mid Devon, 1% of the population are from minority ethnic backgrounds.

3 The number of 16-year-old school-leavers in the area served by the college is predicted to rise over the next five years, but competition for school-leavers is intense. Tiverton high school has approximately 1,240 students. Year 11 student progression from this school to the college is 35% while the post-16 continuation rate for Devon is 71%. Other post-16 providers in the area include seven 11 to 18 schools. The nearest further education sector colleges are Exeter College, 15 miles to the south-west and Somerset College of Arts and Technology and The Richard Huish College 20 miles to the

north-east at Taunton. There are various training organisations which also operate within the area.

4 The college offers a range of courses in nine of the 10 Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) programme areas. It is committed to sustaining a wide range of courses to meet the needs of the local community and has developed a number of specialist courses, particularly at advanced level, and in higher education, which attract students from outside the immediate area. The highest number of enrolments are in health and community care, science and business. At January 1999, the college had 4,004 students on roll of whom 73% were aged 19 and over. Of these 4,004 students, 70% are on courses funded by the FEFC. The college anticipates that approximately 1,200 additional students will be enrolled before July 1999 on short courses, and collaborative and community provision. Higher education courses offered in collaboration with the University of Plymouth include degree level provision in health care, social work and tourism management. The college has exceeded its reducing funding targets for the past three years. The college provides training programmes funded by the Devon and Cornwall Training and Enterprise Council (TEC). Recently, European links have been established and in 1998 24 Danish students were recruited on to a new international tourism course.

5 The college works with its local communities to generate greater opportunities for access to education and training. Collaborative links have been established with local industry, schools and social services. Links with local employers have been formally established through advisory committees. A number of regionally-based training organisations and community groups are involved with the college to develop initiatives in inclusive learning and widening participation. The college also provides training in information technology (IT) for companies on a regional and national basis.

Context

6 The college employs 190 full-time equivalent staff, of whom 97 are teachers and a further 30 directly support teaching. There was a restructuring of college management during 1998, and the current senior management structure has been in place since September 1998. A new principal was appointed in December 1998. In addition to the principal, the senior management team comprises the vice-principal and two assistant principals responsible for curriculum and finance, respectively. There are seven middle managers, four of whom have responsibility for all the education provision provided by the college.

7 The mission of the college is 'to promote a continuing improvement in learning programmes that will maximise students' achievements and contribute to the prosperity of the local economy'. The college aims to achieve its mission through ensuring medium and long-term solvency, developing a highly professional and motivated workforce, enhancing its position within the local community, embracing collaborative initiatives and lifelong learning, and striving to improve quality and standards to ensure students have a fulfilling and rewarding educational experience.

The Inspection

8 The college was inspected during the week commencing 8 March 1999. The inspection team had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and studied information about the college held by other directorates of the FEFC. The college was notified of the sample of its provision to be inspected approximately three months before the inspection. The inspection was carried out by 11 inspectors and an auditor working for a total of 50 days in the college. Two inspectors also spent four days inspecting collaborative provision in computing and business. This accounts for 18% of the college's total provision. Inspectors observed 81 lessons, examined students' work and inspected college documents.

They met with college governors, managers, staff, students and representatives of external groups and organisations. Inspectors used data on students' achievements derived from the college's individualised student record (ISR) returns to the FEFC for 1996 and 1997. The college submitted its own data on students' achievements for 1998. These data were checked by inspectors against primary sources of evidence, such as registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies and were found to be generally reliable.

9 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1997-98. Of the 81 lessons observed, 60% were judged to be good or outstanding and 7% less than satisfactory. This compares with averages of 65% and 6%, respectively, for all lessons observed during 1997-98.

Context

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	4	13	8	2	0	27
GCSE	0	1	2	0	0	3
GNVQ	2	4	1	0	0	7
Intermediate vocational	1	7	2	0	0	10
Advanced vocational	4	7	5	2	0	18
Other, including basic education	0	5	9	2	0	16
Total (No.)	11	37	27	6	0	81
Total (%)	14	46	33	7	0	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1997-98 (%)	19	46	29	6	0	100

Source for national average: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1997-98: Chief inspector's annual report*

10 The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1997-98.

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
East Devon College	9.1	81
National average, all inspected colleges 1997-98	10.4	77

Source for national average: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1997-98: Chief inspector's annual report*

Curriculum Areas

Science, Mathematics and Computing

Grade 3

11 Inspectors observed 15 lessons covering the range of sciences, mathematics, computing and IT courses offered by the college, including collaborative provision. The self-assessment report identified some strengths and weaknesses in the provision, but did not place sufficient emphasis on teaching and learning and students' achievements. Inspectors identified further key strengths and weaknesses not included in the report.

Key strengths

- effective and well-planned teaching
- high success rates on introductory IT programmes in collaborative provision
- accessible and good-quality computing facilities

Weaknesses

- poor retention and achievement rates on some courses
- small numbers on many courses
- inadequate review strategies to improve provision

12 Most teaching is effective and well planned, a strength not identified in the college's self-assessment report. Teachers use an appropriate variety of activities to hold students' attention. They apply question and answer techniques effectively to challenge students' assumptions and to check their learning. There is a balance between theoretical and practical work in science and computing lessons, and most practical work is well organised. Many schemes of work only itemise topics and make little reference to activities to assist learning or strategies to deal with a range of ability levels.

In a few lessons, teachers fail to involve students sufficiently in the work and do not encourage them to participate through questioning and discussion. Links with employers and work experience are not developed sufficiently to enhance the learning experience of students studying general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) or the first diploma.

13 Most students work diligently during lessons. Those completing vocationally-based assignments are given suitable opportunities to develop key skills. However, insufficient use is made of IT to extend students' experience in science and mathematics lessons and assignments. There is no planned strategy to develop key skills for students on GCE A level and general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) courses. Teachers set an appropriate range of coursework and homework. Students' work is generally marked accurately. In most cases, detailed written feedback helps students to make improvements in their work. Most students receive good individual support from their teachers both in and out of lessons, which they value.

14 Students' achievements in science, mathematics and computing are erratic. The college identified the need to increase retention in its self-assessment report. There have been poor retention rates on GCE A level and the national diploma in computing. The pass rate in GCE A level chemistry was 100% in 1998, but the retention rate fell to 47%. Over the last three years, achievement rates have improved and retention rates have declined for the six GCE A level subjects, but both are lower than the national average. Many students on the first diploma in IT applications complete the course, but the number achieving the full diploma has fallen over the last three years. Pass rates on GCSE mathematics courses have risen over the last three years, but retention has fallen to below 70%. There are good retention and achievement rates for adult students taking computer literacy and IT programmes delivered

Curriculum Areas

by two of the college's collaborative partners. One centre operates a bookable 'drop-in' facility and 69% of the students successfully achieved the qualification within a four-month period.

15 The recent management reorganisation has begun to effect improvements to the management of courses including the introduction of team meetings. IT programmes delivered by collaborative partners are effectively monitored. However, there are few curriculum links with teachers covering similar provision in the college. There is little teamworking among staff and few opportunities exist to share good practice. Improvement is impeded by weak course review and self-assessment processes. Classroom observation is at an early stage of development.

16 Equipment for courses in science and mathematics is adequate. Resources for computing and IT are good, although there is no local area computer network to support theoretical aspects of the first diploma course. Students have good access to IT facilities outside timetabled lessons for their practical work, a strength recognised in the self-assessment report. Access to the internet is widely available and increasingly used by students. In mathematics lessons, students regularly make effective use of graphical calculators. Students are provided with appropriate text books on most courses. However, many of the science, mathematics and computing books held in the library are out of date and there have been few new additions in the last two years.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in science, mathematics and computing, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GCSE mathematics	2	Expected completions	117	67	94
		Retention (%)	72	76	66
		Achievement (%)	30	43	50
RSA computer literacy and information technology short courses	2	Expected completions	31	26	289
		Retention (%)	87	100	94
		Achievement (%)	41	94	61
RSA computer literacy and information technology long courses	2	Expected completions	163	211	243
		Retention (%)	79	81	79
		Achievement (%)	86	95	52
First diploma in IT applications	2	Expected completions	26	13	16
		Retention (%)	86	85	81
		Achievement (%)	75	55	54
GCE A levels in science, mathematics and computing	3	Expected completions	106	95	116
		Retention (%)	80	73	66
		Achievement (%)	55	61	70
National diploma in computer studies	3	Expected completions	15	13	15
		Retention (%)	93	69	47
		Achievement (%)	100	100	71

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

Curriculum Areas

Business

Grade 2

17 Inspectors observed 14 lessons, covering a wide range of the college's business provision including public services courses. Few strengths or weaknesses were listed in the self-assessment report and there was no action plan. Inspectors found other strengths and weaknesses which were not included in the report.

Key strengths

- majority of lessons well planned and effective
- good key skills development on vocational courses
- good pass rates on general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) intermediate
- extensive range of enrichment activities

Weaknesses

- failure to meet some enrolment targets
- unsatisfactory retention and poor pass rates on a minority of programmes

18 There is a wide range of business courses to meet the needs of school-leavers, adults who wish to develop their skills, and the training requirements of employers. This strength was recognised in the self-assessment report. Many subjects are assessed at employers' premises. Students are able to study at their own pace using self-study materials in integrated business technology and administration. Students' prior experience can be accredited towards their qualification. The self-assessment report acknowledged that there is poor enrolment on a minority of courses. Collaborative provision is monitored and reviewed closely to ensure that standards are maintained. Some business teachers working in different areas co-operate to

share expertise, materials and standards of internal verification. Good links with employers and an active employers' advisory committee benefit students and their curriculum. Staff work closely with the various public services through a separate advisory committee. The armed forces and other employers provide relevant practical experience and specialist inputs to course programmes. Most courses are well planned and well managed. Key skills are being integrated with vocational assignments. Most schemes of work and lesson plans are well prepared.

19 There is much good teaching. Several well-planned and stimulating lessons were seen by inspectors. Students work effectively in small groups and in practical exercises. In one lesson, students considered concepts such as teamworking and then developed these skills in realistic vocational role-play exercises. References to current business and public services issues bring topical interest into lessons. Students on national vocational qualification (NVQ) courses are assessed in their own workplace and receive regular guidance on portfolio work. Students on full-time administration courses benefit from well-planned work experience and the well-equipped training office. Visits to businesses and other places of interest, sometimes overseas, enrich students' experience and understanding. Students on public services courses value the range of outdoor tasks and regular visits to services' locations. Many students gain from residential team-building exercises in challenging environments. However, in a minority of lessons teachers do not vary the work sufficiently and do not involve all students enough to sustain their interest. Sometimes too much time is spent by students copying notes from overhead projectors or from textbooks. Most students' work is well organised. Assignments are accurately graded and teachers provide constructive feedback. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that staff support students well.

Curriculum Areas

20 The self-assessment report acknowledged the erratic pattern of students' achievements on some business courses. However, pass rates well above sector averages have been achieved at GNVQ intermediate and first and national diploma level in public services in most years, although retention has only been satisfactory and sometimes poor. Some students leave public services courses early to take up their chosen armed forces career having valued their time in college. Many students progress successfully to higher education or employment and staff take a close interest in their subsequent progress. Good pass rates have been achieved on full-time NVQ administration programmes in most years, but retention was low in 1997. Pass rates for GCE A level have generally been close to the sector average, although in 1998 a high proportion of students achieved higher grade passes. There is good retention on level 1 short courses in business administration, although for full-time students the completion rate was low until 1998. Results have been satisfactory for business administration at levels 2 and 3.

21 Most staff are well qualified and many have suitable industrial experience related to aspects of their teaching. The internal inspection report identified the need for a more effective induction for part-time staff. Students often use modern specialist equipment and facilities in their learning. There is generally good access to computers with current versions of business software. Students also make good use of the sports facilities of the college and some are members of the college's Army Cadet Force company.

Curriculum Areas

A summary of achievement and retention rates in business, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
Stage 1 text processing and wordprocessing full-time courses	1	Expected completions	120	40	64
		Retention (%)	70	73	92
		Achievement (%)	68	91	58
Stage 1 text processing and wordprocessing short courses	1	Expected completions	44	55	463
		Retention (%)	91	95	91
		Achievement (%)	71	69	61
NVQ administration	2	Expected completions	29	41	45
		Retention (%)	72	63	69
		Achievement (%)	92	36	87
GNVQ intermediate business	2	Expected completions	15	11	10
		Retention (%)	100	55	50
		Achievement (%)	100	100	100
First certificates and diplomas in public services	2	Expected completions	28	29	25
		Retention (%)	57	83	76
		Achievement (%)	100	79	84
GNVQ advanced business	3	Expected completions	39	17	40
		Retention (%)	79	71	78
		Achievement (%)	39	83	71
National certificates and diplomas in public services	3	Expected completions	51	38	39
		Retention (%)	82	68	74
		Achievement (%)	72	83	86
GCE A level business studies	3	Expected completions	45	13	19
		Retention (%)	76	85	73
		Achievement (%)	62	73	75

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

Curriculum Areas

Art, Design and Media Studies

Grade 2

22 The inspection covered the range of courses provided in media, art and design, photography and graphic design. Inspectors observed 17 lessons. The self-assessment report did not include many of the specific strengths and weaknesses identified during the inspection.

Key strengths

- good staff teamwork at course level
- well-planned and varied teaching and learning activities
- constructive feedback on students' work
- productive external links
- high pass rates on most courses
- good progression to relevant employment and higher education

Weaknesses

- poor retention rates on a significant number of courses
- small numbers on some courses
- the adverse impact of accommodation weaknesses on teaching and learning
- shortcomings in specialist equipment

23 There is a good range of courses in art and design. Some courses run with low student numbers. There are opportunities for students to gain qualifications in addition to their primary learning goals. Courses are well organised and enable students to develop their individual interests and abilities. Staff work closely together and their expertise is used effectively across courses. External visits and work placements enrich the curriculum and extend students' learning. Media professionals, practising artists and designers visit the college to talk to students and assist them with projects.

24 Most teaching is well managed. Lessons are well planned with clear objectives. Teachers use a good range of appropriate teaching methods. Practical work is successfully integrated with theory. Teachers set students realistic, but demanding tasks. Students experience a variety of appropriate activities which stimulate and encourage their involvement. Teachers readily make themselves available to provide additional help to students. In the most effective theory lessons, teachers make skilful use of appropriate questions and encourage students to contribute to group discussion. Practical assignments are well prepared and relevant to industry. In a media studies lesson, students worked effectively as a production team to a tight deadline that simulated the hectic environment of real-life radio broadcasting. Constructive verbal and written feedback is given to help students improve their performance. Group critiques and self-evaluation are used effectively to promote learning. Students enjoy this approach to learning and work co-operatively and confidently. The time allocated to some practical lessons does not allow for the full exploration and development of ideas. In some lessons, the distance between studios and workshops makes it difficult for teachers to provide students with appropriate supervision and guidance. Students' workload is sometimes unbalanced with several assignments required at the same time. Teachers often extend deadlines for these in an arbitrary way. Inspectors noted some poor student attendance and punctuality.

25 On most courses, pass rates are above the national average for students who complete their studies. Pass rates for GCE A level media, national diplomas in graphic design and in media, and GNVQ intermediate and advanced art and design have been consistently high at 100% for the past three years. The self-assessment report did not acknowledge the poor retention rates on a significant number of courses. Retention on the GCE A level media course has been below the national average for

Curriculum Areas

the past three years. Retention on the national diploma in graphic design, and GNVQ advanced art and design courses were below the national average in 1997 and 1998. The standard of most students' practical work is good. Portfolios are carefully reviewed by tutors at individual student performance review meetings.

Assessment of students' work is fair and thorough. Most portfolios are well presented. Some show good use of computer-aided design. Most students produce well-researched and evaluative assignments. However, a few are too inclined to use ready-made images and produce work that is too derivative. Some students have not fully developed their investigative drawing skills. Most of the students who achieve the GNVQ intermediate progress to an advanced course at the college. The self-assessment report recognised that there is a good record of progression to higher education and employment.

26 Specialist accommodation and resources are of mixed quality. The location of courses in a number of buildings makes management of the area difficult. It also hampers the monitoring of students' attendance. Some studios are too small for the number of groups using them. In most studios, there is insufficient storage space. There are few printmaking facilities. The media studio has ageing equipment that is no longer representative of that used in industry. These weaknesses affect the quality of some teaching and students' achievements. Staff are well qualified and offer a wide range of art and design and media specialisms which benefit students. Most staff have relevant industrial experience, professional affiliations and are practising artists and designers.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in art, design and media studies, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GNVQ intermediate art and design	2	Expected completions	13	9	10
		Retention (%)	92	100	80
		Achievement (%)	90	100	88
GCSE photography	2	Expected completions	13	27	17
		Retention (%)	85	93	82
		Achievement (%)	91	92	86
GCE A level media	3	Expected completions	12	16	15
		Retention (%)	67	63	47
		Achievement (%)	100	100	100
National diploma in graphic design	3	Expected completions	15	12	19
		Retention (%)	93	58	68
		Achievement (%)	100	100	100
GNVQ advanced art and design	3	Expected completions	19	14	20
		Retention (%)	84	64	70
		Achievement (%)	100	100	100
National diploma in media	3	Expected completions	12	15	17
		Retention (%)	92	73	59
		Achievement (%)	100	100	100

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

Curriculum Areas

Humanities

Grade 4

27 The college's self-assessment report did not adequately cover the full range of its humanities provision. Inspectors agreed with the few judgements on GCE A level subjects included in the report although they found additional weaknesses. The self-assessment report made insufficient reference to aspects of teaching and learning and students' achievements.

Key strengths

- good retention and achievement rates on counselling courses
- mostly good teaching on counselling and teacher education courses
- effective GCE A level general studies programme

Weaknesses

- many courses with poor retention and achievement rates
- poor progression to higher education from access courses
- insufficient checking of students' understanding in some lessons
- inadequate course reviews not addressing retention and achievement issues
- insufficient sharing of good practice

28 Inspectors observed 20 lessons in teacher education, counselling, access to higher education, GCE A level and GCSE humanities and social sciences. Few adults study GCE A level subjects and the decline in numbers of full-time 16 to 18 year old students on these courses results in small group sizes in several subjects. There has been some reduction in the choice of available GCE A level subjects.

29 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that most lessons are well prepared. Most teachers use a variety of appropriate teaching methods which encourage students to participate in lessons. For example, students on teacher training courses gain direct experience of working with deaf people to develop their understanding of the complexity of communication. Students take a lively interest in lessons and generally express their views with confidence and fluency. They work well in small groups. Written work is of an appropriate standard and mostly well presented. In some less effective lessons, teachers fail to share their objectives with students. They provide insufficient challenge or opportunities for students to learn on their own. In some lessons teachers did not check students' understanding of important concepts. There is no systematic development of key skills and study skills for GCE A level students. The quality of note-taking and organisation in some students' files is poor.

30 There is little effective sharing of good practice between teachers of individual GCE A level humanities subjects and other teams within humanities. The annual review and evaluation process pays little attention to data on students' achievements and retention. Action plans are not consistently implemented or reviewed. Teacher education and counselling courses are planned to meet the needs of students. The course team in counselling provides five Saturday workshops to teach those who wish to progress to the diploma in counselling. Some individual GCE A level subjects are well managed, for example, general studies. The course management of the access to higher education course is less effective. Under a recent management restructuring, communications between staff are beginning to improve. Some of the weaknesses are being addressed.

31 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that retention and achievement is low in many GCE A level humanities subjects.

Curriculum Areas

Retention at GCE A level is generally unsatisfactory and sometimes poor. There are significant contrasts between subjects. For example, in 1998 the retention rate was 89% in geography and 49% in psychology. Inspection evidence indicated no improvement in retention for those courses due to finish in 1999. Examination results in GCSE English, psychology and sociology have declined significantly between 1996 and 1998. Pass rates in 1998 were below national averages, but retention has improved. The achievements of access to higher education students were poor in 1998. Progression to higher education courses is also poor. In 1996, pass rates in 10 humanities GCE A level subjects taken by 16 to 18 year old students were above the national average. There were particularly poor achievements in psychology in 1997 and sociology in 1998. However, in geography, pass rates were above the national average in 1998. Between 1996 and 1998, students achieving grades A to C at GCE A level have only been above the national averages in communication studies, English, history and general studies. On teacher training and counselling courses, most students are successful in achieving their qualification. The self-assessment report provided no judgements about students' achievements on many courses.

32 Most teachers have a teaching qualification and a relevant degree. The classrooms used by most humanities students are well equipped with attractive displays. Classrooms for students on access to higher education courses are unsuitable. There are shortages of books in several subjects. Some of the bookstock held in the library, for example, in psychology and history, is out of date.

Curriculum Areas

A summary of achievement and retention rates in humanities, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GCSE humanities subjects	2	Expected completions	101	105	95
		Retention (%)	68	80	88
		Achievement (%)	64	60	32
GCE A level English language and literature	3	Expected completions	48	56	66
		Retention (%)	52	73	67
		Achievement (%)	88	76	80
GCE A level psychology and sociology	3	Expected completions	61	51	65
		Retention (%)	66	65	55
		Achievement (%)	75	58	61
GCE A level geography and history	3	Expected completions	31	38	46
		Retention (%)	84	76	85
		Achievement (%)	83	77	81
Access to higher education (humanities and social sciences)	3	Expected completions	31	34	34
		Retention (%)	84	68	88
		Achievement (%)	92	*	62
Further adult education teacher's certificate	4	Expected completions	**	29	26
		Retention (%)	**	97	96
		Achievement (%)	**	89	85
RSA certificate in counselling skills in development of learning	4	Expected completions	25	43	17
		Retention (%)	96	91	94
		Achievement (%)	100	97	100

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

**data unavailable

*data unreliable

Curriculum Areas

Basic Education

Grade 3

33 Inspectors observed 15 lessons in adult basic education and courses for students with learning difficulties. The self-assessment report for these areas was brief, and identified few strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors found other strengths and additional weaknesses in the provision for students with learning difficulties.

Key strengths

- good teaching in adult basic education
- appropriate students' achievements
- constructive use of volunteers for basic skills teaching and support
- successful progression of some students to higher level courses

Weaknesses

- inappropriate structure for much of the provision for students with learning difficulties
- the inappropriate content of many lessons for some students with learning difficulties
- underdevelopment of individual learning programmes for students with learning difficulties
- too much paper-based teaching for students with learning difficulties
- weaknesses in accommodation for adult basic education

34 Adult basic education and courses for students with learning difficulties are managed in separate curriculum divisions. The adult basic education curriculum manager provides effective leadership and management for a small team of part-time tutors and volunteers. This strength was not identified in the college's self-assessment report. The adult basic

education provision is small with some students enrolled for more than one subject. Over 80 students with learning difficulties are enrolled on either full-time or substantial part-time courses attending for one or two days a week. Some students progress successfully to NVQ courses, particularly in catering where they respond well to the high expectations of teachers. The quality of the provision and its development have been hampered by many changes in management and staffing. The current curriculum manager is new in post and has not yet been able to make improvements to meet the needs of current students more effectively. A curriculum review is planned, but the weaknesses of the current provision were not identified in the self-assessment report.

35 Teaching is good in adult basic education and in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) lessons. The quality of teaching was identified as a strength in the self-assessment report. Courses and lessons are well planned. Experienced teachers use well-tried teaching methods successfully. A well-organised literacy lesson for a wide range of learners included some work for students in pairs and some individual teaching. One student had progressed from being a non-reader to being able to read his children a bedtime story. Complete beginners and those with the greatest difficulties often benefit from the support of volunteers who are used effectively for basic skills teaching. Students are encouraged to develop their self-confidence and many are making real progress in developing their basic skills. This was not identified in the self-assessment report.

36 Some students with learning difficulties achieve well and progress to higher level courses, employment or more independent lives within the local community. However, their learning and achievement are often hindered because the content of many lessons is inappropriate for some of the students in the group. In some lessons the more able students

Curriculum Areas

are underachieving. In an effective practical cookery lesson all the students prepared a meal comprising three dishes. A few of the students could have prepared something more demanding or prepared this meal without support. In other lessons, less able students were unable to learn effectively, particularly when activities demanded literacy or numeracy skills which they did not have. Many lessons contained unsuitable paper-based activities which did not contribute to students' learning or achievements. Individual learning programmes are at an early stage of development. The elements which could form appropriate programmes for students have been developed, but they have not yet been brought together to influence teaching, learning and students' achievements. None of these weaknesses were identified in the self-assessment report.

37 All the adult basic education classes are held in a small annexe near the centre of Tiverton. However, the building is small and does not have adequate facilities. Computers are plentiful but they are out of date and are adequate only for the most basic levels of IT teaching. Some of the accommodation used for teaching students with learning difficulties is of poor quality and not suitable for the activities carried out. Catering students use a commercial standard kitchen and serve in the staff restaurant. Some art and craft work takes place in the art department but some takes place in a hut which has no appropriate facilities. Although in classrooms some students' work is displayed, other classrooms are uninviting and lacking in material to enhance learning. This was partially identified in the self-assessment report.

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Support for Students

Grade 2

38 Staff providing support for students were little involved in the self-assessment process. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report but considered that it failed to identify some weaknesses.

Key strengths

- thorough advice and guidance for prospective students
- well-planned induction programmes
- well-delivered careers and higher education guidance
- effective and well-used services to support students with personal problems
- wide range of extra-curricular activities

Weaknesses

- low uptake of learning support
- lack of systematic feedback on progress of students receiving learning support

39 The college provides thorough advice and guidance for prospective students. Applicants obtain clear information and guidance from the admissions staff in the students services unit. Enquiries are carefully recorded and response is speedy. Interviews are well planned and careers staff provide impartial advice. The self-assessment report identified the good links with schools and inspectors agreed. Many students are attracted to the college when staff make presentations at their school. School-leavers benefit from visiting the college on open days, for 'taster' sessions or to attend GCSE revision days.

40 Induction programmes for students are well planned. They provide students with a good introduction to the college and to key staff.

There is an effective system which enables students to transfer between courses if they have made the wrong decision. Evaluation shows that most students are satisfied with the induction programme.

41 The quality of individual support from tutors is good. A tutorial handbook and staff development for tutors were introduced in September 1998. Full-time and part-time students attending for more than six hours a week have a personal tutor. There is a clear entitlement to group and individual tutorials. Tutors are approachable and make themselves available outside timetabled sessions. Most of the tutorials observed by inspectors were good. They were well planned and attendance was good. However, not all students were fully engaged in activities and a few perceive that tutorial time is wasted. Action plans drawn up during induction were not always rigorously maintained. The self-assessment report acknowledged that the quality of the tutorial programme is not sufficiently well monitored. Tutors maintain close links with parents and keep them advised of students' progress, particularly where concerns are identified.

42 The self-assessment report identified a strong emphasis on careers education and guidance within the tutorial programme and inspectors agreed. The careers guidance officer delivers modules on career planning and on techniques for applying for employment and higher education. There is a good relationship with the Devon and Cornwall Careers service which, at the time of the inspection, had conducted over 120 individual interviews since September, mainly with students aged 16 to 18.

43 The college is currently seeking to improve retention through a project initially supported by the Devon and Cornwall TEC which identifies and supports students who are at risk of not completing their course. The two staff in the newly-established retention and achievement unit had interviewed nearly 40% of early leavers by the time of the inspection. They provide

Cross-college Provision

support for tutors in following up students' persistent absence and lack of progress. The unit is beginning to have some success in persuading students to continue their studies and to take advantage of the wide range of support that the college provides. There is some improved retention of students who enrolled in September 1998.

44 Learning support is provided in the study centre for those students who need extra help to enable them to succeed on their course. Those students who attend receive a high level of individual support. Attendance and work done is monitored and learning support staff liaise informally with teachers but feedback to tutors on the progress of students is not systematic. All full-time students enrolling in September were assessed to identify their needs for learning support but the take-up for learning support has been low. This weakness was not recognised in the self-assessment report. Some students refer themselves to the study centre and some teachers encourage students to attend. Not all teachers are convinced of the reliability of the tests in diagnosing the need for learning support. Some students do not have a positive image of the study centre and this is not helped by its location and its limited resources. There is no learning support provided by specialist tutors in lessons, although on seven courses more than half the students were identified as being below the level of literacy or numeracy required for the course.

45 There is an extensive and well-used range of services to provide personal and practical support for students. Members of an enthusiastic and committed team work closely together to provide counselling, advice and practical help on mental and physical health, welfare, accommodation, finance and transport. Many students value the opportunities the college provides for extra social and cultural activities, including a wide range of sports and residential visits. As the self-assessment report stated, the active student guild organises social events as well as ensuring that students are

consulted about the decisions made by managers and governors.

General Resources

Grade 3

46 Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report, but identified many others. The report did not present a complete and accurate picture of the college's resources and their use.

Key strengths

- much good-quality accommodation
- good access to generally high-quality computers for students
- good range of sporting facilities
- spacious common room and refectory facilities

Weaknesses

- lack of an effective accommodation strategy
- significant underuse of accommodation
- a lack of coherent suites of accommodation for some curriculum areas and college services
- inadequate books and other resources for some curriculum areas
- some poor-quality classrooms, including some with heating problems

47 The college has much good accommodation and facilities. However, there is not an effective accommodation strategy and the self-assessment report did not mention this as a weakness. This lack of planning has some significant effects on the quality and efficient use of the college's accommodation. Much of the accommodation is underused, a weakness which was also not identified in the self-assessment report. The college is now monitoring its use of accommodation closely. In some areas, there is

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a lack of coherent provision of facilities to support some curriculum and service areas. A facilities and procurement manager has recently been appointed and many of these issues are the subject of discussions with governors and managers. The college has taken some action to rationalise its accommodation. It has closed its former site at Seaton and is trying to dispose of the property.

48 The college's main site offers a pleasant and spacious environment. Most of the teaching accommodation is of good quality, including the teaching block for higher education courses and the facilities for IT. Some general classrooms, especially those in huts, are in poor condition. There are problems with the heating control arrangements in a few classrooms. Classroom furniture and fittings, the provision of whiteboards and overhead projectors are generally adequate. The well-designed sports hall provides good facilities and is well used by students and the local community. The college's sports fields are adjacent to the main site. Some of the accommodation on the main site is not organised to ensure that best use can be made of it for teaching and learning or to ease communication between staff. Some subject areas, such as art and design and mathematics, have rooms which are scattered around the site. The study centre is separated from the main building in one of the huts and presents a dilapidated image. It is separated from the main resource centres. The self-assessment report acknowledged that the various locations for the different elements of student services and reception cause confusion for intending and actual students.

49 Two smaller sites are located close to the main shopping areas in Tiverton and Honiton. Both provide mainly introductory courses for students who either cannot travel or who prefer the more intimate atmosphere of the Bampton Street site in Tiverton.

50 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that students on the main campus have

good access to high-quality computers. The open access IT centre and associated classroom provide a modern and pleasant working environment, where 50 machines are available to students on either a 'drop-in' or booking basis. In addition, there are three other rooms in the same block which are timetabled to ensure that students have access to structured lessons in IT as part of their course. Further computers are available for students in art and design and the higher education block. Most computers allow access to the internet, although this is little used to research assignment work.

51 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the stock of books and other learning materials in the library has not kept pace with some new curriculum developments. There are sufficient study spaces to meet current needs. Library use is generally static or in decline. Links with some curriculum areas are strong, but the self-assessment report identified that in some areas they are weak. There are instances of students being presented with book lists of which library staff have little knowledge and which contain titles that are not held in the library. A new system to improve liaison is being introduced. The library operates a manual system for cataloguing and issuing stock. This makes it difficult to monitor usage efficiently and to keep staff up to date with the stock that is held.

52 Nearly all the college's accommodation is accessible to students with restricted mobility, although there are some problems with easy movement around the site. There is a large nursery which provides a wide range of facilities for childcare for up to 90 children from six weeks to school age at any one time. However, only 15% of the places are taken by students' children. There are large and well-furnished student common rooms. The refectory and snack bars provide a well-used and reasonably priced service. While the college is generally clean, some parts are in need of more effective and regular cleaning.

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Quality Assurance

Grade 4

53 Inspectors found that the self-assessment report did not give a full account of quality assurance in the college. They agreed with the weaknesses and some of the strengths, but considered that key weaknesses were omitted.

Key strengths

- developing programme of internal inspections and lesson observation
- effective monitoring of collaborative provision
- effective internal verification

Weaknesses

- lack of a comprehensive quality assurance system
- the poor quality of some course reviews
- underdeveloped use of targets and performance indicators
- slow implementation of staff appraisal
- underdeveloped quality assurance of support services
- poor self-assessment report and process

54 The college has made little progress with the development of quality assurance since the last inspection. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that a comprehensive system of quality assurance activities linked to strategic planning cycles has not been established. There is no quality assurance policy or manual of procedures. Some reporting arrangements are inadequate. Action plans resulting from course review, self-assessment and internal inspection are not systematically monitored. The self-assessment report recognised that targets and performance indicators are not used in all areas of provision. The recent management reorganisation strengthened the management of quality assurance. Operational plans for 1998-

99 for quality assurance and staff development are in place. The internal course validation committee operates effectively. Some new systems, for example standardised contents for course management files, have been implemented, but much remains to be done.

55 Inspectors disagreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that course review is a strength. Some teams produce detailed reviews, others do not complete all sections of the review form. For several GCE A level subjects no review was carried out in 1998. Many reviews pay insufficient attention to teaching and learning and students' achievements. Curriculum inspectors judged that course review has not made a significant contribution to quality assurance in the curriculum areas inspected. In 1997, internal inspection was introduced. It has become an established part of the quality assurance system. The resulting reports contain strengths, weaknesses and action plans. Few contain an evaluation of students' achievements. For the 119 lesson observations carried out since September 1997, the college judged 82% to be good or outstanding, compared with 60% for lessons observed by inspectors.

56 Internal verification operates effectively. Internal verifiers' duties are clearly documented. All programmes have an internal verifier and the lead verifier effectively monitors both internal verification and course leaders' responses to issues identified by external verifiers. Monitoring of collaborative provision is also effective. A summary report is provided for the curriculum council, the college's academic board. Students who attend courses at a distance from the main site are given an appropriate summary of the college charter.

57 Arrangements for gathering students views have not operated consistently in recent years. For several years, students have completed a post-induction questionnaire and a more detailed survey about their course and aspects of college services. Some course teams also conduct their own surveys. However, many

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course reviews do not include the required summary of students' views. All students receive the college charter. It clearly describes the college's commitments to students and its expectations of them. Appropriate reference is made to employers, parents and the community. However, there has been no monitoring of compliance with charter commitments. Complaints are centrally recorded, promptly dealt with and an analysis was recently provided for the finance committee of the corporation.

58 In 1997-98, few staff appraisal interviews took place. A new appraisal system was introduced in September 1998. It includes lesson observation and it has the support of staff. It identifies staff development needs, but pays little attention to evaluation of performance. Between September 1998 and March 1999, 59% of teaching staff were appraised. The same system applies to support staff, but their appraisals have not yet taken place. Staff development is linked to appraisal findings and to college priorities set out in the staff development policy.

59 Quality assurance of support services is underdeveloped. There are no service standards for support areas and no requirement for individuals or teams to review their performance. A detailed survey of students' views included questions on some support services, for example, the resource centre and classroom accommodation. The resource centre also carries out its own surveys. Response by managers to issues identified in surveys is the basis of quality assurance of support services, but there is no system to check whether this leads to improvements.

60 The self-assessment process involved most full-time teaching staff. Some teams identified many strengths, weaknesses, actions and target dates. Although teaching staff found self-assessment worthwhile, their judgements were often not reflected in the final report. Some support areas, for example the resource centre,

produced self-assessment reports, but many key support staff, such as student services staff, were not involved in the process. Few teaching and support staff have seen the final report. The college's collaborative partners were not involved in the self-assessment process and they are not referred to in the report. Self-assessment is not yet integral to quality assurance and the final report has not made a significant contribution to quality assurance in the college.

Governance

Grade 4

61 Inspectors and auditors agreed with some of the strengths identified in the very brief self-assessment report. They identified many significant weaknesses not specified in the report.

Key strengths

- commitment and skills of members of the corporation
- good communications with college staff and students
- regular training and briefing events

Weaknesses

- insufficient progress in addressing the significant strategic challenges facing the college
- delay in appointing a new principal
- inadequate clerking support for some key matters
- inadequate oversight of the college's strategic plan
- little use of performance indicators to analyse students' achievements
- lack of systematic appraisal of senior postholders
- inadequate involvement in self-assessment

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62 The college has made little effective progress in addressing many of the significant strategic issues described in the previous inspection report. Concerns regarding declining enrolments, reducing income, the efficient use of the college's resources and its financial health remain. The previous principal retired in April 1997. At that stage it had already been clear for some time that the college was facing considerable difficulties. Delays in appointing a new principal resulted in 18 months of uncertain leadership. During this period, effective joint working between governors and senior managers was sometimes hindered by a mutual lack of confidence. The corporation board intervened more directly in management matters than would normally be appropriate. These efforts helped managers in some cases, for example, by leading to the development of a course costing system. There has been little progress in formulating clear, longer-term strategies for the college to follow. The corporation devoted much of its time to attempting to address the serious budgetary problems resulting from a decline in recruitment and income. This has resulted in insufficient attention being paid to other important areas of the college's work.

63 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is weak. The corporation does not substantially conduct its business in accordance with the instrument and articles of government. It also does not substantially fulfil its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC. The corporation is committed to the college's success and contributes a relevant range of commercial and professional experience. Some of the clerking support to the corporation is inadequate. Inspectors and auditors identified instances of poor advice on procedures and the operation of some committees. The term of office for eight governors ends in August 1999. Succession planning has not been successfully managed to allow for continuity of skills and

experience and to comply with Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) guidance on transition to the revised membership requirements. Governors have reported the late receipt of agendas and supporting papers resulting in inadequate briefing before debate. Proceedings are appropriately documented with clear papers and minutes, although agendas do not identify the objectives of each item of business. The corporation adopted a code of conduct and standing orders in 1995, but these have not been updated to be consistent with current best practice, nor have governors been made aware of good practice issues arising since that date. As the self-assessment report stated, attendance at corporation and committee meetings is good.

64 The corporation has established a chairman's executive committee consisting of the chair and the vice-chair of the corporation, the chairs of the committees and the principal. A major activity of this committee has been to advise the corporation on strategic issues during the period of financial difficulty. There is some overlap between the terms of reference and operation of the chairman's executive committee and the finance committee. Both have responsibility for monitoring elements of the strategic plan, but these elements are not brought together. Consequently, it is not clear how the corporation as a whole discharges its responsibilities for the monitoring of the strategic plan and college finances. The corporation is in the process of reorganising its committee structure. However, initial proposals do not reflect the current statutory requirement for a separate remuneration committee nor the proposed statutory requirement for a separate search committee. The functions of the search committee have been merged with those of the employment committee. Membership of some committees is inappropriate. The corporation does not monitor formally the implementation of the college's equal opportunities and health and safety policies. Governors do not receive sufficiently robust and meaningful data to

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inform debates and decisions concerning students' retention, achievements and destinations.

65 A useful induction process for newly-appointed governors has been established. Members of the corporation have attended regular training days with senior staff and external consultants, the most recent being concerned with the college's mission and strategic objectives. Briefings on key issues have been arranged immediately before or during meetings of the corporation. However, these do not constitute a structured training programme for all members of the corporation. Communications with staff and students in general are good. The involvement of members of the corporation in a variety of college working groups, meetings and other activities is appreciated. The corporation's involvement in the self-assessment process is at an early stage of development. Governors have completed self-assessment questionnaires but they have not yet established agreed criteria for the monitoring and evaluation of their own performance. The corporation's responsibility for the appraisal and professional development of senior postholders has not been systematically fulfilled. Specific annual targets have yet to be agreed by the corporation with senior staff.

Management

Grade 4

66 The self-assessment report provided some useful general information, but did not identify adequately the strengths and weaknesses of management. Inspectors agreed with some of the very few strengths and weaknesses identified in the report, but considered that other important weaknesses were omitted.

Key strengths

- an increasingly clear view amongst staff of strategic priorities
- some good practice in financial reporting to governors and budget holders
- active review and implementation of equal opportunities and health and safety policies

Weaknesses

- insufficient progress in addressing significant issues facing the college
- insufficient link between financial and strategic planning
- lack of systematic monitoring of financial and other objectives
- continuing decline in student enrolments
- lack of an operating statement
- inadequate marketing strategy
- weaknesses in curriculum strategy and management

67 The college has made insufficient progress in addressing the many significant issues it faces, the majority of which were identified at the last inspection. There has not been effective management of key areas such as quality assurance, accommodation and marketing to increase enrolment. The previous principal retired in April 1997 and the vice-principal acted as principal for 18 months with no additional senior management support. This created additional pressures on the senior management team. The college restructured its management with effect from September 1998. The restructuring has clarified and simplified management roles and reporting routes. In many areas, improved communications have provided staff with a clearer view of the college's current position. Groups of courses are managed by curriculum leaders. Some curriculum leaders are on fractional contracts,

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which is inappropriate for their level of responsibility. Uncertainties remain over their role in some areas. Some curriculum leaders and course managers find it difficult to meet regularly. The new principal has been in post since December 1998 and is taking action to improve the scheduling and sequencing of meetings.

68 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is weak. The college is in poor financial health. However, since August 1997 it has improved its cash position. Management accounts are received each month by the senior management team. It is not clear from the minutes of these meetings what action has been agreed and how progress is being monitored. There is no clear link between the strategic plan and the monthly management accounts. Management accounts have focused attention on cashflow because of the uncertainty of the college's financial situation. They also include some accounting ratios and performance indicators. It is not clear, however, that these are being monitored against management financial targets which have been approved by the corporation. The finance team has recently been strengthened by the appointment of a finance manager. Financial reporting to budget holders is clear and timely.

69 The college has had an operating deficit for three years and it is projecting a further two years of deficit. It has been able to support this situation by using inherited cash reserves. Although the college has succeeded in meeting its target for FEFC-funded units of activity, its enrolments and total income have declined over the last three years. The college has been slow to develop coherent curriculum and marketing strategies to address these very considerable difficulties. In the academic year 1996-97, the college enrolled 1,388 16 to 18 year old students. The college predicts a total enrolment of 889 for this cohort in 1998-99. Efforts to maintain a broad curriculum offer to the community have resulted in many small classes.

There is no mention of the college's difficulties or the steps taken to address them in the self-assessment report.

70 Because of the college's financial vulnerability the FEFC has required it to submit a recovery plan. The essentials of the recovery plan are included in the strategic plan. The strategic plan identifies the corporate mission and aims, categorised to achieve improved recruitment, student performance and efficiency savings. The strategic plan is supported by a curriculum plan, produced in April 1998. Progress has been made with some elements of the curriculum plan. Enrolment targets have been closely monitored, in the form of contracts with managers. However, strategic and curriculum objectives are not monitored regularly or closely enough. There is no operating statement against which progress can be systematically measured. At the time of the inspection, managers were engaged in setting targets for students' retention and achievements at course level. The lack of robust targets for students' achievements was reflected in the self-assessment report. Managers and teachers make use of an effective student registration system easily available on the college computer network.

71 The effort to halt the decline in full-time student recruitment has been hindered by a lack of specific marketing information. Marketing and publicity activities have lacked clear priorities and focus. Improvements recently introduced include a better-organised schools liaison function, improved publicity materials and a clear sense of priority for marketing activities. Improvements in publicity materials and schools liaison activities are already evident. Neither the weaknesses in marketing nor recent improvements were indicated in the self-assessment report.

72 Equality of opportunity is actively pursued in the college. The equal opportunities committee has been working in areas such as recruitment and selection procedures, the

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provision of training materials and students' induction to the college. The health and safety policy for the college was reviewed and revised with effect from January 1999. It clearly establishes responsibilities for different categories of employees and areas of the college, an annual programme of inspections and an annual programme of works.

Conclusions

73 The college produced its first self-assessment report for the inspection. While the self-assessment report was useful in planning the inspection, inspectors judged that the college failed to identify a significant number of key weaknesses. Overall it is a poor document that contains insufficient evaluative judgements and inadequate action plans. Weaknesses in teaching and learning and cross-college areas were understated. Inspectors agreed with the two of the five curriculum grades and one of the cross-college grades proposed by the college. In those areas where the judgements of inspectors and the college differed, inspection evidence indicated that the college had been overgenerous in its grading.

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

College Statistics

Student numbers by age (January 1999)

Age	%
Under 16	4
16-18 years	22
19-24 years	11
25+ years	62
Not known	1
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (January 1999)

Level of study	%
Foundation	11
Intermediate	43
Advanced	24
Higher education	7
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	15
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (January 1999)

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	95	654	19
Construction	43	51	2
Engineering	114	346	11
Business	104	495	15
Hotel and catering	109	80	5
Health and community care	205	671	23
Art and design	104	314	10
Humanities	136	344	12
Basic education	63	76	3
Total	973	3,031	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 10% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (January 1999)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	82	15	0	97
Supporting direct learning contact	30	0	0	30
Other support	62	1	0	63
Total	174	16	0	190

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1996	1997	1998
Income	£5,767,000	£5,816,000	£5,371,000
Average level of funding (ALF) Out-turn to 1997; funded 1998	£17.29	£17.64	£17.21
Payroll as a proportion of income	63%	67%	64%
Achievement of funding target	120%	112%	101%
Diversity of income	34%	36%	31%
Operating surplus	-£221,000	-£754,000	-£310,000

Sources: Income – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), 98/43 (1997), college (1998)

ALF – Performance Indicators 1996-97 (1996 and 1997), Funding Allocations 1997-98 (1998)

Payroll – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), 98/43 (1997), college (1998)

Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1996-97 (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

Diversity of income – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), 98/43 (1997), college (1998)

Operating surplus – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), 98/43 (1997), college (1998)

Students' achievements data

Level	Retention and pass	Students aged 16 to 18			Students aged 19 or over		
		1995	1996	1997	1995	1996	1997
1	Expected completions	294	291	422	661	560	590
	Retention (%)	90	86	75	90	80	74
	Achievement (%)	44	78	67	32	52	69
2	Expected completions	582	545	478	403	312	399
	Retention (%)	88	79	79	93	68	85
	Achievement (%)	47	87	76	38	77	71
3	Expected completions	–	669	610	–	298	398
	Retention (%)	–	86	75	–	86	87
	Achievement (%)	74	84	79	48	76	62
4 or 5	Expected completions	–	–	1	–	77	92
	Retention (%)	–	–	100	–	88	89
	Achievement (%)	85	–	100	34	87	96
Short courses	Expected completions	60	830	589	787	6,138	5,140
	Retention (%)	98	100	100	97	100	100
	Achievement (%)	78	99	98	75	97	97
Unknown/ unclassified	Expected completions	109	131	249	115	369	174
	Retention (%)	87	92	80	97	84	82
	Achievement (%)	69	68	77	73	82	72

Source: ISR

–ISR data not collected

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