

# **Norton Radstock College**

**REPORT FROM  
THE INSPECTORATE  
1998-99**

**THE  
FURTHER  
EDUCATION  
FUNDING  
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL**

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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

## Norton Radstock College

### *South West Region*

#### **Inspected January 1999**

Norton Radstock College is a general further education college 10 miles south of the city of Bath. The self-assessment report presented for inspection was the result of the college's first cycle of self-assessment. All staff had the opportunity to contribute to the report and most were involved in its preparation. The report was discussed by governors and the academic board. Inspectors agreed with many strengths and weaknesses identified in the report, but found others which had been omitted. Some of these were significant and this reduced the quality and usefulness of the report. The self-assessment made little use of evidence drawn from the lesson observations undertaken. The inspection team's overall judgements about the quality of curriculum areas and cross-college provision differed in a number of instances from the college's judgement.

The college offers provision in nine of the FEFC's 10 programme areas. Four of these programme areas were inspected at the college's main site and at Keynsham. Prospective students are well informed about the range of courses and opportunities available. Students benefit from some good teaching and there have been some recent improvements in students' achievements. Governors make a positive contribution to strategic planning and conduct corporation business efficiently. Senior

managers have an open and consultative approach which is appreciated by staff. Financial management is good. Accommodation and resources have significantly improved since the last inspection. The college should: address low achievement and poor retention in some subjects; improve the recording and use of student achievement data; ensure there is rigorous monitoring by all managers against clear targets; improve student services for part-time students; assess more accurately the quality of teaching and learning; and address weaknesses in quality assurance.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Engineering	3	Support for students	2
Business administration	3	General resources	2
Health and social care	2	Quality assurance	3
Humanities	3	Governance	2
		Management	3

# Context

## The College and its Mission

1 Norton Radstock College is a general further education college serving the towns of Midsomer Norton, Radstock and Keynsham. It also serves the surrounding rural areas of North Somerset. The district has a population of 164,643. The college's main site is located close to the centre of Radstock. It has a small annexe at Keynsham, between Bath and Bristol. The local economy of North East Somerset and Mendip has suffered industrial decline over the past 40 years following the closure of the Somerset coalfields. More recently the relocation of the Ministry of Defence facilities away from the area has adversely affected employment. The economy is heavily reliant on manufacturing and printing. Reports on the local labour market by the West of England Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) show shortages in technician and management skills, particularly related to computing and information technology (IT). Employment growth areas are management, personnel services, and health and social care; training is required to support these areas of growth. Unemployment in Bath and North East Somerset is 4.6%. In the Radstock area it is 6.9%. The national average is 4.1%.

2 The area served by the college has six comprehensive schools, each with sixth form provision. The college is working with these schools and the local education authority (LEA) to map provision. This is intended to help raise the post-16 participation rate which is currently just over 50%, compared with 71% nationally.

3 The college offers a range of courses in nine of the 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. Provision in animal care, health and social care, and IT has grown in recent years. Student enrolments have increased steadily in the last three years. Total enrolments rose from 3,897 in 1994-95, to

4,482 in 1996-97, an increase of 15%. In 1997-98, the college enrolled a total of 5,589 students, of whom 782 were full time. Full-time student enrolments have risen by 20% while part-time and, particularly, short course enrolments have declined by 16% over the past three years. The college's annual total of funded units increased from 149,390 in 1994-95 to 200,470 in 1996-97, an increase of 34%. In November 1998, the college employed 133 full-time equivalent staff, of whom 52 were teachers and 11 were staff directly supporting learning.

4 The college has a number of important collaborative arrangements, including productive partnerships with the West of England TEC. It works closely with other colleges and schools in the Bath and Bristol areas, particularly in co-ordinating resources and training through effective use of IT. There are also links with two universities for the provision of higher level qualifications in IT and teacher education. The college is actively involved in a number of community projects, including an initiative to address local economic and social regeneration funded through the governments's single regeneration fund.

5 The mission states that 'Norton Radstock College believes all people can meet their potential through learning. We will promote individual, business and community success by working in partnership with others to offer excellent learning opportunities for all.' The college aims to achieve its mission through widening participation, maintaining high-quality education and training, supporting students of all ages to maximise their potential, adopting innovative approaches to teaching and learning, and establishing partnerships with business, schools, community groups and a range of external agencies.

## The Inspection

6 The college was inspected during the week beginning 18 January 1999. The inspection

# Context

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 found that data on students' achievements derived from its individualised student record (ISR) returns to the FEFC for 1997 were inaccurate, and it submitted revised data to the FEFC. Inspectors used the original ISR data for 1996, the revised ISR data for 1997, and data provided by the college on students' achievements for 1998. These 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. The inspection was carried out by eight inspectors and an auditor working for a total of 38 days. The college was one of 30 in the current cycle of inspections which agreed to participate in the joint Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) and FEFC assessment of careers

education and guidance. The joint assessment was guided by the inspection framework, with careers education assessors contributing to judgements made by inspectors. The emphasis in this report on careers education and guidance will help colleges and careers services to improve the quality of the careers education and guidance they offer and help the DfEE to disseminate good practice. The inspection team observed 43 lessons, examined students' work and evaluated college documents. Meetings were held with governors, managers, other college staff, and students.

7 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1997-98. Of the lessons observed, 63% were judged to be good or outstanding and 5% less than satisfactory. This compares with averages of 65% and 6%, respectively, for all lessons observed during 1997-98.

## Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level and GNVQ	0	3	2	0	0	5
NVQ	3	6	6	1	0	16
Other vocational	3	8	5	0	0	16
Other, including GCSE	1	3	1	1	0	6
Total (No.)	7	20	14	2	0	43
Total (%)	16	47	32	5	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*

# Context

8 The table below 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 (%)
Norton Radstock College	8.2	77
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

## Engineering

### Grade 3

**9 Inspectors observed 10 lessons across a range of courses covering general engineering, motor vehicle maintenance and welding. Many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report were confirmed by the inspection. However, inspectors identified additional weaknesses and found that some strengths in the report were overstated.**

#### Key strengths

- some enthusiastic and effective teaching
- improving levels of students' achievements in 1997-98
- positive contribution of workplace evidence towards qualifications
- effective provision of additional learning support

#### Weaknesses

- instances of uninspiring teaching
- poor retention and achievement on some courses
- some weak course management
- overcrowded workshop accommodation
- some poor attendance and punctuality

10 The college offers a range of full-time and part-time day and evening courses leading to national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in engineering subjects. These offer students opportunities to progress from level 1 to level 3. Demand for courses and student numbers have both increased in the last three years. A general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) intermediate course in general engineering was introduced in September 1998. During the first term many students decided to transfer to motor vehicle NVQ courses and the GNVQ programme was withdrawn.

11 Many aspects of course management and review are weak. Generally course management is not well organised and planning is often ineffective. The recording and monitoring of students' progress is not rigorous and fails to provide students with an up-to-date picture of their progress. Annual course reviews do not include action to address significant issues such as retention, assessment planning and pass rates. The self-assessment report did not identify these weaknesses. Course induction is good for full-time students, but less effective for part-time students. Key skills are taught by engineering teachers. Learning support staff work effectively alongside teachers in engineering lessons to help students develop their communication and numerical skills.

12 Some teaching is enthusiastic and effective. Most lessons are delivered through practical or workshop sessions. In the better lessons, teachers demonstrate procedures effectively and provide support to students as they work individually or in small groups to complete given tasks. Effective group work was observed in motor vehicle lessons. In less satisfactory lessons, planning is inadequate and teachers fail to motivate students or sustain their interest. In a few instances, handouts and visual aids are not used well, and there is little effective learning. The standard of students' written and practical work is generally good. Assignments are marked by tutors, but feedback does not provide students with sufficient information to improve their performance. The use of workplace evidence towards achievement of qualifications is effective.

13 Individual student tutorials take place twice a term and technical tutorials once a term. For many students, this level of tutorial support is inadequate. Full-time motor vehicle students are timetabled to undertake resource-based learning within course time. This is limited to the use of standard course text books in the library with support from teachers to help students complete the written element of

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practical work or assignments. In some instances students receive insufficient guidance in the effective use of learning materials.

14 There is no clear pattern of retention and achievement in engineering. Students' achievements on some courses are good. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report judgement that achievement and retention on motor vehicle programmes are low and that some students do not complete the full award in the expected timescale. Although pass and retention rates vary, there was an overall improvement in 1997-98. Course content and delivery schemes are being reviewed in response to advice given by external verifiers. Students' achievements in the motor vehicle area are well recorded, but the scheduling of assessments and target-setting is a weakness across all courses. A number of students are erratic in attendance and punctuality.

15 The engineering unit has five full-time teaching staff who have appropriate qualifications and industrial experience. Equipment in the motor vehicle and welding workshops is sufficient to support the range of programmes taught. Mechanical engineering is not so well resourced. Motor vehicle and welding workshops are cramped and overcrowded, especially when several groups are being taught at the same time. Work is under way to relocate motor vehicle to a new building. The library is well stocked with engineering text books, and there are multiple copies of some titles. Students have access to computer facilities within the library, but there is a lack of useful engineering software to support their learning.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
Certificate in welding and fabrication practice	**	Expected completions	14	29	38
		Retention (%)	93	45	70
		Achievement (%)	54	48	70
NVQ in vehicle mechanical and electronic systems	2	Expected completions	24	21	31
		Retention (%)	67	71	29
		Achievement (%)	94	27	78
NVQ in engineering manufacture (foundation)	2	Expected completions	*	*	13
		Retention (%)	*	*	54
		Achievement (%)	*	*	100
NVQ	3	Expected completions	9	*	14
		Retention (%)	78	*	69
		Achievement (%)	71	*	50

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

\*data not available

\*\*level 1 (1996), levels 1, 2 and 3 (1997, 1998)

# Curriculum Areas

## Business Administration

### Grade 3

**16 Inspectors observed 11 lessons covering a wide range of administration, secretarial and office skills courses. Inspectors agreed with the majority of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report, but they identified further weaknesses, in particular relating to low levels of students' achievements on some courses.**

#### Key strengths

- good teaching in many lessons
- flexible delivery, helping adults to take courses
- improving pass rates on level 2 programmes
- effective individual tutorial support to review progress
- well-resourced classrooms and good access to IT facilities

#### Weaknesses

- low levels of achievement on text processing diploma course
- unsatisfactory recording and reporting of students' achievements
- lack of systematic target-setting and monitoring at course level
- little action-planning in response to course review and evaluation

17 The college provides a wide range of opportunities for students to acquire skills and qualifications in business administration. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that a strength of the provision is the flexible delivery times and open access opportunities which allow for adult learners to study at all levels. Enrolments have increased over the last three years, particularly in integrated business technology. To meet its aim to widen

participation the college has extended its provision of business administration courses to a number of other centres in addition to the main college site.

18 Teaching in most lessons is good and many lessons are well planned. As recognised in the self-assessment report, teachers use a variety of teaching and learning methods in theory classes to maintain students' interests. In the better lessons, they check students' progress thoroughly and encourage them to play a full part in activities. Most lessons and workshops in IT skills are managed effectively, catering for a mix of students working at different levels. A minority of lessons lack a sense of purpose and insufficient demands are made on students. Inspectors observed some effective examples of well-organised group work culminating in good student presentations. In a business studies lesson, students worked in groups to identify aspects of motivation relating to their attendance at college. They then presented a comprehensive list of items which were used in discussion of motivation theories.

19 The quality of students' work is generally satisfactory. Students work effectively on their own and in groups. They demonstrate the ability to use prior experience and knowledge to enhance their learning in lessons. Practical work is carefully marked, corrected for typographical and spelling errors, and promptly returned. However, on some written assignments teachers give insufficient feedback to help students improve their performance. Individual tutorial support is provided for all full-time students and students on substantial part-time courses. In individual tutorials, progress is reviewed and discussed in detail to check whether students have improved on previous weaknesses.

20 The self-assessment report did not acknowledge the poor achievement rates on some courses. Level 2 qualifications in 1996 and 1997 were below the national benchmarking data. Although the achievement

# Curriculum Areas

rate improved considerably for some of these qualifications in 1997-98, levels of achievement for the 254 students on text processing diploma courses were below the national figure for retention and significantly below for achievement. Achievement rates of those entered on single subject qualifications are at or just above national figures. However, the college was unable to provide sufficiently reliable data for inspectors to judge retention and achievement statistics for single skills subjects in 1995-96 and 1996-97.

21 Course team meetings make an effective contribution to aspects of curriculum planning. However, course teams have not set course targets for retention and achievement. Course reviews vary in style and rigour. Often they contain too little evaluation, and key performance indicators such as enrolment, retention and pass rates are not analysed on a regular basis. Inspection findings confirmed the

college's judgement that it has established effective links with the local business and education partnerships. Students benefit considerably from the work experience placements provided as a result of these links.

22 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that teaching staff are well qualified and experienced. Staff development is effective and staff appraisal contributes helpfully to professional development. Teaching accommodation and specialist resources are good. Rooms are well furnished and use is being made of relevant display materials to positive effect. The quality of accommodation at some of the sites not owned by the college is poor and learning can be adversely affected. Access to computers, specialist CD-ROMs and the internet is good. Students make little use of books available from the library at the main site.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
Text processing diploma	2	Expected completions	*	*	254
		Retention (%)	*	*	79
		Achievement (%)	*	*	48
NVQ business administration and accounting	2	Expected completions	29	61	37
		Retention (%)	97	92	73
		Achievement (%)	39	57	95
Integrated business technology	2	Expected completions	135	218	316
		Retention (%)	95	91	91
		Achievement (%)	44	53	72

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

\*data unreliable

# Curriculum Areas

## Health and Social Care

### Grade 2

**23 Inspectors observed 12 lessons covering a range of full-time and part-time courses in care and childcare, together with evening classes in counselling. The self-assessment report was very brief and made no reference to students' achievements. It also paid insufficient attention to teaching and learning. Evidence from lesson observations by the college was not used in arriving at judgements. Inspectors identified a number of strengths and weaknesses not noted by the college in its report. The judgements in the self-assessment report were not supported by robust evidence.**

#### Key strengths

- good teaching in many lessons
- systematic review of students' progress
- the high standard of formal and informal individual tutorial support
- pass rates above national figures on many courses
- good quality of students' work

#### Weaknesses

- poor retention and achievement on NVQ programmes
- declining recruitment on GNVQ and some part-time courses
- the failure to monitor some students' achievements on work experience
- poor progression to higher education from level 3 courses

24 The college offers a range of full-time and part-time care courses. It has established an assessment centre for NVQs in care and childcare, and has forged links with many local employers. Course teams hold regular meetings which focus on curriculum development and

operational issues. Wherever possible, part-time teachers and those teaching key skills attend team meetings. While there has been an overall increase in provision, the self-assessment report did not mention the decline in recruitment to many courses or identify action to remedy the situation.

25 There is much good teaching. Schemes of work and lesson plans vary widely in their level of detail. Some are merely lists of topics to be covered and do not identify assessment opportunities or teaching method. In some lessons, activities are varied and challenge the students. In less satisfactory lessons, teachers fail to ensure that all students participate actively. On the GNVQ intermediate in health and social care, most lessons consist of workshops in which students progress through workbooks covering the topics in each unit. Some groups work in this way for lengthy periods, with little variety or stimulus. In a few lessons, teachers make effective use of students' life and work experience to enrich learning.

26 The key skills of IT and application of number are taught as discrete lessons, but wherever possible the assessment of key skills takes place in the context of vocational assignments. Both vocational and key skills assignments are appropriate for the level of study and are marked promptly. The feedback on marked assignments is, in most cases, detailed and supportive. Teachers regularly meet students to assess their progress. Students monitor their own progress against action plans. Most tutorials are one to one, though tutors arrange group tutorials when there is a specific need identified by the group or the tutor. Students speak highly of the support they receive from their teachers and personal tutors.

27 Students on full-time childcare courses benefit from well-managed work experience with local employers and also in the college creche and day nursery. Work experience is not a compulsory part of GNVQ programmes, and staff do not routinely monitor the performance

# Curriculum Areas

of those students who participate. The quality of students' written work is often good. Most students' files are well organised and tidy. Many completed assignments contain examples of effective use of IT. In some lessons students' contributions are mature and demonstrate professional standards. The college's self-assessment report made no reference to students' achievements. Inspectors found that pass rates on many courses are higher than national averages. However, groups are sometimes very small and retention is poor on a number of courses. Most care students have the opportunity to take additional qualifications in first aid, food hygiene, and lifting and handling. Retention on NVQ programmes is poor and few students complete the full award in the expected timescale. Progress from all courses to employment in the care sector is good. The number of students who progress to higher

education from the BTEC national diploma in childhood studies is low.

28 Most teachers have relevant qualifications in care or education. Sufficient numbers of staff are trained as assessors and verifiers. The majority of lessons take place in comfortable rooms which are bright, well decorated and equipped. Some rooms can be joined to form more flexible spaces for practical work. Equipment for the demonstration of practical care and childcare techniques is adequate. There are ample supplies of materials for art and craft work. Students have access to up-to-date computers in key skills lessons and in the learning centre. The library holds a good range of specialist books in care subjects, and an extensive collection of periodicals and CD-ROMs to support learning.

## A summary of achievement and retention rates in health and social care, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GNVQ intermediate in health and social care	2	Expected completions	16	17	11
		Retention (%)	69	94	64
		Achievement (%)	31	81	100
NVQs in care and childcare	2	Expected completions	*	34	37
		Retention (%)	*	86	22
		Achievement (%)	*	21	50
Other part-time vocational care courses	2 and 3	Expected completions	111	88	47
		Retention (%)	90	92	87
		Achievement (%)	71	83	97
BTEC national diploma in childhood studies	3	Expected completions	31	19	36
		Retention (%)	90	84	72
		Achievement (%)	100	67	92

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

\*course not running

# Curriculum Areas

## Humanities

### Grade 3

**29 Inspectors observed 10 lessons. The inspection covered courses in humanities subjects, except modern languages, leading to general certificate of secondary education (GCSE), general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level), further education teachers' certificate courses and access to higher education. Inspectors identified more strengths and weaknesses than were in the brief self-assessment report, and placed greater emphasis than the college on some of the weaknesses in the report.**

#### Key strengths

- good levels of achievement and progression on the access course
- some improved pass rates in GCSE subjects
- well-planned courses
- much good teaching
- well-accommodated and properly-resourced lessons

#### Weaknesses

- poor retention on GCE A level courses and declining retention on GCSE courses
- some low student achievement
- lack of effective management response to significant issues
- inappropriate structure of provision for full-time GCE A level students
- unclear admissions policy for GCE A level subjects

30 Lessons and courses are generally well planned. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that much teaching in humanities is effective and varied. Most lessons are well managed, benefiting from different activities, appropriate tasks and objectives

which are clear to students. Much students' work is carefully and helpfully marked. Almost all lessons are held in well-decorated and comfortably furnished rooms, with easy access to library and other learning resources. For example, students in a class on study skills worked in a room next to the learning resources centre, to plan a series of short presentations. They printed off appropriate material from the internet as part of the resources they would use. The students were working well and made good progress. Some discussions are well managed, but others are less productive, because of missed opportunities to take the students' response and develop it further. Several classes are small, and have lessons of two to three hours. Some teachers have not adjusted their methods to take this into account. In a few lessons the teacher made ineffective use of time, spending too long informing the class of facts which could have been communicated more economically.

31 Students on access courses did well in 1998. Almost all of them successfully completed their studies and progressed to higher education or training. For GCSE and GCE A level courses, inspectors gave more weight than the self-assessment report to weaknesses in the patterns of achievement. Results have fluctuated considerably in recent years. Retention rates for GCSE students have declined in the last three years from a position above comparable benchmarks to one just below it. GCE A level retention declined sharply in 1998. Some pass rates improved, particularly in some GCSE subjects, but generally where they did, retention was poorer than in previous years. For example, the pass rate for GCE A level psychology improved from 73% to 80% but the retention rate fell from 88% to 51%. Overall, retention on GCE A level courses fell from a position close to comparable national figures to one well below them, and pass rates remained around the national benchmarks. GCE A level sociology pass rates have been poor for the last three years. The self-assessment report gave

# Curriculum Areas

only very brief attention to these matters. Completion rates for the further and adult education teachers' certificate are adversely affected by the proportion of students who do not complete the course for a year or more after it started, often because they have not been able to arrange for a teaching observation to take place.

32 Recruitment to GCSE and GCE A level courses has declined over the last three years from 198 to 146. This has limited the college's ability to offer a good choice of subjects. For example, GCSE history, GCE A level history and sociology have all failed to recruit sufficient numbers to run in 1998-99. A small number of full-time students aged 16 to 19 are currently taking GCE A level and GCSE subjects. Some GCE A level subjects are offered only as one-year courses, for one three-hour session each week. This is not an appropriate mode of study for many students. The college's response to declining enrolments and poor results has so far

been of limited effectiveness. The college has no clearly agreed entrance policy. Subject leaflets vary considerably in the statements they make about entry requirements for GCE A level subjects. The college is currently seeking to ensure that part-time applicants are not enrolled before they have received guidance and been given an informal assessment of their likelihood of success. Course review procedures have not included statistical analysis and management action points. In general there has been a lack of target-setting and monitoring for students' achievements. Some course management and tutoring arrangements are inadequate. For example, there is no routine procedure for reporting absences to the course tutor and no systematic procedure for action-planning and reviewing progress in the twice-termly individual tutorials offered to full-time GCSE and GCE students. The self-assessment report had little to say on these issues.

## 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 English, history, psychology and sociology	2	Expected completions	80	64	75
		Retention (%)	93	84	68
		Achievement (%)	72	52	88
GCE A levels	3	Expected completions	118	57	71
		Retention (%)	79	78	56
		Achievement (%)	35	68	65
Access to higher education	3	Expected completions	*	13	15
		Retention (%)	*	92	93
		Achievement (%)	*	75	93

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

\*data unavailable



# Cross-college Provision

## Support for Students

### Grade 2

**33 Inspection findings confirmed a range of strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report. Some weaknesses and strengths were not included in the report and some strengths included were statements of normal practice.**

#### Key strengths

- effective recruitment and admissions procedures
- successful advice and enrolment shops in local towns
- good initial guidance and careers advice
- significant learning support provision
- many effective tutorials
- comprehensive and accessible childcare

#### Weaknesses

- some variation in the quality of tutorial practice
- less effective assessment, induction and tutorial support for part-time students
- underdeveloped careers education programme for some students

34 Students receive much good support from staff and from the student services unit. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that pre-enrolment activities provide prospective students with impartial advice and guidance. The college has established successful learning advice shops in Midsomer Norton and Keynsham. Last year these handled over 2,000 enquiries for college courses and careers guidance. Liaison programmes with local schools are well established. Open days and careers fairs enable prospective students to find out about courses and college activities. Enquiries are followed up promptly. Guidance is available to help students decide the most

appropriate course. There is little accreditation of students' prior learning.

35 Induction programmes for full-time students are well organised. They provide students with a good introduction to the college and to their course of study. An effective system enables students to re-negotiate their learning programme, if necessary. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that many part-time students do not receive an adequate induction to the college.

36 The college allocates substantial resources to learning support. The learning support needs of most full-time students are assessed by vocational tutors and learning support staff. Others are determined on the basis of the student's entry qualifications, or students are referred for help as needs are identified during their course. Learning support is provided as appropriate in lessons where tutors and support staff work jointly, in individual tuition, or in workshops. Learning support programmes are carefully monitored and recorded. Arrangements for part-time students are less effective. The college identified the lack of comprehensive initial assessment for some part-time students as a possible reason for some students being placed on inappropriate courses. Formal initial assessment has now been extended to the courses affected. The college has made a significant commitment to inclusive learning. In a pilot scheme, students are following individually-designed learning programmes using a range of entry level courses, rather than taking a discrete foundation course. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported. As noted in the self-assessment report, programmes leading to the accreditation of key skills are offered as an entitlement to all students.

37 There is much good tutorial practice but the quality of tutorials varies across curriculum areas. Most full-time students have tutorials which are well documented by tutors. However, in some areas, tutorials for students on

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substantial part-time courses are not well organised and records are not always adequate. All full-time courses include individual tutorials in the timetable. Many individual tutorials are well planned with careful review and recording. This information is aggregated into student files held centrally. Each student's progress is finally reviewed at course team meetings held twice a term. Surveys of student opinion confirmed that tutorials are helpful and staff supportive. The college has recently introduced an additional option for students, the completion of a progress file leading to an accredited 'record of achievement'.

38 The college has strong links with employers which benefit careers education. Employers provide a range of work experience opportunities and advise on the curriculum. Some work experience is arranged overseas. Guidance on the college's careers provision is included in the charter and students' handbook. The college careers library has a comprehensive range of literature and appropriate careers IT packages. Working relationships between college and careers service staff are good. Individual guidance on careers and higher education is readily available. There is a regular programme of group sessions, often involving inputs from the careers service or employers. Course tutors work closely with the careers service adviser to incorporate careers education into courses. The degree of involvement varies across the college, resulting in an underdeveloped careers education programme for some students.

39 Central student services are well managed and provide a coherent pattern of support for students. Welfare and financial advice and counselling are readily accessible. The college provides free bus services covering a wide area. The self-assessment report identified the creche and day nursery as strengths. Inspectors agreed. These facilities and the 'after-school' club are highly regarded by students. The college chaplain works closely with the other

support services. A students' consultative forum, chaired by the chaplain and attended by two governors, has recently been formed. A varied sports and activities programme is attracting increasing support.

## General Resources

### Grade 2

**40 Inspectors agreed with the majority of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report. However, the self-assessment report contained insufficient detail and did not include some key strengths and weaknesses.**

#### Key strengths

- well-equipped and comfortably-furnished classrooms
- outstanding new buildings
- well-maintained grounds and buildings
- good provision of computers for students
- well-managed accommodation

#### Weaknesses

- lack of library facilities at the Keynsham annexe
- limited access for people with disabilities at the Keynsham annexe
- insufficient study spaces in the library

41 The college is located on a 13.2 acre site in Radstock. There have been substantial improvements to the accommodation since the last inspection. The self-assessment report highlighted the outstanding new building opened in 1997, housing the library and learning resources centre, 12 classrooms, staff accommodation, a hairdressing salon, social areas and purpose-built creche and day nursery facilities for 50 children. Most of the remaining teaching and staff accommodation is of good

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quality, housed in a building opened in 1995. This building also houses the college 'internet cafe' where students and the general public can purchase snacks and log on to the internet at one of the cafe's six computers. An adjacent building contains an attractive open-plan reception area, the refectory, staff accommodation, some workshops and student services facilities. Apart from six mobile classrooms, which are in an unsatisfactory condition, the teaching accommodation is good. Rooms are comfortably furnished and in good decorative order. They are well equipped with blinds, whiteboards, overhead projectors and screens. Approximately one-third of the rooms have permanent television and video facilities. The office accommodation for teaching and support staff is generally pleasant and spacious.

42 College grounds are very well maintained. The areas surrounding the new buildings have been attractively landscaped and planted with a variety of shrubs. Wheelchair users can gain access to all teaching and social areas. College signs are clear and the large car park is well lit. All accommodation is clean and well maintained. The refectory is too small and becomes crowded at peak periods. The college has a small playing field which is used for football, but there are no changing facilities or other sports facilities. Each week about 30 students take advantage of the opportunity provided by the college to go swimming at a local school or engage in outdoor pursuits.

43 Ellsbridge House, on the outskirts of Keynsham, is a grade II listed building accounting for approximately 10% of college accommodation. Some rooms are suitable for educational use, but many are small and lack the flexibility necessary for effective teaching and learning. Access for students with disabilities is difficult, and there are no library facilities, although students and staff can arrange for books to be delivered from the college library in Radstock. The learning shops based in Keynsham and Midsomer Norton are well resourced, and the college has recently

leased additional premises in Keynsham town centre. When this comes into use, it will provide a useful supplement to the provision at Ellsbridge House.

44 Accommodation is well managed. The college has a clear, well-researched accommodation strategy. At the time of the inspection, work had started on the construction of new motor vehicle workshops. A three-year planned maintenance programme is updated annually. Room utilisation surveys in 1997 and 1998 show that room use is satisfactory and improving. The college maintains a detailed assets register. Weaknesses in health and safety auditing procedures identified by the self-assessment process were promptly rectified.

45 The college's spacious, well-designed library was opened in 1997. An annual budget of over £30,000 provides for a good range of books, periodicals, videos, audio cassettes and CD-ROMs. In the past two years the number of books issued has increased by over 40%. Good informal links with teaching staff ensure that purchases are relevant to students' needs. The layout of the library's study spaces allows effective supervision, but the 42 spaces are insufficient for the number of students. A staff survey, in July 1998 showed a generally high level of satisfaction with library facilities. The findings of a useful self-assessment of library and learning resource facilities carried out by learning resources staff was not reflected in the self-assessment report submitted to inspectors.

46 A total of 229 modern computers is sufficient to provide for students at both Radstock and Keynsham. Fifty machines are available on a 'drop-in' basis for students who wish to work on their own. The college does not monitor the use of these machines. Central control of purchasing ensures that there is a common standard for hardware and software. A member of staff, acting as college IT adviser, provides helpful advice to curriculum managers on software developments and purchases. There is a good range of software, and students'

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access to the internet is effectively managed. The college has recently started to develop a useful intranet facility for staff.

## Quality Assurance

### Grade 3

**47 Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report. They agreed with some weaknesses, but identified others which the college had overlooked. The college placed insufficient emphasis on the weakness it identified in the course review processes and on the assessment of the quality of teaching and learning.**

#### Key strengths

- comprehensive and well-documented policies and procedures for quality assurance
- effective analysis of performance by the academic board
- productive process for collecting and responding to students' views
- comprehensive arrangements for staff appraisal
- effective staff development
- effective responses to external verifiers' reports

#### Weaknesses

- lack of sustained impact of quality assurance procedures on students' achievements and retention
- poor quality of many course reviews
- inadequate attention to students' achievements in course reviews
- overgenerous assessment of teaching quality in some areas
- some inadequate monitoring of charter commitments and complaints

- underdeveloped arrangements for lesson observation

48 The college has a comprehensive set of policies and procedures to enable it to evaluate the quality of its work. Some of these have been introduced or revised during the last year and have yet to demonstrate their effectiveness. While the academic board pays close attention to the performance of students on college courses, the reviews carried out by course teams often pay insufficient attention to students' achievements and retention. The system used by the college to assess the quality of teaching and learning is developing well, but is not yet a comprehensive and effective monitoring tool. These elements of the quality assurance system are not sufficiently linked to enable them to provide a consistent overview of the quality of the college's work.

49 There is little evidence to show that quality assurance systems have led to continuous improvement in students' performance. There are often significant swings in students' achievements and retention from one year to the next and it is difficult to identify trends. In 1997, recorded achievement figures were particularly low. In 1998, students' achievements improved generally, but the numbers of students completing their courses declined. The use of value-added measures reported at the last inspection has lapsed.

50 A comprehensive system of course review and evaluation has been a central element of quality assurance for many years. Reporting lines are clear. Course team reports go to the academic board through its subcommittees. The quality of course reviews varies and some are unsatisfactory. In humanities and engineering, course reviews are often poor. They contain little evaluative comment or systematic analysis of strengths and weaknesses. Action plans are often insufficiently detailed and do not address the weaknesses identified. These shortcomings

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were not recognised in the self-assessment report. Courses which are causing concern are required to report actions to improve quality. Most action plans from the academic board are of good quality and some have led to improvements.

51 The college responds effectively to comments made by external verifiers and examiners. There has been good progress towards ensuring more staff gain their assessor and verifier awards since the last inspection. Most external verifiers report on good procedures for internal verification.

52 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the college's arrangements for assessing the quality of lessons are underdeveloped. Some observations are made by peers, some by managers. The observations make little contribution to the processes of course review. The college was overgenerous in its assessment of the quality of teaching and learning in some subjects.

53 Students' views on a wide range of aspects of their experience at the college are regularly gathered through questionnaires and course representatives. Their views are analysed and there are instances where the college has responded swiftly to adverse student comment. The students' charter is distributed to students and used at induction. Students on the college's off-site collaborative provision did not receive the charter. The college identified in its self-assessment report that its monitoring of charter commitments is weak and inspectors agreed with this view. The college responds well to complaints it receives. As a result of self-assessment, the college concluded that it did not monitor its responses to complaints. It has now introduced an effective system to track responses to complaints and ensure their resolution.

54 Much good progress has been made in the last year to develop and monitor the standards of service provided by support functions such as

estates, students support services, the library and finance. Standards devised by support teams are clearly expressed in a standard format. The attainment of these standards is audited by the self-assessment review group and senior managers. So far, only a few audits have been undertaken. In some cases, the audits led to a refinement of the standards laid down.

55 Inspectors support the college's view that staff appraisal and development are supportive, thorough and effective. Appraisal results in clear objectives being set for individual members of staff. These are reviewed and updated through the year. Staff development needs are identified through appraisal and are clearly linked to strategic planning.

56 The self-assessment report presented for inspection resulted from the college's first cycle of self-assessment. All staff had the opportunity to contribute to the report and most were involved in its preparation. The report was discussed by governors and the academic board. It made little use of the evidence provided from the lesson observations undertaken. While inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the report, most found others which were omitted. Some of these were significant and their omission reduces the quality and usefulness of the report. In some cases, where both the inspectors and the college identified similar weaknesses, inspectors placed more weight on the significance of these weaknesses than did the college. The quality of the action plans in addressing weaknesses varies.

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## Governance

### Grade 2

**57 Although inspectors and auditors agreed with the strengths in the self-assessment report, they identified some additional strengths and weaknesses.**

#### Key strengths

- effective links with curriculum and cross-college areas
- significant involvement in strategic planning
- efficient conduct of corporation business
- effective monitoring of the college's financial performance

#### Weaknesses

- lack of compliance with, and updating of, the terms of reference of some committees
- underdeveloped evaluation by governors of their own performance
- some weaknesses in monitoring college performance in areas other than finance

58 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is good. The corporation substantially conducts its business in accordance with the instrument and articles of government. It also substantially fulfils its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC.

59 The corporation has 13 business members, two co-opted members, two community members and the principal. There are currently four vacancies which it has chosen not to fill, pending the government's revised guidelines for governance. Most governors have been associated with the college for many years. Governors use their wide experience to the

benefit of the college. There are no staff or student governors. A student subcommittee was recently established to ensure students' views are communicated to the corporation. Each governor is linked with a specific curriculum or cross-college area. These governors act as a channel for communication between staff and the corporation.

60 There are six corporation committees, and responsibilities are clearly delegated to each committee. The work of the committees is overseen, but not duplicated, by the full corporation. Although the college is in good financial health a management accounts review group has been set up to enable members of the corporation to consider the college's management accounts on a monthly basis. This group reports to the finance and employment policy committee. The committee's terms of reference have not been amended to reflect this innovation. A committee responsible for security matters has effectively overseen the implementation of improved security arrangements on the college's sites and is overseeing the college's IT for millennium compliance. The search and nominations committee has carried out a skills audit of corporation membership to identify additional skills needed by the corporation. The committee has not formally recommended governors for re-election. The audit committee has not yet fully implemented the requirements of the audit code of practice.

61 Inspectors and auditors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that business is conducted efficiently at meetings. Sound administrative arrangements support the corporation's work. The clerk to the corporation is the assistant accountant and has a separate job description approved by the corporation. Clerking is effective. The corporation and committee procedures and responsibilities are clearly set out in the corporation manual. Meetings are supported by well-written reports and appropriately detailed minutes; agendas

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clearly identify the items which are for discussion and those for decision. Meetings of the governing body are generally well attended. There is a good level of debate at corporation and committee meetings. Working relationships between governors and senior managers are productive. The chair and principal meet frequently. Governors distinguish clearly between governance and management. The code of conduct is in need of updating. The register of interests has recently been revised.

62 The self-assessment report stated that governors have a clear view of their strategic role and contribute effectively to the strategic planning process. Inspectors agreed with this judgement. Governors are aware of the issues facing the college and have a clarity of purpose and sense of direction. Governors debate and establish an order of priority for strategic objectives and review the strategic plan and operating statement at regular intervals. The financial forecasts are closely integrated with the strategic plan. Governors monitor the college's performance against targets, and receive regular reports including data on students' achievements. The monitoring of some aspects of the college's work has been insufficiently rigorous. For example, equal opportunities, which is an important aspect of the college's strategy to widen participation, has not been formally monitored by the corporation.

63 Governors have taken an active role in the self-assessment process. They attended staff briefings and development seminars, were involved with the college's self-assessment review group, and worked with relevant college staff through task groups and working parties. The corporation responded positively to the process of self-assessment. However, it has been slow to establish and monitor measures of its own performance. To help members in this task, a set of indicators has been developed.

## Management

### Grade 3

**64 Inspectors and auditors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses addressed by the college. However, some strengths were overstated and some weaknesses were omitted.**

#### Key strengths

- a clear management structure with well-defined roles and responsibilities
- good financial management and monitoring
- open management style which values the contribution of staff
- involvement of staff in strategic and operational planning
- effective links with external bodies

#### Weaknesses

- weaknesses in divisional and unit management and in the response to some key issues
- insufficient rigour in some areas in setting targets and monitoring progress
- inaccuracies in achievement data
- inadequate use of student data
- some ineffective marketing

65 The executive team consists of the principal, the vice-principal and the finance manager. It is perceived by staff to be open, supportive and responsive. Staff report that they are well informed about college values and objectives through a range of media and monthly staff meetings. FEFC funding unit targets have been met for the last two years, staffing levels have been reduced and accommodation improved. However, effective action has not been taken to address a number of issues, some of which were identified at the

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last inspection. These include declining enrolments, low levels of achievement, and insufficient teaching time for GCE A level programmes.

66 The senior management team meets every two weeks to discuss a broad range of operational and strategic matters. This team comprises the executive, three senior cross-college managers and three divisional managers who line-manage the college's nine curriculum unit managers. In addition to their curriculum responsibilities, each divisional manager is responsible for a cross-college area and a marketing sector.

67 The college has a clear management structure which is understood by staff. A number of key services including finance, estates, library and learning resources, are well managed. However, many of the full-time staff have several roles and management responsibilities. There are significant variations in the effectiveness with which divisional and unit teams plan and manage the curriculum. There are inequalities in staff workloads. Some managers find it difficult to fulfil their roles effectively. Inconsistent practice makes the flow of information between divisional managers, unit managers and teachers patchy. This was reported in the 1995 inspection. Inspectors found that managers do not always carry out their monitoring and control responsibilities effectively. The absence of effective supervision and insufficient information available to senior managers in some areas of activity, such as course review and tutorial policy, has resulted in variable practice.

68 During the inspection, the college had difficulty providing some inspectors with accurate data from college-based records relating to students' achievements. The college has recently upgraded its student management information system to improve staff access to data to inform decision-making, particularly at a course or subject level. Some staff are not yet fully confident that the data provided through

the network are accurate. Procedures for tracking students' attendance have been tightened through the introduction of a computerised registration system and more frequent checking of registers.

69 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the strategic planning process involves extensive consultation with staff, and external agencies. Responsibilities for carrying through the strategic plan are identified in the operational plan. Operational plans include objectives and targets for cross-college and curriculum divisions. Although operational plans are cross-referenced to college strategic objectives, the planning process is not fully effective. The college has not been successful in improving students' achievements and retention in a number of areas. There is variability in the way that targets are expressed; some targets are too general to allow effective monitoring. Some teams are insufficiently rigorous in deciding how to achieve their targets; others have not considered ways of improving recruitment and students' achievements when they fall below target levels.

70 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is good. The college's finance team is appropriately skilled and experienced. Timely management accounts are produced every month which are reviewed by senior managers and governors. A more comprehensive report, including detailed financial analysis, is produced three times a year. Budget holders receive clear monthly reports against the budgets for which they are responsible. The financial regulations and procedures have recently been updated to incorporate changes in practice and input from the internal and external auditors. The internal and external auditors have not identified any significant weaknesses in the college's systems of internal control.

71 In some areas the college does not market its services effectively. All staff are expected to



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contribute to marketing and recruitment initiatives. Their contribution varies in quality. Marketing of some provision is underdeveloped. Variable use is made of market information to influence course planning. Recommendations from external consultants have resulted in improvements in some publicity material and college promotion.

72 The self-assessment report stated that the college has a strong commitment to the local community and inspectors agreed. Courses have been developed at centres away from the college which effectively widen participation amongst groups that have traditionally not enrolled at the college. The college has effective and productive links with a wide range of external organisations, education institutions and local businesses. It has formed constructive international partnerships with colleges in Europe and the United States of America.

73 The college has policies and procedures for both equal opportunities and for health and safety. The equal opportunities committee has been reconstituted and revitalised. Teaching, support staff and students are represented and the committee meets regularly. This has raised the profile of the committee's objectives throughout the college. The health and safety committee also meets regularly and reports to the academic board.

## Conclusions

74 The inspection team found the self-assessment report provided a useful basis for planning and carrying out the inspection. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the report. However, they identified further weaknesses during the inspection and placed greater significance on others identified in the report. These related particularly to the quality of teaching and learning and students' achievements. Inspectors agreed with one of the four curriculum grades awarded by the college. In cross-college areas, inspectors

agreed with the overall college judgements in three areas, but found that weaknesses had been omitted or understated in the other two.

75 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 (November 1998)

Age	%
Under 16	3
16-18 years	11
19-24 years	8
25+ years	74
Not known	4
Total	100

Source: college data

## Student numbers by level of study (November 1998)

Level of study	%
Foundation	36
Intermediate	31
Advanced	15
Higher education	2
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	16
Total	100

Source: college data

## Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (November 1998)

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	56	1,031	19
Agriculture	90	121	4
Engineering	94	193	5
Business	137	698	15
Hotel and catering	25	101	2
Health and community care	188	570	14
Art and design	64	428	9
Humanities	78	1,475	28
Basic education	50	190	4
Total	782	4,807	100

Source: college data

## Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 4% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

## Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (November 1998)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	40	11	1	52
Supporting direct learning contact	10	1	0	11
Other support	66	3	1	70
Total	116	15	2	133

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

# College Statistics

## Three-year Trends

### Financial data

	1996	1997	1998
Income	£3,914,000	£4,141,000	£4,368,000
Average level of funding (ALF)			
Out-turn to 1997; funded 1998	£16.34	£15.94	£15.58
Payroll as a proportion of income	62%	63%	62%
Achievement of funding target	95%	103%*	100%
Diversity of income	27%	23%	23%
Operating surplus	£133,000	£100,000	£11,000

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	83	144	174	642	422	607
	Retention (%)	89	76	74	87	87	89
	Achievement (%)	97	55	47	96	64	42
2	Expected completions	251	244	282	797	616	1,128
	Retention (%)	86	77	83	85	88	90
	Achievement (%)	97	59	60	98	55	29
3	Expected completions	–	170	97	–	499	351
	Retention (%)	–	88	78	–	87	88
	Achievement (%)	79	43	53	92	52	72
4 or 5	Expected completions	–	0	2	–	112	92
	Retention (%)	–	n/a	50	–	99	90
	Achievement (%)	n/a	n/a	0	100	33	45
Short courses	Expected completions	150	151	151	3,021	2,874	2,929
	Retention (%)	99	98	97	98	95	93
	Achievement (%)	46	86	54	51	74	59
Unknown/unclassified	Expected completions	91	89	124	748	822	1,033
	Retention (%)	79	82	83*	86	86	87
	Achievement (%)	57	95	65	56	86	88

Source: ISR

–ISR data not collected

\*ISR data may not be reliable

n/a not applicable

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