



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE



Office for Standards
in Education

Inspection report
Norton Radstock College

Dates of inspection: 2–6 February 2004

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Basic information about the college

Name of college:	Norton Radstock College
Type of college:	General further education college
Principal:	Shirley Arayan
Address of college:	South Hill Park Radstock Bath BA3 3RW
Telephone number:	01761 433161
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Chair of governors:	Jeremy Blatchford
Unique reference number:	130559
Name of reporting inspector:	John Evans HMI
Dates of inspection:	2–6 February 2004

Part A: Summary

Information about the college

Norton Radstock College is a small further education (FE) college in a semi-rural location 10 miles south west of Bath. The college was established in 1948 to serve the mining communities of the north-east Somerset coalfields. It moved to its main campus in Radstock in 1960 and this was substantially refurbished in the mid-1990s. In Keynsham, a small town some 12 miles to the north west, the college has a small sixth form centre called B6 based at Broadlands School and an animal care centre at Ellsbridge House. It also has information technology (IT)-based learning centres in the high streets of Radstock and Keynsham, and a new business training centre which recently opened in Midsomer Norton. The area is characterised by a predominance of small and medium enterprises. The college is the main provider of vocational training in north-east Somerset and currently has about 100 modern apprentices undertaking work-based learning in 7 different areas of learning.

Prior to incorporation, the college concentrated on providing courses for adult students, but in recent years the number of students aged 16 to 18 has steadily grown. In 2002/03, the college had 794 full-time students, of whom 82% were aged 16 to 18, and just over 5,000 part-time students, of whom 93% were adults. Most enrolments are on courses at levels 1 and 2. Some 70% of students are female, a gender imbalance which is most pronounced on part-time courses. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is very small and reflects the local population. The college employs some 300 staff, of whom 50% are part time. The college has recently been awarded funding to develop a Centre of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) in adult care. The mission statement declares that the college ‘...values all people, providing innovative learning opportunities for all to reach out for a new future.’

How effective is the college?

The inspection graded the quality of provision in nine curriculum areas. Inspectors judged teaching and students achievements to be satisfactory in seven and unsatisfactory in two. The quality of work-based learning was satisfactory in the one area inspected. The college’s main strengths and the areas that should be improved are listed below.

Key strengths

- high retention rates
 - high pass rates on courses for adults
 - good learning environment
 - provision of a diverse curriculum
 - good transport and childcare arrangements
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- effective collaboration with schools and employers
 - good strategic response to the education and training needs of the local area.

What should be improved

- quality assurance
- pass rates on courses at levels 2 and 3 for students aged 16 to 18
- the proportion of good or better teaching
- provision in hairdressing and literacy and numeracy
- initial assessment and learning support
- tutorial framework and progress reviews
- the college's response to race equality legislation
- the speed and vigour with which weaknesses are addressed.

Further aspects of provision requiring improvement are identified in the sections on individual subjects and courses in the full report.

Quality of provision in curriculum and occupational areas

The table below shows overall judgements about provision in subjects and courses that were inspected. Judgements are based primarily on the quality of teaching, training and learning and how well students achieve. Not all subjects and courses were inspected. Inspectors make overall judgements on curriculum areas and on the effectiveness of leadership and management in the range: Outstanding (grade 1), Good (2), Satisfactory (3), Unsatisfactory (4), Very Poor (5).

Area	Overall judgements about provision, and comment
Animal care and horticulture	Satisfactory. Pass rates are high on the first diploma animal care, but retention and pass rates on some courses are low. Most teaching is satisfactory or good and teachers link theory and practical applications effectively. Students receive high levels of informal support, but formal tutorial practice is weak and few clear targets are set to help students improve their performance. Insufficient emphasis is placed on curriculum management, quality improvement and the development of appropriate teaching strategies for mixed-ability groups.
Automotive engineering	Satisfactory. Work-based learning contributory grade: satisfactory. Retention and pass rates are high on national vocational qualification (NVQ) courses at levels 2 and 3. Full-time students take a broad range of qualifications, but theory lessons lack variety and challenge. Most practical resources are good, but the vehicle fleet lacks modern cars for students to work on. Full-time students do not start their key skills until late in their course and miss good opportunities to gather evidence.
Business, administration, management and professional	Satisfactory. Accounting contributory grade: good. Retention and pass rates are mostly high, but low on some level 3 courses. Teaching and assessment on the broad range of accounting courses are good. There is strong individual support for students, but some full-time students are on inappropriate courses or in small classes which restrict the range of learning activities. New curriculum leadership is strongly focused on improvements, but quality assurance procedures remain unsatisfactory.
Information and communications technology	Satisfactory. Retention and pass rates on full-time courses at levels 1 and 2 have been consistently high for the last three years. Students develop good information and communications technology (ICT) skills and there is effective sharing of good practice to improve learning. An increasing number of adult students access courses in conveniently located learning centres, but their progress is not adequately monitored. Teachers fail to set challenging targets for students at the start of their programme and few full-time students progress to higher levels of study.

Area	Overall judgements about provision, and comment
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	<p>Unsatisfactory. Beauty therapy contributory grade: satisfactory. Students are well motivated and take part in a good range of enrichment activities. Resources for hairdressing and beauty therapy are inadequate and restrict students' development of professional skills. In hairdressing, much teaching is unsatisfactory; there are poor assessment practices and insufficient progression opportunities. Management and quality assurance of the hairdressing curriculum are unsatisfactory.</p>
Health, social care and childcare	<p>Satisfactory. Pass rates are consistently high and teaching and learning are good on courses for adults. Some courses have very low retention rates and lessons on courses for students aged 16 to 18 are often dull and uninspiring. The college has responded well to community and care sector skills' needs and there is a wide range of care provision. Assessment practice in the workplace is inconsistent and quality assurance is not rigorous enough on some courses.</p>
General art and design	<p>Satisfactory. Pass rates are high on most courses. Teaching is good across the broad range of part-time courses and the creative skills of adult students are well developed. On full-time courses, small class sizes restrict the sharing of ideas within groups and gaps in resources limit the range of skills students can develop. Some students are on inappropriate courses due to the lack of any full-time course below level 2.</p>
Humanities and English	<p>Satisfactory. Pass rates have been consistently high on the access to higher education (HE) course, but low on most general certificate in education advanced level (GCE A-level) courses. The vast majority of students complete their courses, but numbers on advanced supplementary level (AS-level) and GCE A-level courses are very low. There is good individual academic support for students and some dynamic teaching in English. Management at course level is satisfactory, but the overall management arrangements for the sixth form centre are weak.</p>
Literacy and numeracy	<p>Unsatisfactory. There are good partnerships leading to innovative and successful work with employers and unions. Retention and pass rates are high on many courses, but pass rates are very low on key skills level 1 communication and application of number. There is insufficient additional literacy, numeracy and dyslexia support for students. Key skills teachers have insufficient expertise in literacy and numeracy teaching. Inadequate quality assurance does not identify much unsatisfactory teaching.</p>

How well is the college led and managed?

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Governors and senior managers have established a clear strategic direction to ensure the college best meets the needs of its local community. The college has effective partnership arrangements with a range of organisations. Retention rates are at, or above, the national averages. Pass rates have generally improved, but in 2002/03 not all improvements were sustained. Standards of teaching have not risen since the last inspection. The proportion of teaching graded good or better is significantly lower than the average for colleges of the same type. Management of the curriculum and work-based learning is satisfactory in most curriculum areas. However, the quality of provision is unsatisfactory in two curriculum areas. Weaknesses in quality assurance identified in the last inspection have not been addressed with sufficient determination and quality assurance procedures do not make an effective contribution to raising standards. The college has been slow to respond to the requirements of the Race Relations Amendment Act. Financial management is good and the college provides adequate value for money.

To what extent is the college educationally and socially inclusive?

The college's response to educational and social inclusion is satisfactory. The college is committed to sustaining a wide range of courses to meet the needs of the local community and to widen participation. There are good partnership links with local schools and employers and a broad range of options are provided for students aged 14 to 16. College investment in transport for students and in nursery provision helps attract students who would not otherwise participate in education. Access to most buildings and specialist resources for students with restricted mobility is good. There is discrete provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities not yet ready to attend mainstream courses and they generally make good progress. The college's response to the requirements of race relations legislation has been slow. Limited use is made of data to monitor and improve performance in relation to equality of opportunity. Reasonable progress has been made in responding to the requirements of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA). At curriculum level, insufficient attention is paid to extending students' understanding of equality of opportunity.

How well are students and trainees guided and supported?

The college provides satisfactory guidance and support to students. Arrangements to inform prospective students about the provision, including college publications, are good. Full-time students receive a helpful induction to the college and their course, which includes an initial assessment. Arrangements for the enrolment, induction and initial assessment of part-time students are less systematic. Initial assessment does not identify all students who would benefit from additional learning support and support is not always provided for those students whose needs are subsequently identified. Learning support assistants are deployed in lessons to help individual students. However, there is insufficient additional literacy, numeracy and dyslexia support for students. Teachers provide all students with considerable day-to-day

support, which is highly valued by students. Much personal support is informal, there are no structured tutorial programmes and few records are kept. Full-time students generally have one individual tutorial each term, but there is insufficient emphasis on setting clear targets which could help students to improve their performance. Careers and progression guidance are offered by individual appointment, but the college does not monitor the take-up of this provision.

Students' views of the college

Students' views about the college were taken into account and a summary of their main comments is presented below.

What students like about the college

- friendly and approachable staff
- good support from teachers and personal tutors
- relaxed atmosphere
- good working environment
- flexible learning opportunities in the high street learning centres
- good standard of childcare
- free transport to and from the college.

What they feel could be improved

- teachers talking too much in lessons
- being set more challenging targets
- careers and progression advice
- recreational and sports facilities
- some cramped and noisy accommodation
- better and cheaper food in the canteen
- more computers and other resources.

Other information

The college inspection report will normally be published 12 working weeks after the formal feedback of the inspection findings to the college. Once published, the college has two months in which to prepare its post-inspection action plan and submit it to the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The college's action plan must show what action the college will take to bring about improvements in response to issues raised in the report. The governors should agree it before it is submitted to the local LSC. The local LSC should send to Ofsted only action plans from colleges that have been judged inadequate or have been awarded a grade 4 or 5 for curriculum provision, work-based learning and/or leadership and management.

Part B: The college as a whole

Summary of grades awarded to teaching and learning by inspectors

Aspect & learner type	Graded good or better (Grades 1 to 3) %	Graded satisfactory (Grade 4) %	Graded less than satisfactory (Grades 5 to 7) %
Teaching 16–18	44	40	16
19+ and WBL*	57	33	10
Learning 16–18	43	43	14
19+ and WBL*	61	31	8

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

**work-based learning*

Achievement and standards

1. Retention rates are mostly above national average for students aged 16 to 18 and adult students at all levels. For students aged 16 to 18, this represents a clear improvement over a three-year period, but there has been some decline in retention rates for adult students. Pass rates generally improved between 2000 and 2002, particularly for adult students. There was some decline in overall pass rates in 2003, particularly at level 2, although they remain above the national average for adults at all levels and for students aged 16 to 18 at level 1. Retention rates are low on some modern apprenticeship programmes. Framework completion rates have generally improved over the last year and range from very low in business to satisfactory in automotive engineering.

2. The college has tightened procedures for monitoring attendance and following-up absences. The overall level of attendance in lessons observed by inspectors was 81%, which is above the national average. Attendance levels during inspection ranged from 69% in literacy and numeracy to 94% in ICT.

3. Many students at the college have low prior attainment. The college does not yet make effective use of value added systems to measure the progress students make or as a tool for motivating students and helping them raise their levels of achievement. Nevertheless, most students, particularly adult students, display good levels of self-motivation. Inspectors found the standard of students' work to be mostly good in business, especially accounting, ICT, and on part-time art courses. Adult students in care and students generally in automotive engineering and beauty therapy develop good practical skills. In other areas, levels of students' attainment are more variable. On AS-level and GCE A-level courses, for

example, too many students struggle to reach the standard required to achieve their qualification.

16 to 18 year olds

4. Students aged 16 to 18 represent only 17% of all college students, but some 80% of full-time students. Most enrolments by this age group are at levels 2 and 3. Retention rates at all levels have mostly been high in recent years, although the retention rate on level 3 courses fell by 22% in 2000/01 before improving by 28% the following year. Pass rates at level 1 have consistently been well above the national average. At level 2, pass rates have declined by about 10% in each of the last two years and are now 6% below the national average. Pass rates at level 3, previously just above the national average, have been just below the national average in each of the last two years.

5. At level 2, retention rates for students aged 16 to 18 have been consistently high on general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) and general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) courses and around the national average on NVQ courses, although in 2003 retention rates fell significantly on GCSE courses and improved on NVQ courses. Pass rates have been above the national average for the last three years on each type of course. At level 3, retention rates on AS-level and GCE A-level courses have been consistently high but pass rates remain below the national average, although they have improved in each of the last three years. On advanced level vocational courses, retention rates have been erratic, moving from 37%, to 74%, to 61% over the last three years, while pass rates have remained around the national average. The improved pass rate in 2003 coincided with a lower retention rate. Only a very small number of students aged 16 to 18 take NVQ qualifications at level 3.

Adult learners

6. In 2002/03, approximately 83% of students were adults, 98% of whom were on part-time courses. Adult enrolments are distributed broadly evenly between long and short courses and between levels 1, 2 and 3, with a small number of adult students on higher level courses.

7. In 2001/02, overall retention rates for adult students were well above the national average at level 1, at the national average at level 2, and below the national average at level 3. At level 4, the retention rate fell to only 32%. In 2002/03 retention rates fell by 9% at level 1, but improved at all other levels, to 74% in the case of level 4. Currently, retention rates for adult students are above the national average at levels 1, 2 and 4; and just below the national average at level 3. Overall pass rates for adult students in 2002 were significantly above the national average at all levels. In 2002/03, pass rates improved slightly at levels 1 and 3, but declined by 4% at levels 2 and 4.

8. On level 1 and on GCSE courses, adult students generally achieve as well as students aged 16 to 18, although a slightly lower proportion of adults complete their course. Retention rates for the significant numbers of adult students on NVQ courses at levels 2 and 3 were poor in previous years, but improved in 2002/03 to above the national average. The

pass rate for adult students on NVQ level 2 courses has consistently been above the national average. On NVQ level 3 courses, the pass rate has varied substantially from one year to another, but has remained at or above the national average. On NVQ level 4 courses, the retention rate fell dramatically in 2001/02 to 35%, but otherwise retention rates and, particularly, pass rates have consistently been well above national averages. On AS-level and GCE A-level courses, while retention rates for adult students have been in line with the national average, pass rates in the last two years have been significantly above the national average.

Quality of education and training

9. Teaching, learning and attainment were graded by inspectors in 128 lessons. Teaching was good or better in 49% of these, satisfactory in 38% and less than satisfactory in 13%. It was excellent or very good in only 12%. The proportion of teaching that was good or better is significantly lower than the average for colleges of the same type. The highest proportion of good or very good teaching was on business, especially accounting, ICT, health, social care and childcare, and horticulture courses. The quality of teaching varies considerably between curriculum areas. In automotive engineering, teaching in the vast majority of lessons was satisfactory. In both hairdressing and beauty therapy and literacy and numeracy, one third of lessons were judged to be unsatisfactory or poor. Such unsatisfactory teaching requires urgent attention.

10. At all levels, the quality of teaching is better on courses for adults. The teaching in 60% of lessons for adults was good or better, compared to 44% of lessons for students aged 16 to 18. In health, social care and childcare, teaching in all of the lessons for adult students was good or better and this often inspired and challenged the students, who developed good skills in examining complex theoretical issues as a result. Compared with students aged 16 to 18, adult students were also better taught on art and design and humanities courses. For both age groups, there was more good teaching on courses at level 3 than at levels 1 and 2, although the proportion was still significantly lower than the national average for students aged 16 to 18.

11. Learning was good or better in 50% of lessons, satisfactory in 38% and unsatisfactory in 12%. The highest proportion of good or very good learning was on business and ICT courses and the lowest proportion was on automotive engineering, hairdressing and beauty therapy and literacy and numeracy courses. The proportion of good or better learning by students aged 16 to 18 was low at all levels, whereas the proportion of good or better learning by adult students was at or above the national averages on courses at levels 1, 2 and 3.

12. In the more effective lessons, teachers plan thoroughly, set clear objectives for the students and provide a series of developmental stages through which students' learning is extended or reinforced. In one key skills application of number lesson on bar charts and graphs, the teacher first identified and then built on what students already knew. The students practised reading and interpreting information from a simple chart, then learnt how to add an additional bar to an existing chart and finally produced their own charts from

information given to them. In some curriculum areas, for example in business and ICT, most lessons are well planned and documented. In other areas, for example in animal care and horticulture, automotive engineering, hairdressing and literacy and numeracy, the quality of lesson planning is much more variable. In many lessons, teachers do not identify the specific learning outcomes they want the students to achieve. Some teachers spend too much time talking to the class and too little time involving students more actively in their learning.

13. Compliance with good health and safety practice is given appropriate emphasis in lessons in automotive engineering. However, in hairdressing, some modern apprentices are allowed to breach the dress code by wearing very large earrings and high-heeled boots and students in one lesson were inappropriately told they could test the strength of peroxide by putting it on their fingers and seeing if it bubbled.

14. Theory teaching is generally more effective where it is integrated with practical work or where information and learning technology (ILT) is incorporated into the learning process, as in automotive engineering where students make frequent use of computer-based learning packages. However, in animal care and horticulture and for students aged 16 to 18 on health, social care and childcare courses, the teaching of theory is often uninspiring and lacked sparkle, even though it is often linked to practical applications and work placement experience. On one hairdressing course, students were taught six hours of theory in one day and spent much of this time copying from the whiteboard.

15. In some curriculum areas, teachers use a good range of different resources within their lessons. In beauty therapy lessons, for example, the overhead projector, high-quality handouts and current beauty products were all used interchangeably and to good effect. In many lessons, however, a very limited range of teaching methods and resources are used and the quality of handouts is often poor. Although most students complete an assessment during induction to identify their preferred learning style, the outcomes are not reflected in course or lesson planning designed to accommodate a wider range of learning styles. In ICT lessons, for example, the whiteboard was not used to provide students with visual reinforcement of key points and students were not given any opportunities for group discussion. Insufficient attention is paid to meeting the needs of full range of ability levels within lessons. There are few examples of teachers having planned to use differentiated learning activities or materials within their lessons.

16. Students are generally attentive, interested and keen to learn. In some lessons, they are not sufficiently challenged by the level at which topics are being explored or by the demands of the work they are required to carry out. In some areas, most noticeably on full-time courses in business, art and design and humanities, the small number of students within classes restricts the range of teaching and learning strategies which can be used. This in turn constrains the development by students of some of the skills they would normally acquire on these courses. In automotive engineering, however, the small class sizes enable individual students to receive more sustained coaching and progress more quickly.

17. Most teachers are well qualified in their vocational field and many have recent and relevant occupational experience. Over 90% of teachers have a recognised teaching

qualification or are working towards one. Some courses rely heavily on part-time teachers, many of whom do not have an appropriate teaching qualification. A mentoring scheme has recently been introduced under which advanced teaching practitioners provide support to new staff. An internal verification group is responsible for ensuring that relevant teachers have the appropriate assessor and verifier accreditation. There is good support for staff development where it is linked to the college development plan.

18. The college has a good range of well-designed buildings on a number of sites. All areas are fully accessible to students with impaired mobility, with the exception of the upper floors of Ellsbridge House. The IT learning centres in Radstock and Keynsham are well resourced, as is the new business and multimedia development centre in Midsomer Norton. Learning resource centres on the main site and at the small sixth form centre are well stocked and provide students with good access to ILT. However, the learning resource centre at Ellsbridge House is too small and the provision is inadequate at peak times. Classroom accommodation is good in some curriculum areas, for example, horticulture, business, administration, management and professional and ICT. The automotive engineering workshops are equipped to a high standard, however, the motor vehicle fleet is now outdated. The hairdressing salon and beauty therapy room are too small for current numbers of students, and clients lack proper facilities. Art and design students are disadvantaged by the small size of some of their rooms and the lack of facilities for three-dimensional work. Areas of the main site have insufficient storage space for the resources needed. There are insufficient private rooms for confidential interviews and personal tutorials.

19. Initial assessment for most full-time students is based around online key skills tests, supplemented by a learning styles analysis and, in some areas, a vocational assessment. The outcomes are recorded on individual learning plans. There is little follow-up assessment to diagnose specific individual learning support needs. At course level, assessment is satisfactory. Assessment criteria provided to students are usually clear and appropriate. Teachers use a good variety of assessment methods and generally provide constructive written and oral feedback to students. The scheduling of assignments on some courses in animal care and horticulture, ICT, and health, social care and childcare is poor and marking and feedback are delayed. Practical assessment in hairdressing is not adequately planned and students' competency is poorly observed. The rigour of internal verification varies considerably across the college. A monitoring group has been established to train assessors and verifiers and share good practice. External verification reports are systematically reviewed and appropriate actions are taken within target dates.

20. Individual learning plans are often incomplete and are not used effectively to plan or monitor students' progress. In most cases, they lack specific short-term targets and are not kept up to date. Individual tutorials rarely focus on the planning of learning or the setting of appropriate targets. Parents of students aged 16 to 18 receive one formal progress report each year. The profiles on students attending courses at the outreach learning centres provide factual record of assessment, but no evaluative comment. Effective progress records are kept on courses for students with learning difficulties and disabilities. The progress of work-based

learners in automotive engineering is systematically monitored and assessment takes place on demand; however, completion of portfolios is slow.

21. The college's strategy prioritises the maintenance of a diverse curriculum to maximise, within the constraints of the budget, the range of learning opportunities available to the local community. One consequence of this policy is the prevalence of small class sizes. Opportunities for students to progress to more advanced courses are mostly satisfactory. However, there are no full-time level 1 courses in art and design or business and some students in these curriculum areas are inappropriately placed on level 2 courses. Similarly, insufficient provision at level 2 at the sixth form centre has resulted in too many students taking advanced level programmes when an intermediate qualification would have been more appropriate at this stage. There are limited progression opportunities for hairdressing and beauty therapy students beyond level 2. The range of courses provided for adult students is good in animal care, art and design, business and ICT. Part-time courses are provided at eight community venues in addition to the college's main sites.

22. The college has developed good links with local schools, including partnership arrangements with one to provide sixth form provision in a purpose-built centre on the school's site. Students are enrolled on to level 3 college courses taught either by college or school teachers. Students recruited to these courses mostly have relatively low GCSE grades and pass rates are low. The college has begun the process of refocusing the provision around level 2 and vocational courses which will better meet the needs of the students. There are good arrangements for extending learning opportunities for school students aged 14 to 16. At the time of the inspection, some 200 Year 10 and 11 students were studying college courses. A minority take a full-time college course; the vast majority spend part of their week at the college and study for a vocational GCSE. The college provides free transport and co-ordinates its teaching timetable with those of the schools so that the maximum number of young people aged 14 to 16 can participate. College courses in GCE A-level law photography and psychology, and advanced vocational certificates in care and travel and tourism are also made available to school sixth form students. Head teachers strongly value these collaborative arrangements with the college.

23. There are good links with local employers. There are well-established modern apprenticeship and NVQ programmes in local automotive engineering, care and animal care organisations. Employers consider the college to be very responsive to their training needs. The college has recently opened a learning centre to provide IT training for local businesses and has developed bespoke IT and management courses for specific companies. One local printing company provides a designated area in which employees receive training in IT and basic skills from the college. A development worker has recently been appointed to develop further links with companies.

24. The college has well-developed links with partner colleges and providers of vocational education and training in Europe. Successful funding bids to develop teaching and learning materials in conjunction with European partners have led to the production of an interactive CD-ROM for leisure and tourism students. Students on advanced vocational

certificate of education (AVCE) business studies courses have studied for an additional IT qualification validated by a Spanish awarding body. There is no cross-college enrichment programme which would enable students to broaden their experience beyond their study programmes. The sixth form centre offers weekly sports activities as well as photography and music, but most enrichment activity is course related. Curriculum enrichment for full-time students is good on courses in business and hairdressing and beauty therapy. Field trips are organised for students of art, geography, psychology and textiles.

25. Key skills are poorly integrated with students' main course of study and are taught in separate workshop lessons. The college has been unsuccessful in appointing a key skills co-ordinator to manage the provision. Retention rates on many key skills courses are above the national average. However, pass rates for students aged 16 to 18 are very low for communication and application of number at level 1. Although initial key skills assessment is used to enrol students at the most appropriate level, there is little recording of progress beyond a record of completed assignments. Many students with literacy and numeracy skills below the level required of their vocational follow an inappropriate key skills syllabus with no alternative qualification offered to them. Many key skills teachers lack the necessary expertise to help students at level 1 to develop their skills sufficiently to pass the key skills tests. On full-time art and design courses, there is a clear focus on the application of key skills within specific subjects and key skills are integrated well into assignments. In many curriculum areas, insufficient attention is paid to ensuring students work towards specific key skills at the level most appropriate to their abilities; generally all students on the same course study key skills at the same level.

26. The college has good arrangements for marketing and recruiting to its courses. A range of well-produced publicity materials and the links with local schools are used to keep prospective students well informed about learning opportunities. The application process for full-time students includes an interview with a teacher from the curriculum area concerned. However, curriculum areas have developed their own strategies for interviewing and selecting students and the college does not effectively monitor the impartiality of the advice and guidance provided. Initial assessment takes place either at the interview or induction stage. The initial assessment tools used by the college are adequate for confirming that students are placed on the appropriate level of course, but are not effective in diagnosing specific additional learning support needs. Learning support is provided at an early stage for students whose learning difficulties and disabilities are identified through the admissions process, particularly those who had received additional support at school. Students who are referred for learning support during their course do not always receive it. Most learning support is provided by learning support assistants within lessons. There is little specialist one-to-one learning support. Some 20 students have been assessed for dyslexia this year, 6 of whom are now receiving dyslexia support. Apart from three lunchtime sessions each week at Ellsbridge House and some drop-in support at the sixth form centre, there is no drop-in or workshop-based literacy or numeracy support.

27. Induction for full-time students is satisfactory. It provides an introduction to the college and its services, as well as to the course that the students are enrolled on. Course

teams have developed their own induction programmes. However, there is little monitoring of the consistency and effectiveness with which issues like the student charter and equality of opportunity are dealt with across the college.

28. The college invests significantly in providing transport to enable students resident in outlying areas to attend the college more easily. Coach routes take in villages which are not well served by public transport. Approximately 80% of full-time students use this transport and it is also available to part-time students. One consequence of this service is that the college day is short, especially at the sites in Keynsham, where lessons finish by 3.30 pm. There is good nursery provision on the main campus. The college subsidises nursery places for students' children, who occupied 52 of the 77 available places at the time of inspection. The learner support fund is well administered to help overcome barriers to study.

29. Personal support for students is generally good, though it is often informal and few records are kept. The college does not monitor the effectiveness of personal support or identify students at risk of not completing who may benefit from additional personal support. A counsellor is employed for one day a week, but most personal and emotional support is given by teachers who have little or no specialist training. The college has recently introduced a child protection policy and procedure and has designated staff to follow-up referrals about individual students. However, not all staff are aware of how to implement the procedures and the college has not yet ensured that all staff are trained to recognise the key indicators of abuse.

30. There is no structured tutorial programme and tutorial provision is inconsistent across curriculum areas. There is a college requirement for individual tutorials to be held once a term with students on full-time courses, although this is exceeded on some courses. Tutors have insufficient guidance on how they should monitor progress and set effective targets. There is no college policy on the use of group tutorials, and few group tutorials take place. On some courses, group tutorials are arranged with the careers officer to cover progression into employment, FE or HE. There are no formal tutorial arrangements on most part-time courses, although students often receive good individual support from teachers.

31. Although the college does not have a structured programme of careers and progression guidance, careers support is offered by individual appointment. This service is available to all current and prospective students. Progression to employment or HE is good in some vocational areas, for example, animal care and horticulture. There has been an increase in applications to HE amongst the students based at the sixth form centre, from 2 to 26 over the past three years. However, the number of HE applications from all other areas of the college has remained in the low twenties over the same period. The college has good partnership arrangements with the local Connexions service, whose personal advisers provide an effective service for students on courses at entry level and level 1.

Leadership and management

32. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Governors and senior managers have set a clear strategic direction for the college. In the last three years since the appointment of

the current principal, the college has developed effective partnership arrangements with a range of organisations. This has resulted, for example, in collaborative approaches to sixth form provision with local schools and to IT and basic skills training with local employers and unions. Consistent with the college's mission that strongly emphasises its role in the community, more opportunities for education and training have been provided through the opening of three learning centres in prominent high street locations. The number of students aged 16 to 18 studying full time at the college has increased by 40%. There has been a clear commitment to supporting a diverse curriculum to meet local needs. Pass rates for adult students have been significantly improved, although pass rates declined at level 2 for all students in 2002/03.

33. The college has an executive team of three comprising the principal and two directors. The senior management team of seven comprises the executive and four senior managers. One senior manager is newly appointed to the post; other members of the team have recently had their responsibilities revised. The curriculum is organised into seven schools. In three schools, there have been new appointments to the head of school post. A further two schools have experienced organisational change in response to the numbers of students recruited to their areas. These changes in senior and middle management have resulted in some recent actions to address weaknesses identified by the college, for example, a more systematic monitoring of student attendance, but in many cases it is too early to judge their impact.

34. A curriculum strategy for the college has been recently approved by the academic board and the governing body. The effectiveness of curriculum planning varies across the college. The quality of leadership and management is satisfactory in most curriculum areas. A small number of curriculum managers are providing good leadership, sharing information effectively with staff, promoting the sharing of good practice to improve learning, reviewing the curriculum, and leading regular team meetings. Many course team meetings are not held regularly, concentrate on administrative processes and fail to agree clear actions to achieve improvements. In some areas of the curriculum, there is insufficient support for, and management of, part-time teachers.

35. The college has improved access to and reliability of data, a weakness identified in the last inspection. Reports are used to monitor performance at quarterly review meetings held between each head of school, the principal and a director. Targets are set for recruitment, retention and pass rates. These targets are set at whole college and school level. Although targets are also set at course level, some are insufficiently challenging and are not routinely monitored.

36. Quality assurance is not sufficiently effective in raising standards. Teams complete course reviews and evaluation three times each year and incorporate the views of students. Completed course reviews are discussed in detail by the academic board, issues are identified and actions are followed through and reported back at subsequent meetings. Many course reviews lack rigour, they do not evaluate the effectiveness of teaching and learning, and do not identify clear actions for improvements.

37. Each course team completes a self-assessment report. These are compiled into a school self-assessment and form part of the whole college report. Although the college introduced an internal validation process for the first time this year, many self-assessment reports were insufficiently analytical, particularly in judging the quality of teaching and learning. In some cases, significant weaknesses were not identified and students' achievements were not taken into account in forming judgements. Action plans for the most recent self-assessment report are yet to be developed. Inspectors did not agree with the grades awarded for leadership and management and several curriculum areas in the self-assessment report and found some strengths to be overstated and some weaknesses to be understated or not identified at all. Benchmarking methods or external validation procedures are insufficiently developed to provide assurance that appropriate standards are applied in self-assessment.

38. The college has a lesson observation scheme. The activities of each curriculum area are reviewed across a week with senior managers undertaking observations of teaching and learning. Observations are recorded and verbal and written feedback is given to the teachers. In some areas, teaching observations have failed to identify weaknesses or actions designed to improve teaching and learning have not been followed through. In 2002/03, the college judged 78% of teaching and 76% of learning to be good or better and 4% of both teaching and learning to be unsatisfactory. Inspectors judged 49% of teaching and 50% of learning to be good or better and 13% of teaching and 11% of learning to be unsatisfactory. The last inspection report identified overgenerous assessment of teaching quality in some areas as a weakness. This is one of several weaknesses identified at the last inspection which have not been addressed successfully.

39. Advanced practitioners mentor newly appointed teaching staff and through projects are beginning to identify and facilitate the sharing of good practice. It is too early to judge the effectiveness of their roles. There is an annual staff conference which all full-time and part-time teachers attend. The range of activities includes sessions to update staff on aspects of teaching and learning, health and safety and equal opportunities. The college has an in-house development programme including workshops on course co-ordination, tutoring, and working with schools. In addition, staff can apply through their line manager to attend external staff development events. These requests are generally supported. There is an annual appraisal scheme for all full-time and part-time staff. Appraisals have been carried out to schedule in most areas.

40. Governors demonstrate a strong commitment to the college and clearly understand their responsibilities. They contribute to the college development plan and ensure that progress against the targets set out in the plan are reviewed. To help the governors oversee the academic performance of the college, the quality sub-committee receives and thoroughly discusses the outcomes of the week-long reviews of each of the college's seven schools. Governors ask questions and seek assurance that areas identified as requiring improvement are being addressed. A partnership with three nearby schools with sixth forms is actively supported by regular meetings of a joint group of governors and head teachers of the schools and the college principal. This school partnership forum is a sub-committee of the

corporation. Governors have completed a self-assessment of their own performance. Although governors have 15 performance indicators against which to monitor their performance their use is underdeveloped. Governors acknowledge in their self-assessment report that links between individual governors and curriculum areas have lapsed.

41. The college has a well-publicised statement on equality of opportunity. The equal opportunities policy has been amended recently and belatedly to incorporate the requirements of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. The amended policy is yet to be approved by the governing body. There is no implementation plan. A working group has been established recently to develop equality and diversity impact measures. Although participation is monitored in terms of the profile of the students enrolling at the college, the achievements of students from particular groups are not analysed to see if they perform better or worse than other groups. In April 2003, the college appointed consultants to complete a review of accommodation and equipment in response to the SENDA 2001. An action plan was agreed by the governors and the college has prioritised and implemented specific actions to improve facilities and equipment.

42. Financial management is good. Budget holders receive regular and accurate reports on income and expenditure. The college has recently introduced software to help determine the viability of courses. This is enabling costs to be analysed at individual course level and has resulted in some actions to address small group sizes. The average class size during the inspection was eight, which is below the average for the sector. The college has recently participated in a benchmarking project to examine the costs of the services it provides. The results are yet to be analysed by managers. Although the college has not met its funding targets for the last two years, funds have been well managed. With retention and pass rates generally above the national average, the college provides adequate value for money.

Part C: Curriculum and occupational areas

Animal care and horticulture

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

Strengths

- high pass rates on first diploma in animal care
- good links to industry practice in lessons to promote learning
- effective use of additional learning support in lessons
- good progression rates to FE and employment.

Weaknesses

- low retention rates for students aged 16 to 18 on many courses
- low pass rate on national diploma in animal care in 2003
- insufficiently rigorous assessment practices
- ineffective tutorial practice.

Scope of provision

43. The college offers a wide range of courses in animal care and in horticulture from entry level to level 3 providing good progression routes for most students. Full-time programmes are available at all levels and include first and national diplomas and NVQ programmes at levels 1 and 2. NVQs in veterinary nursing at levels 2 and 3 are also available. Most full-time enrolments are on diploma courses in animal care. Full-time courses include one day each week on work placements in industry. Some 350 students are enrolled, 70% of whom are aged 16 to 18. Enrolments on to horticulture courses are low and over half the 205 students attend an extensive range of vocational short courses aimed at people working in industry. There are three foundation modern apprentices in horticulture.

Achievement and standards

44. Pass rates on the first diploma in animal care are good and above the national average, but in the past three years the pass rate for the national diploma in animal care has declined and in 2003 was below the national average. Retention rates for students aged 16 to 18 on many animal care courses are low and consistently below national averages. Strategies to improve retention rates are starting to have a positive effect and in-year retention rates for

2003/04 indicate a continuation of this trend. Retention rates on full-time courses and the NVQ level 2 arboriculture course are mostly good.

45. The standard of assignment work is mostly satisfactory or better, although the quality of work in student files is highly variable. Assignments produced by national diploma students are good and well presented but the quality of some work by first diploma students barely reaches the standard expected for the level of the course. Portfolios prepared by NVQ level 1 horticulture students are particularly well presented. In general, students demonstrate satisfactory understanding of topics in theory lessons and attain an acceptable level of practical skills. Most students develop good IT skills. Progression rates to FE courses and to employment are good. Students' personal skills are not systematically developed, although many opportunities are available. All full-time students work towards key skills qualifications, but key skills pass rates range from good to poor.

A sample of retention and pass rates in Animal care and horticulture, 2001 to 2003

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
First diploma in animal care	2	No. of starts	28	36	23
		% retention	71	64	70
		% pass rate	90	70	88
NVQ in animal care	2	No. of starts	21	28	26
		% retention	81	50	73
		% pass rate	65	93	63
Royal Horticulture Society general examination in horticulture	2	No. of starts	28	19	18
		% retention	43	95	*
		% pass rate	33	28	*
National diploma in animal care management	3	No. of starts	**	37	29
		% retention	**	54	62
		% pass rate	**	95	78

Source: ISR (2001 and 2002), college (2003)

* course changed from one year to two years so outcomes not known until 2004

** fewer than 15 students enrolled

Quality of education and training

46. Most teaching is satisfactory or better. Teachers use standard schemes of work and lesson plans, but the quality of completion is variable and some lessons are not adequately planned. Some teachers rely on a narrow range of teaching methods and make insufficient use of distinctive visual aids and ILT to illustrate important points in lessons. Handout materials are generally well produced and are structured to encourage students to read and develop their understanding of topics. In a well-planned lesson on plant classification, the teacher used a variety of active learning methods including quizzes, focused discussion and research that effectively met the learning needs of the group. The lesson was lively, all students were fully involved and clearly able to explain and discuss what they had learnt. In the less effective lessons, teachers talk too much and there is little student activity other than taking notes and asking a few questions. Students are insufficiently involved in these lessons, show little evidence of learning and are often bored. Most teachers regularly check students' learning in lessons before moving on to new subjects.

47. Teachers make effective links between theory and practical applications to promote learning. They effectively use their own industrial experience, and that of students, in both classroom and practical lessons. Work placements augment the teaching and help to consolidate students' learning. Additional learning support available in both theory and practical lessons is effective. In a lesson involving research in the library, support staff assisted students to use catalogues to seek information to further their learning and ensure they are actively involved in lessons.

48. Teachers are suitably qualified, enthusiastic and have a diverse range of industrial experience and interests. There are sufficient technical staff who also contribute to the teaching programme. Staff make good use of professional development opportunities and maintain close links with industry to maintain their current knowledge. Practical resources are of a satisfactory standard and are used well to support theory teaching. Animal care students have access to an appropriate range of animals which is adequate to support student numbers and the needs of programmes. The range of learning resources is good and includes a well-stocked library and a good selection of tapes on a range of related topics. However, many teaching rooms are of insufficient size to accommodate large groups. The library is well used, but at peak times it becomes overcrowded and students often have to wait to access computers. Satisfactory horticulture resources include a new teaching block, glasshouses and a small plant collection. Teachers make good use of local gardens and woodlands for practical tuition.

49. Students receive good initial advice and guidance to enrol on the most appropriate course to meet their needs and levels of prior attainment. Induction programmes are well planned and introduce students effectively to the college and their course. They include initial assessment of students' basic and key skills, their preferred learning styles and level of vocational skills. The results are not always effectively applied in lessons or used to agree structured programmes of support for students identified with additional learning needs.

50. Assessment practices are applied with insufficient rigour. Course tutors meet regularly to monitor students' progress, but this is not recorded on individual learning plans or in tutorial records. A range of assessment methods is used to assess students' learning and progress. Assignments are generally clearly written with good guidance and adequate grading criteria. However, assignment briefs do not identify opportunities to assess key skills. Assessment schedules are not given to students and often teachers are slow to return assessed work. Marking is mostly fair and accurate. The quality of feedback varies, but most helps students to improve their future performance. There is little internal verification of practical assessments. Aspects of assessment and internal verification of NVQ level 2 in horticulture are weak.

51. Tutorial practice is inconsistent and ineffective. Teachers provide students with high levels of informal support, but formal tutorial practice is often weak. Progress monitoring and action planning are weak and few clear targets are set to help students improve their performance. Careers education, promotion of equal opportunities and development of other personal and learning skills are not systematically provided.

Leadership and management

52. Leadership and management in animal care are satisfactory. A recently appointed head of school of horticulture has started to review and improve management procedures. Communications within curriculum teams and between teachers and students is good, but information about college policies and procedures is not always effectively communicated to staff. Team meetings tend to focus on resource management and student progress and there is insufficient emphasis on curriculum management, quality improvement or the development of appropriate teaching strategies for mixed ability groups. Attendance monitoring is good. Quality assurance is underdeveloped. The understanding of, and involvement in, course review and evaluation by some staff is limited. Course reviews and the self-assessment lack rigour and useful data analysis. The implementation of cross-college systems is variable, although course managers maintain comprehensive course files in accordance with college guidelines.

Automotive engineering

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

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

Strengths

- high retention and pass rates on most NVQ courses
- good practical resources
- broad range of qualifications studied by full time students
- effective management of work-based learning.

Weaknesses

- insufficient variety and challenge in theory lessons
- outdated vehicle fleet
- poor management of key skills for full time students
- ineffective target setting in progress reviews.

Scope of provision

53. Courses are available for full-time and part-time students in motor vehicle engineering, mechanical engineering, computer-aided engineering, design and technology, GCSE engineering and AVCE single award in engineering. Mechanical engineering courses include performing engineering operations, welding and fabrication and production engineering. There are approximately 50 full-time students and 40 modern apprentices following motor vehicle courses. The majority of the full-time students also study performing engineering operations level 1. The majority of modern apprentices are on level 2 programmes. A further 10 modern apprentices are taking programmes in engineering production. There are 3 students taking the AVCE single award in engineering and 23 are studying GCE A-level design and technology. Some 47 students aged 14 to 16 are taking GCSE engineering at the college.

Achievement and standards

54. Retention and pass rates on NVQ level 1 courses are above the national average. The pass rate on the level 1 motor vehicle progression award is high, but the retention rate is only satisfactory. Retention rates on NVQ courses at levels 2 and 3 are high and most pass rates are above the national averages. Pass rates on modern apprenticeship programmes, which had been poor, are now satisfactory, although a number of work-based learners

achieve their full qualification after the allocated time has lapsed. Current data indicate an improved retention rate and improving pass rate. Some 8 of the 15 modern apprentices who completed their programme during 2002/3 achieved the full framework and a further 2 achieved the NVQ qualification.

55. Students are well motivated in practical workshop lessons. They find the work interesting, cope well with the demands made of them and achieve satisfaction from completing the tasks set for them. Students are familiar with a wide range of specialist tools and handle them with confidence. Progression rates for full-time students from NVQ level 1 to level 2 are low. Attendance and punctuality are satisfactory.

A sample of retention and pass rates in automotive engineering, 2001 to 2003

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
NVQ automotive engineering	1	No. of starts	*	22	55
		% retention	*	64	73
		% pass rate	*	71	90
City and Guilds progression award (motor vehicle servicing and repair: light vehicle)	1	No. of starts	*	22	16
		% retention	*	64	69
		% pass rate	*	71	91
NVQ automotive engineering	2	No. of starts	67	39	77
		% retention	55	85	88
		% pass rate	65	73	51
NVQ automotive engineering	3	No. of starts	*	18	31
		% retention	*	67	97
		% pass rate	*	42	73

Source: ISR (2001 and 2002), college (2003)

* fewer than 15 students enrolled

Quality of education and training

56. Teaching and learning in the large majority of lessons are satisfactory. In the best lessons, good use is made of ILT to hold students' interest and link theory to practice. In one lesson on the principles of vehicle braking systems, animated presentations were used to simulate the action of hydraulic fluid. In another, the provision of crumple zones in vehicle design was illustrated by the use of a computer presentation. Students learn well when theory is closely related to practical work. For example, the principles of universal joints and their role in the transmission system of a car were outlined in one workshop lesson. Students then dismantled universal joints and received detailed instructions on the operation of the joint. Finally they re-assembled the joint and fitted it to a vehicle to test their work. Extensive use is made of online packages to check progress in theory lessons and the results students achieve are reviewed individually with teachers. Compliance with health and safety requirements is emphasised strongly in college workshops and in the workplace.

57. Too little teaching succeeds in really challenging and inspiring students. Some full-time level 2 students are poorly motivated in theory lessons and do not follow instructions without constant supervision from their teacher. In some lessons time is wasted as students have to cross the main motor vehicle workshop to access a computer terminal and often became distracted before they reach the computer. The quality and content of schemes of work are inconsistent. The best are fully detailed with lesson content linked to week numbers, associated key skills, assessment dates and methodology. These are issued to students and help them to understand how the course is organised. The poorer examples are little more than a topic list and are not shared with students. Most lesson planning is satisfactory, although some teachers use the standard template with little thought given to using different learning activities with groups of mixed ability and learning preferences. There is insufficient integration of on-the-job and off-the-job training on modern apprenticeship programmes.

58. Physical resources are good with the exception of the vehicle fleet which is dated. The realistic and purposeful work environment of the workshops helps to motivate students. There is a good range of tools and specialist equipment. Teachers are enthusiastic and work well as a team. They hold relevant vocational qualifications and all have or are working towards teaching and assessor qualifications.

59. Assessment is well planned and effective. Practical workshop activity is assessed on completion. Students receive verbal and written feedback on their work, but written comments are often too general to help students to improve their performance. Work-based learners can telephone to request an assessor visit within the next two hours if they have been given a particular job on which they could usefully be assessed. Internal verification systems are effective in ensuring the consistency of assessment in college and the workplace. There is a good tracking system which enables students to plot their progress towards their NVQ. Employers give constructive support to modern apprentices and play an active role in ensuring evidence of competence is gathered and supported by job cards or witness

statements. Nevertheless, some modern apprentices are slow in building the evidence for their NVQ qualification.

60. Initial assessment is used to determine the level of additional support required, but this information is not recorded on individual learning plans. Additional learning support is provided discretely in lessons by learning support assistants or by vocational teachers. The progress of students receiving learning support is not systematically reviewed. However, individual learning plans are not routinely updated and targets set during progress reviews with work-based learners are often too vague to be helpful.

61. The range of courses is satisfactory and matches the ability range of applicants and the needs of local employers. Full-time students are able to access to a broad range of qualifications. They receive a thorough grounding in occupational trades related to motor vehicle, general engineering and welding, which enhances their opportunities of employment. There are many examples of full-time students obtaining related jobs and transferring to work-based learning programmes. There are two link courses with local schools which give younger students the opportunity to study for a vocational GCSE in engineering. Key skills are poorly managed. All full-time students study key skills at level 1 with the exception of those who hold appropriate GCSE grades. However, they do not start their key skills' qualifications at the beginning of their course. As a result many opportunities for evidence gathering are missed and students later repeat some activities for the sole purpose of gathering key skills' evidence.

62. Teachers provide good academic and pastoral support to students, mostly on an informal basis. Students value the easy access they have to teachers outside of lessons. Student absences are closely monitored and followed-up.

Leadership and management

63. Curriculum leadership and management are satisfactory and leading to improvements. Team meetings have a clear focus on raising standards and set short-term objectives which are monitored in subsequent meetings. Targets for recruitment, retention and pass rates are set by course teams. Effective management has brought about significant improvements to modern apprenticeship programmes. Quality procedures are not sufficiently effective in assuring the quality and consistency of key processes such as assessment feedback, individual target setting and tutorials. The school self-assessment report makes a genuine effort to critically evaluate the quality of provision, but overestimates the quality of teaching and learning.

Business, administration, management and professional

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

Contributory grade for accounting is **good (grade 2)**

Strengths

- high retention and pass rates on most courses
- high-quality accounting courses
- good individual support for students
- strong curriculum leadership focused on improvements.

Weaknesses

- poor pass rates on level 3 management courses
- small classes restrict learning activities
- ineffective individual learning plans
- no full-time business courses below level 2
- unsatisfactory aspects of quality assurance.

Scope of provision

64. The college provides courses in business, administration, accounting and management, which are studied by some 350, mostly part-time, students. There are some 33 full-time students on GNVQ intermediate and AVCE business, the certificate in administration and the Association of Accounting Technicians (AAT) intermediate courses at the Radstock campus. A further 23 students study the GNVQ and AVCE business courses at the B6 sixth form centre. About one third of students are taking accounting courses. There are also a very small number of modern apprentices in business administration. A new business centre has recently opened in Midsomer Norton to encourage new links with local industry and to offer specialist business training and NVQ assessments in business and management.

Achievement and standards

65. Retention rates are above the national average on most courses. On practical book-keeping and text processing at level 1, word processing at level 2 and NVQ accounting at levels 2 and 3, retention rates have been high in each of the last three years. Pass rates are mostly at or above the national average. Pass rates on NVQ levels 2 and 3 accounting and

text processing stage 1 have been consistently high. However, pass and retention rates are poor on level 3 management courses. In 2001, none of the students who started the professional award in management studies completed the course. In 2003, the proportion of students achieving high grades in AVCE business (double award) in 2003 was 44% above the national average and 81% of students of stage 2 business presentation achieved distinction. Framework completion rates are poor on modern apprenticeship programmes in administration.

66. Students produce good work on most courses. Written work is usually well presented and many students' portfolios include assignments of a good standard. The work of accounting students shows a high level of accuracy and documents produced by administration students using IT are mostly accurate and well presented. Most students are well motivated, with adult students, particularly on accounting courses, sustaining high levels of concentration. Adult returnee's on administration courses are particularly appreciative of the opportunity to develop the level of IT skills required by employers and are delighted by their own progress and new-found confidence.

67. Progression rates to higher level courses and employment are good. In 2003, for example, progression rates between NVQ levels 2, 3 and 4 in accounting exceeded 90% and 75% of students who successfully completed the certificate in administration either returned for a second year to work towards specialist medical or legal secretarial qualifications or went into employment. However, no students progressed from GNVQ intermediate on to AVCE business. Average attendance during inspection was 10% above the national average for business courses and punctuality is good.

A sample of retention and pass rates in Business, administration, management and professional, 2001 to 2003

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
Text processing	1	No. of starts	38	46	46
		% retention	100	89	93
		% pass rate	87	78	88
Practical bookkeeping	1	No. of starts	28	15	*
		% retention	96	87	*
		% pass rate	89	62	*

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
NVQ accounting	2	No. of starts	15	18	19
		% retention	80	94	89
		% pass rate	83	94	88
Word processing	2	No. of starts	51	48	59
		% retention	100	98	92
		% pass rate	82	68	70
NVQ accounting	3	No. of starts	20	22	30
		% retention	95	91	87
		% pass rate	79	90	88

Source: ISR (2001 and 2002), college (2003)

* fewer than 15 students enrolled

Quality of education and training

68. Most teaching is satisfactory or better on business courses. The better lessons are well planned and provide students with a range of learning activities that engage their interest and extend their knowledge and skills. Teachers on some business and business administration courses plan lessons to meet the needs of students at different skill levels. For example, in one audio transcription lesson, some students were learning medical audio skills, whilst others concentrated on speed building in preparation for an imminent advanced examination. Students with a wide range of ability in a GNVQ intermediate business lesson were given a series of short tasks which required the use of ILT to develop their understanding of organisation mission statements. The weaker students learned from each other and, assisted by a learning support assistant, successfully completed the activity. Most teaching on accounting courses is good or very good. One lesson on partnership accounts, for example, was skilfully delivered by the teacher, who made frequent and accessible references to the real business world and drew effectively on students' prior learning. In less effective lessons, teachers talk for too long before giving students an activity they can get more involved in. Small classes in business and administration restrict the range of teaching and learning strategies that can be used.

69. Students are well informed about assessment requirements, and teachers use a good variety of methods to assess students' progress. For example, in an NVQ level 3 accounting class, students were given a quiz to help them revise for a skills test the following week.

Their answers were quickly marked, and individual support to ensure the correct answers were understood was targeted swiftly and sensitively. In administration classes, keyboarding software is used to develop and then analyse students' typing speed to assess readiness for the stage 3 text processing examination. Teachers provide clear, constructive written feedback on assignments. Arrangements for internal verification are good and follow college guidelines. Detailed records are kept and external verifier reports express satisfaction with assessment arrangements.

70. Resources are good. Most teachers are well qualified, and those without an appropriate level teaching qualification are required to achieve one within two years. Some part-time teachers have current or recent professional experience which is used to good effect in some accounting and legal administration lessons. Staff development needs are identified during annual appraisal, and largely met, but there is no evaluation of the impact on teaching and learning for students, and no plans to ensure professional or vocational updating. Classrooms are well furnished and equipped, and many contain computers for students to use. However, most lack stimulating wall displays to enhance students' learning or celebrate their work. Attention to health and safety is satisfactory. Students in computing rooms are aware of some of the health aspects, but some fail to adjust their chairs. Students can access a good stock of business books and periodicals as well as computers for private study in the learning resource centre.

71. Initial assessment for full-time students is satisfactory in identifying the appropriate key skills level and whether, in the broadest terms, they would benefit from additional learning support. However, the outcomes of the analysis of students' preferred learning style during induction does not influence lesson planning so that teachers provide a sufficiently wide range of learning activities to cater for differing learning needs.

72. Teachers provide students with good individual subject support on an informal basis. All students are allocated a personal tutor and periodically there are individual reviews of full-time students' progress. Full-time students have individual learning plans, but these are ineffective in helping students improve. Many lack key information, such as milestones for monitoring in-year progress. The use of target setting to help students improve aspects of their performance is poor. However, most teachers keep up-to-date progress tracking records. Parents are provided with written reports at the mid-year stage. The quality of tutorial provision is variable, and there is no monitoring or evaluation of its effectiveness.

73. There are no full-time business courses below level 2, and some students are inappropriately placed on intermediate level. However, the curriculum has been reviewed and there are plans to introduce an improved range of full-time courses at both sites next academic year. The range of part-time courses for adults is good. Full-time and part-time accounting courses are available on three sites, and the daytime secretarial course has flexible start and end times to suit those with care responsibilities or part-time employment. There are good curriculum enrichment opportunities. For example, GNVQ and AVCE business students have made visits to Bristol airport, Alton Towers and BBC Bristol, and can apply to undertake work experience in another European country.

Leadership and management

74. Leadership and management are satisfactory. New curriculum leadership is strongly promoting a culture which prioritises students' and employers' needs. Communication has improved and regular meetings are seen as a forum for sharing good practice in teaching and learning as well as discussing operational matters. More responsibility is now delegated to course co-ordinators. There are unsatisfactory aspects of quality assurance. The school self-assessment report is not mapped against evidence and does not critically evaluate the quality of teaching and learning and student pass rates. There are no action plans for the current year to systematically drive improvements. Target setting and monitoring at course level is weak. Promotion of equal opportunities is poorly monitored and evaluated.

Information and communications technology

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

Strengths

- good pass rates on GNVQ foundation and intermediate and diploma for IT practitioners
- good development of ICT skills
- flexible opportunities for adults to access learning
- effective sharing of good practice to improve learning.

Weaknesses

- inadequate focus on progression
- poor individual target setting
- weak monitoring of students' progress in learning centres
- poor action planning for quality improvements.

Scope of provision

75. There are 45 full-time students on GNVQ foundation, intermediate and AVCE ICT courses at the Radstock campus. A further 13 students are taking AS-level and GCE A-level ICT at the B6 sixth form centre. Student numbers are small on all full-time courses. The college also offers a part-time City and Guilds diploma for IT practitioners at level 2. Computer literacy and information technology (CLAIT) and European computer driving licence (ECDL) courses are provided on a flexible learning basis for about 900 adults in the learning centres in Radstock and Keynsham.

Achievement and standards

76. Retention and pass rates in GNVQ foundation and intermediate have been significantly above the national averages over the last two years. The proportion of students on these courses achieving higher grades is significantly above the national averages. Retention and pass rates on the AS-level ICT course are very high; in 2003 all nine students who started the course completed it successfully. However, very few students progress to the GCE A-level course. Retention and pass rates in the diploma for IT practitioners are also high.

77. Pass rates on AVCE and short courses have been inconsistent. In the AVCE double award, the retention rate has been declining and the pass rate was 57% and 100% in the last

two years. In the AVCE single award, retention rates have been satisfactory and pass rates have been high. Retention rates are good on CLAIT one-year courses, but the pass rate fell from 73% to 50% in 2003. On CLAIT short courses, retention and pass rates have declined in each of the last three years and are well below the national averages. Retention and pass rates are generally better on the ECDL course. The pass rate in key skills IT at level 2 improved to 100% in 2002, but fell again to 37% in 2003.

78. The standard of most students' work is good. Adults on short computer literacy courses develop good ICT skills to use at work or home and progress to higher-level courses. AVCE students produce high-quality presentations, making good use of graphics, animation and sound. AS-level students are able to produce high-quality forms in database applications. However, progression to higher-level courses by full-time students is extremely limited. Average attendance during inspection was high at 93%, but an average group size of seven students is small.

A sample of retention and pass rates in information and communications technology, 2001 to 2003

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
CLAIT stage 1 (short)	1	No. of starts	230	171	27
		% retention	95	82	56
		% pass rate	67	57	53
CLAIT stage 1 (one year)	1	No. of starts	282	209	52
		% retention	90	80	85
		% pass rate	62	73	50
Diploma for IT practioners	2	No. of starts	19	20	24
		% retention	89	95	88
		% pass rate	94	84	100
ECDL (one year)	2	No. of starts	24	58	49
		% retention	88	83	65
		% pass rate	52	75	88

Source: ISR (2001 and 2002), college (2003)

Quality of education and training

79. Much teaching is good or better. Most lessons are well planned and managed with annotated schemes of work, detailed lesson plans and high-quality task sheets. Students make effective use of dedicated course websites and tutor-prepared links to a variety of relevant websites. Adult students use virtual learning programmes for their ECDL courses. They also use high-quality workbooks at a pace and time to suit themselves and with good support from their tutors. In the better lessons, teachers set a clear direction and use skilful questioning to draw out students' own ideas. Students demonstrate a good awareness of new technologies.

80. Although all full-time students complete a learning styles assessment during induction, many teachers rely on a narrow range of teaching and learning methods. Few attempts are made to draw a group of students together for a discussion or to provide any whole class input using the whiteboard. In some instances, the objectives of the lesson are not made clear at the start and students are confused about the expected outcomes. Some teachers do not draw on the experiences of the students and tend to dominate the lesson. Where new topics are not introduced to the class in a structured way, time is often wasted while individual understanding is developed on a one-to-one basis.

81. Teachers have appropriate IT qualifications for their level of teaching and many have recent vocational experience. All have or are working towards an appropriate teaching qualification. Some teachers have been supplied with laptops. ICT resources adequately meet the needs of students, with networked computers over four sites. Technician support has recently been improved and is responsive to learning needs; for example, wireless access was rapidly installed when required for one course. Resources in the learning centres are good. One is particularly spacious, light and airy with high specification computers. Access for students with impaired mobility is good. Adaptive technologies are available to ensure that students with visual impairments are able to complete their course.

82. Assessment is satisfactory. Assignments are marked and returned promptly, usually with constructive verbal feedback. The quality of written feedback is variable and guidance on improving performance is not always provided. Internal verification and moderation is satisfactory in confirming the consistency of grading. Some teachers have useful links with awarding bodies. However, there is no standardised documentation to ensure that assignments match the requirements of the specifications. Assignment briefs do not include guidance on grading or signpost links with key skills. In one student survey in 2003, only a quarter of GNVQ intermediate students indicated that they felt well informed about assessment.

83. In-class learning support is made available from the beginning of the course for GNVQ intermediate students. Learning support is effective in helping some individual students to achieve. Although teachers provide good individual support for students on an informal basis, they fail to set challenging targets for students at the start of their course and students' progress is not adequately reviewed through the tutorial process. There are no

group tutorials and students do not find their individual tutorials helpful. Comments on tutorial record sheets are mostly very general and there are no clear action points to help students make progress. Adults record their attendance and progress through the modules of their qualifications in log books. However, no target end dates are agreed and monitoring of attendance and progress towards completion is not systematic.

84. The conveniently located learning centres provide good opportunities for adult students to attend flexible ICT courses. Enrolments have increased by 80% this year and many students progress from level 1 to level 2 courses. However, students receive no structured guidance on progression and there are few opportunities for progression from level 2 to level 3 courses. There is no foundation provision this year for full-time students. A European work experience exchange has been arranged for 8 AVCE students and 70 National Health Service (NHS) employees are studying ECDL courses in learning centres online. However, the curriculum area has few links with employers. There are insufficient relevant work experience opportunities for students on vocational courses. Arrangements for in-house work experience through the college technical team have recently broken down. Teachers consider students' existing part-time jobs, with no ICT content, as acceptable work experience placements. GNVQ intermediate students lack the work experience needed for their employment module.

Leadership and management

85. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Regular meetings ensure good communication between colleagues teaching in the different centres, including part-time teachers. Teachers share teaching and learning materials, including an excellent technical website. Course teams are responsive to feedback from students, changing the AVCE curriculum, for example, to include more practical activity in the first year. However, most course reviews do not evaluate the provision sufficiently critically and do not identify actions for improvement. There is no current curriculum action plan to address the weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. Weaknesses identified through lesson observations are not tackled effectively.

Hairdressing and beauty therapy

Overall provision in this area is **unsatisfactory (grade 4)**

Contributory grade for beauty therapy is **satisfactory (grade 3)**

Strengths

- high retention and pass rates on most courses
- good practical skills developed in NVQ level 2 beauty therapy and NVQ level 3 hairdressing
- good punctuality and attendance
- effective enrichment activities.

Weaknesses

- unsatisfactory teaching in hairdressing
- inadequate resources limiting development of professional skills
- poor assessment practice in hairdressing
- insufficient opportunities for hairdressing students to progress
- poor management and quality assurance of the hairdressing curriculum.

Scope of provision

86. The school of hairdressing, beauty and holistic therapies offers full-time NVQ courses at levels 1, 2 and 3 in hairdressing and at levels 2 and 3 in beauty therapy. A range of part-time beauty therapy courses are also available during the day and evening. These include aromatherapy, reflexology, epilation, body massage and Indian head massage. The college also provides work-based learning programmes in hairdressing. There are 80 students in the curriculum area. Most of the 34 full-time hairdressing students and 14 full-time beauty therapy students are aged 16 to 18. There are 19 students on part-time beauty therapy courses and 12 foundation modern apprentices in hairdressing.

Achievement and standards

87. Retention rates are generally at or above the national averages and have been consistently high on most beauty therapy courses. On NVQ level 1 hairdressing, the retention rate has been well below the national average in each of the last two years, and retention rates on NVQ level 2 hairdressing are declining. Already this year, 24% of students

who started the course have left. Although numbers on several courses are low, pass rates are high on the majority of courses and reached 100% in several cases in 2003.

88. NVQ level 2 beauty therapy students develop good skills. Careful consideration is given to client care. The students are professional in both practical applications and demonstrating good interpersonal skills. All students apply the theory underlying their practical activities and use newly introduced products confidently. The client consultations are comprehensive with treatment plans giving clear details of any possible contra-indications to treatment or products. Each student is able to critically evaluate their own performance and apply these criticisms to improve their skills and knowledge. Some NVQ level 3 hairdressing students also have good hairdressing skills. Their technical colour work is good and professionally carried out. Hairpieces and home-made wire frames are used very creatively for competition work.

A sample of retention and pass rates in Hairdressing and beauty therapy, 2001 to 2003

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
NVQ hairdressing (full-time)	2	No. of starts	23	21	20
		% retention	78	90	80
		% pass rate	89	95	94
Indian head massage	2	No. of starts	22	21	**
		% retention	95	81	**
		% pass rate	95	100	**
Body massage certificate	3	No. of starts	15	19	*
		% retention	80	95	*
		% pass rate	100	100	*

Source: ISR (2001 and 2002), college (2003)

*fewer than 15 students enrolled

**course converted to 2 years, no outcomes in 2003

Quality of education and training

89. The teaching in beauty therapy lessons is mostly satisfactory and sometimes good. Most lessons are carefully planned and students are taught good occupational skills, professional standards and a sound understanding of commercial pressures. Teachers often

ask comprehensive and probing questions designed to enable students to clearly relate theory to practice. A wide range of teaching strategies are used.

90. There is too much unsatisfactory teaching in hairdressing. Lesson plans are unstructured, frequently incomplete and fail to identify measurable learning outcomes. There is no differentiation in learning activities and some teachers are unfamiliar with this teaching strategy. Handouts are sometimes poorly reproduced. Many lessons are unstructured and contain repetitive tasks for long periods of time. Students on one hairdressing course spent an entire day with a single teacher in theory lessons, copying notes from the whiteboard for much of that time.

91. There are inadequate resources in both hairdressing and beauty therapy. There are only six beds in the beauty therapy salon which prevents all students from developing their practical skills at the same time. Screening is inadequate to ensure client privacy. There is no electrical beauty equipment for facial and body treatments, which limits the additional qualifications available to students. The range of aromatherapy products and equipment is very limited. There is no spa, steam room or shower facilities. Unsuitable classrooms with no washbasins for cleaning hands are used for Indian head massage lessons; teachers have to bring in specialist seating and head rests.

92. In hairdressing, there are insufficient 'dressing out units' in the single salon for the number of students on some courses. Part-time teachers, without full teaching qualifications, act as course leaders for two of the full-time hairdressing courses. All hair and beauty clients have poor access to toilets and there is no secure storage for clients' and students' bags and coats. There are insufficient clients for students to practise on which restricts students' assessment opportunities. Beauty therapy students often have to practise on each other, and this does not provide them with assessment opportunities or a suitable range of experience. There is insufficient access to, and use of, ILT.

93. There is poor assessment planning in hairdressing. Plans for assessment are usually completed shortly before the assessment begins. Forward planning is insufficient to generate sufficient clients requiring the relevant services. Some assessments are carried out retrospectively. On these occasions the close observation of the skills and techniques used and verbal questioning are both lacking. There is no assessment of students' skills during work experience and no use of witness testimonies.

94. The interview process for full-time courses is thorough and includes a comprehensive written assessment. Some of the information applicants provide about their goals is used to develop their individual learning plans. At induction, an additional vocationally based initial assessment in writing, reading and numeracy is carried out with each student. However, students with additional support needs are not always well supported. For example, on NVQ level 2 hairdressing, teachers continue to use the same written materials for all students, despite evidence that at least one student finds the language too complex to understand. Many students' individual learning plans are incomplete. Despite additional support needs being clearly identified and recorded after initial assessment, learning plans contain no information on what support, if any, has been offered

to students. The frequency of individual tutorials is dependent on class size. Some students have a tutorial review every four weeks, others once a term. There is no programme of group tutorials.

95. Good curriculum enrichment activities effectively promote students' awareness of the hair and beauty industry. All students are encouraged to compete in college competitions and celebrate their success at national events. Beauty therapy students carry out professionally challenging treatments in the community. Last year, hairdressing students made a visit to the Wella studio in Paris and beauty therapy students visited the European parliament in Brussels to observe the discussion on future plans for vocational qualifications. Such activities are well covered in the local press and trade magazines.

96. The lack of any part-time level 3 qualification significantly restricts progression opportunities in hairdressing. The NVQ is not available on a part-time basis to current full-time level 2 students after they qualify or former students now employed as stylists. The diploma in hairdressing and technical certificates are not offered. Prospective work-based learners are only considered for foundation modern apprenticeships, regardless of ability.

Leadership and management

97. Leadership and management of beauty therapy are satisfactory, but the management and quality assurance of hairdressing courses are poor. There have been significant management changes in the school in the last year. New management and quality systems are being implemented, but have yet to impact in hairdressing that is heavily dependent on part-time teachers. Aspects of timetabling and room utilisation are unsatisfactory. Self-assessment is not sufficiently rigorous at course or curriculum level. For example, the unsatisfactory teaching and assessment practices in hairdressing have not been identified through self-assessment.

Health, social care and childcare

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

Strengths

- consistently high pass rates on adult courses
- good teaching and learning for adults
- effective response to community and sector needs
- wide range of provision.

Weaknesses

- very low retention rate on some courses
- some dull and uninspiring teaching in lessons for students aged 16 to 18
- inconsistent assessment practice in the workplace
- variable degrees of rigour in quality assurance across courses.

Scope of provision

98. The college provides a range of full-time and part-time courses from foundation level to level 4 in this area of learning. There are almost 1,000 students on these courses, of whom 70 are full time and over 900 are part time. Full-time courses, mainly for students aged 16 to 18, include the foundation award in caring for children, first and national diplomas in early years care and education and AVCE health and social care. Part-time courses include NVQ levels 2, 3 and 4 in care, the registered managers' award, and NVQ level 3 in early years care and education, and foundation and modern apprenticeship programmes, all of which are work based. The college is developing a CoVE in adult care based around its current NVQ care centre. Other part-time provision includes the introduction to counselling, certificate in counselling skills and certificate in community mental health courses.

Achievement and standards

99. Pass rates are consistently high on courses for adult students. On many, the pass rate has been 100% for the past two to three years. These include NVQ level 3 care courses and the caring for people and certificate in community mental health courses. NVQ level 2 care and counselling courses also have pass rates above the national averages. Pass rates on full-time courses are less consistent and tend to be at or below the national averages. Retention rates on some courses are very low, notably on NVQ level 2 care, NVQ level 3 care (promoting independence) and NVQ level 3 early years care. All are significantly below the national averages. On the national diploma in early years care and education, retention rates

have declined over the past three years from well above to below the national average in 2003. The in-year retention rate is also low on the current course. Retention rates are good on the AVCE health and social care and counselling courses.

100. The standard of students' assignments is generally satisfactory and some are of high standard. The display work of some students shows a high standard of practical skills which are well linked to theory. Students' verbal work is appropriate for the level of their courses. For example, in a counselling lesson, one student made a thorough and detailed presentation on a range of phobias and differing approaches to their treatment drawing heavily on personal experience. On courses for adults, students demonstrate good development of personal and learning skills, respect for their fellow students and growing self-confidence. Students on full-time courses are encouraged to develop their research and independent study skills. For some students, weaknesses in literacy and numeracy constrain their progress.

A sample of retention and pass rates in health, social care and childcare, 2001 to 2003

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
Introduction to counselling	2	No. of starts	20	18	23
		% retention	65	89	96
		% pass rate	38	88	100
NVQ care (direct care)	2	No. of starts	109	161	46
		% retention	45	22	39
		% pass rate	90	97	94
National diploma early years	3	No. of starts	21	32	25
		% retention	95	81	60
		% pass rate	85	92	87
NVQ care (continuing care)	3	No. of starts	87	79	24
		% retention	45	18	58
		% pass rate	95	100	100

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
NVQ care (promoting independence)	3	No. of starts	28	28	29
		% retention	29	4	14
		% pass rate	100	100	100
Certificate in community mental health	3	No. of starts	*	15	17
		% retention	*	80	41
		% pass rate	*	100	100

Source: ISR (2001 and 2002), college (2003)

* course did not run

Quality of education and training

101. Overall teaching is satisfactory or better and students make good progress in most lessons. Teaching and learning on courses for adults are mostly good. Lessons are well planned with clear aims and objectives. Teachers inspire and challenge students to examine complex theoretical issues and attendant ramifications for care practice. In one lesson on mental health legislation, for example, the teacher gave a very clear presentation on the convention on human rights and how these rights raised problems for dealing with mental health problems. The teacher gave excellent illustrations from practice to illuminate the key learning points engaging students in discussion of when one individual's rights might be forfeited to the rights of others. Students asked perceptive questions to clarify their own understanding and demonstrated good evaluative skills in their contributions. During a brainstorming session on the symptoms of hearing impairment, students showed much insight and eagerly illustrated their understanding with examples from their work in nurseries. A video on good and poor practice confirmed the key points which had emerged.

102. In some lessons on full-time courses, the teaching is insufficiently demanding of students and their learning progress is slow. The content is sound, but the delivery is dull and fails to stimulate students to want to learn. They lose concentration and engage in distracting behaviour. In some lessons, the small size of the group inhibits the range of learning activities that can be used.

103. Teachers, trainers and assessors are generally experienced in their occupational field as well as having the necessary professional qualifications. There is a good range of materials in the learning resource centre to aid learning on these courses and an appropriate range of specialist equipment in early years. Teachers have produced useful workbooks and support materials for underpinning knowledge on NVQ and part-time courses. Some

classrooms are small for the size of group and some teaching aids are not in good working order.

104. Assessment is generally fair and accurate and subject to regular internal verification. Feedback on students' work is detailed and usually includes guidance on how they might improve to gain higher grades. However, return of the work is often unduly delayed. Standards of assessment practice in the workplace are inconsistent. Some workplace assessors lack commitment to, and the skills required, for all aspects of their role. The tracking and monitoring of students' progress is good, but there is limited intervention when students are not progressing well. The additional learning support needs of some full-time students are late in being identified. In-class additional support is generally effective where it is provided. There is no formal tracking and monitoring of literacy or numeracy development on NVQ programmes.

105. There is a wide range of provision offering progression from foundation level to level 4. NVQ students, in particular, have taken advantage of these opportunities. Between 2001 and 2003, 27 NVQ level 2 students progressed to NVQ level 3 courses and, of these, 17 subsequently completed their assessor awards. Eight students progressed from NVQ level 3 to NVQ level 4, five of whom were promoted and one became a deputy manager. There is good progression to employment from early years courses. Part-time courses attract a number of students who would not normally participate in FE.

106. The college's response to community and sector skills' needs is strong and effective. Collaborative work with local schools has led to partnership arrangements to provide the applied GCSE and AVCE in health and social care. The number of students enrolling on these courses is steadily increasing and interim results are good. There has been a large growth in NVQ provision in care. The NVQ centre within the school of health and social care has productive links with a wide number of local employers and good partnership arrangements with local health care trusts and national organisations with local provision. Employers value highly the centre's ability to offer training which is structured to meet the employment patterns of their employees.

107. Pastoral support for full-time students is good. Students value the friendliness and approachability of teachers. Individual tutorials take place regularly to monitor overall progress. Action plans are sometimes too general and vague to really produce improvement in performance. There is no established tutorial programme and the scope of tutorial activities is limited. Work-based students value the support they receive with the development of their personal and learning skills as well as their occupational competence.

Leadership and management

108. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The management style is open and supportive. Communications and teamwork are effective in managing courses on a day-to-day basis. Teachers are thoroughly appraised and set individual targets which are monitored at monthly supervision sessions. Although the CoVE in adult care is still in an early stage of development, the NVQ care provision fulfils many of the CoVE criteria. Quality assurance

processes are not sufficiently reliable in identifying and addressing weaknesses. There is no target setting for improvements in retention and pass rates at course level and self-assessments do not identify all key weaknesses, particularly in respect of student achievements. An action plan based on the current self-assessment has yet to be developed.

General art and design

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

Strengths

- high pass rates on many courses
- good teaching on courses for adults
- good range of part-time courses.

Weaknesses

- small class sizes restrict learning opportunities
- inadequate resources to support the full curriculum
- gaps in provision for full-time students.

Scope of provision

109. The college offers full-time courses, mostly at advanced level, in general art and design. These include AS levels and GCE A levels in art and design, design and technology graphics and textiles, and photography at the B6 sixth form centre. Vocational courses are provided at the main Radstock campus and include GNVQ intermediate art and design, national diplomas in fine art, fashion and textiles and media and design, and a diploma in foundation studies. There are 31 full-time art and design students on these vocational courses. There are 283, mostly adult, students on part-time courses provided at the Radstock campus. Courses include AS-level and GCE A-level art and design and a wide range of National Open College Network (NOCN) courses, including calligraphy, embroidery, fashion, painting and drawing, silverwork and jewellery, stained glass and watercolours. Most part-time courses are available from level 1 through to level 3.

Achievement and standards

110. There are high pass rates on AS-level media, GCE A-level art and design, national diploma fine art and OCN calligraphy, silverwork and jewellery, and watercolours courses. The retention and pass rate on the intermediate GNVQ fell in 2003 and students' work is of a poor standard and shows little understanding of the formal elements of art and design expected at this level. The low student numbers on full-time courses restrict the extent to which ideas are shared and creativity is prompted between students. These limitations on the students' learning experience are reflected in the standard of work produced on the national diploma fine art and foundation courses. Work produced by adult students on part-time art courses, however, is mostly good and many students succeed in improving their skills very demonstrably.

A sample of retention and pass rates in general art and design, 2001 to 2003

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
OCN silverwork and jewellery	1	No. of starts	63	35	28
		% retention	97	100	75
		% pass rate	95	100	95
OCN watercolours	1	No. of starts	109	46	24
		% retention	97	100	92
		% pass rate	71	74	100
OCN calligraphy	1	No. of starts	32	26	17
		% retention	94	81	71
		% pass rate	83	95	92

Source: ISR (2001 and 2002), college (2003)

Quality of education and training

111. Teaching is good on courses for adult students. Teachers are knowledgeable about their subject and respond well to the needs of individual students. The work set is challenging and students are encouraged and supported. Due to the low student numbers, some lessons involve students at different levels being taught together. Teachers respond well to the mixed range of abilities, although differentiated approaches are not identified in lesson plans.

112. Teaching on the full-time intermediate course is unfocused and lacks energy and appropriate pace. In one lesson, students presented work on an artist they had researched, but were unable to demonstrate any real understanding of the artist's techniques or motivation. Students on different full-time level 3 courses are taught together and there is a significant difference between the understanding of adult students and students aged 16 to 18, who are unable to explain their work in terms of line, tone, composition, and texture. The low numbers of students on full-time courses restricts the sharing of ideas and group dynamics which stimulate the creative development of ideas. Opportunities to extend students' range of experience of media and methods are not properly exploited. For example, in a textile workshop, students completed a design exercise on paper rather than further developing their skills with textiles.

113. Assessment procedures are not standardised across full-time and part-time courses. On full-time level 3 courses, there are examples of good practice in written feedback and negotiated action points which do promote improved understanding and performance. This approach has now been adopted on the level 2 course. Part-time assessment is variable and dependent on the method adopted by the teacher. Internal verification procedures operate across all courses, but their value is underdeveloped. One internal verifier provides useful comments on students' work and indicates how teaching and learning activities could improve the students' experience, but this practice is not more widely shared.

114. There are some significant gaps in resources; for example, the lack of facilities for ceramics, sculpture and three-dimensional work; of storage space for large-scale artwork; and of an appropriate variety of software to enable students to create and manipulate images. This narrows the breadth of the curriculum available to full-time students and restricts their ability to develop skills across the range of media required to achieve higher grades. Library-based learning resources are mostly satisfactory, but there is a shortage of research material for photography and textiles. The intermediate course base room is small and does not have a sink. The recent addition of a dark room has extended the enrichment opportunities for full-time students who are able to use skills learned in photography as a research tool for their fine art work. Students on full-time level 3 courses have good individual workspaces.

115. There is a wide range of part-time courses for adults at levels 1, 2 and 3 that are available during the day and evening and which provide opportunities to progress to the full-time foundation diploma. There are no full-time courses below level 2 and this has resulted in some students being accepted on to the intermediate course before they have the appropriate skills. There are good progression arrangements with the University of West England, which provides automatic interviews to level 3 students prior to formal application. Recently, photography and life drawing and a field trip to Barcelona have been introduced to provide greater curriculum enrichment on full-time courses. A collaborative arrangement with a local pottery is being developed to enable students to use the facilities. Contacts have been made with art galleries in the local area to begin to develop work experience opportunities for students.

116. On full-time courses, key skills are largely contextualised within art and design and integrated effectively into the assignments of full-time students. For example, the verbal and visual presentations on 'other artists' work' made by students in one lesson were also assessed towards their key skills in communication. Numeracy is taught separately, but assignments are often framed in an art and design context; one, for example, examined the division of space for an art exhibition.

117. Student support is largely provided on an informal basis. Full-time students have individual tutorials periodically. The learning plans which are the focus of these tutorials lack specific, short-term targets and are not used to good effect. All full-time students are interviewed prior to enrolment and receive a structured induction programme which includes initial screening to identify their level of key skills. This is not made available to part-time

students. Procedures do not ensure that all students identified as needing additional support do actually receive it.

Leadership and management

118. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Previously, poor leadership of the curriculum area had resulted in a lack of growth, poor curriculum planning and low staff moral. During the last academic year, full-time teachers had not been appraised and new part-time teachers had received no induction. A new curriculum manager was appointed six months ago and this has already had a positive impact on the curriculum. Strategies are being implemented to increase student numbers and remedy the recognised weaknesses in the curriculum.

Humanities and English

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

Strengths

- good pass rates on access to HE course
- high pass rates on GCE A-level psychology and AS-level English language and literature in 2003
- some well-planned and lively teaching in English and history
- good individual subject support for students

Weaknesses

- low pass rates on most GCE A-level courses
- insufficient sharing of good practice
- insufficient action to improve students' achievement
- poor management arrangements for provision for students aged 16 to 18 at Broadlands.

Scope of provision

119. The college offers AS-level and GCE A-level courses in English language and literature, history, law and psychology. Geography and English literature are offered at GCE A level only. Most humanities and English courses are provided at B6, the sixth form centre based at Broadlands School in Keynsham. Students at the B6 centre are all aged 16 to 18. Access to HE is offered on a full-time or part-time basis at the main campus in Radstock, where AS-level and GCE A-level psychology are also offered. These are mainly studied by adults on a part-time basis. There are currently 116 students enrolled in the curriculum area, 75 of whom are students aged 16 to 18 studying AS-level and GCE A-level courses at B6.

Achievement and standards

120. Although numbers on the access to HE course have been relatively modest, retention and pass rates have consistently been high. While there has been an improvement in pass rates in GCE A-level psychology and AS-level English language and literature, pass rates fell or remained below average in AS-level English literature, law and psychology. The number of high grades achieved by students is well below average. Retention rates are generally good, but student numbers are small. Recruitment in general remains poor. This has a limiting effect on the range of learning activities that students can engage in, which in turn affects standards of performance and skill development. There is no effective system for

measuring performance against prior attainment. There are no cumulative records of student attendance at B6, but during inspection week attendance was above average for colleges of the same type.

121. Standards of work in student files and in their oral and written work in class are satisfactory, with some examples of good knowledge and understanding. In one English language and literature lesson, students ably and enthusiastically analysed texts by four Irish authors. They effectively made stylistic comparisons between English and Irish grammar, syntax and lexis. For a minority of students, standards achieved are less than satisfactory. Some psychology students are not achieving the required standard in their knowledge and application of experimental design.

A sample of retention and pass rates in humanities and English, 2001 to 2003

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
GCE A-level psychology	3	No. of starts	*	15	19
		% retention	*	93	95
		% pass rate	*	57	94
AS-level psychology	3	No. of starts	13	59	35
		% retention	54	75	89
		% pass rate	71	77	61
AS-level law	3	No. of starts	*	20	14
		% retention	*	100	93
		% pass rate	*	70	38
Access to HE	3	No. of starts	13	15	8
		% retention	85	87	88
		% pass rate	100	92	86

Source: ISR (2001 and 2002), college (2003)

*course did not run

Quality of education and training

122. Teaching is generally satisfactory or better. Some teaching is lively and interesting. Teachers share their enthusiasm for their subject through stimulating activities which involve a wide range of learning styles. In the best lessons, teachers take account of the individual learning needs of their students and plan the lesson accordingly. In these lessons, students acquire the appropriate analytical skills and develop their ability to present information in a clear concise manner in speech and writing. They can engage in literary criticism and carry out linguistic analysis of a range of texts and genres. In one access to HE lesson, students engaged in lively debate about the characters, plot and stage direction of *Educating Rita* by Willy Russell. They were able to identify the linguistic devices used to create humour and impact. Humanities students develop good presentation skills. In an AS-level history lesson, students confidently presented their research findings on trench warfare. They made this interesting by including information from a range of sources including First World War poetry. Psychology students acquire appropriate knowledge and understanding of key theories and perspectives, but their knowledge of experimental design is weak.

123. In many lessons, however, there is a lack of challenge. Students spend considerable time performing low level tasks, such as extracting information from texts, without being sufficiently stretched intellectually. Some teaching is not sufficiently interesting. In these lessons, the learning environment lacks energy and stimulation. There is too narrow a range of learning activities and too little involvement of students in their learning. When group sizes are very small, learning is restricted and students do not have sufficient opportunity to engage in collaborative activities. Where teaching is less than satisfactory, the learning is not well planned and managed. The lesson content is not of an appropriate level and students are not provided with opportunities to acquire the skills required for advanced level work.

124. Teachers are well qualified and experienced. They engage in appropriate training to keep up to date with developments in their subject areas. Resources are generally adequate for advanced level courses. There is a reasonable range of video resources to support learning. The library stock is recent and up to date and there is a good range of periodicals. Students can generally access computers for independent research. There is, however, very limited use of ILT for learning in the classroom.

125. Assessment of students' work is thorough and regular. Students are given a clear understanding of how marks are allocated and what they need to do to improve. Teachers meet to discuss and moderate students' work. There is, however, insufficient target setting and monitoring of progress towards personal and academic goals.

126. The access to HE course effectively meets the needs of students wishing to progress to HE, but the range of optional units available is rather narrow. Provision at advanced level is mainly on an historic basis and does not sufficiently meet the needs of all students. Some students embark on inappropriate courses and do not achieve a qualification.

127. There is good individual support for students. Teachers give freely of their time to help and guide students. The tutorial programme lacks structure and planning. There is insufficient liaison between teachers and tutors and their role in monitoring the overall progress of students is unclear. There is an effective working relationship between the Connexions adviser and the college careers adviser. Students receive good support and careers guidance.

Leadership and management

128. Management at course level is satisfactory, but leadership and management of humanities provision at the sixth form centre are weak. The role of the head of centre is not sufficiently defined, particularly in terms of quality assurance of teaching and learning. The provision is not properly integrated into the college structures and procedures. There are no course reviews or action plans. There is no mechanism at present for measuring the extent to which students' attainment is in line with or exceeds expectation based on their GCSE results. This is, however, now being introduced. Self-assessment is not sufficiently rigorous and is not followed through by an action plan to address weaknesses. There is no clear strategy to raise attainment.

Literacy and numeracy

Overall provision in this area is **unsatisfactory (grade 4)**

Strengths

- good retention rates on most courses
- good pass rates on a range of courses
- successful innovative courses in partnership with local employers.

Weaknesses

- low pass rates on level 1 key skills communication and application of number
- too much unsatisfactory teaching
- insufficient expertise of key skills staff in literacy and numeracy
- insufficient additional literacy, numeracy and dyslexia support
- inadequate quality assurance.

Scope of provision

129. The college provides opportunities for literacy and numeracy development on discrete courses for adults at entry and level 1, on key skills communication and application of number levels 1 and 2, on GCSE English and mathematics, as an integral part of other course provision and through additional learning support on vocational courses. At the time of inspection, there were approximately 750 enrolments. Some 400 full-time students aged 16 to 18 and approximately 100 full-time adult students are enrolled on key skills courses at levels 1 and 2; 150 adults study part time for 2 to 3 hours weekly. Courses run on college sites and in the community. There are 15 daytime and 8 evening courses for adults weekly.

Achievement and standards

130. Pass rates for most students are unsatisfactory. Retention rates on many courses are above the national average, but pass rates for students aged 16 to 18 on key skills communication and application of number at level 1 are very low. Pass rates for key skills at level 2 and for GCSE mathematics are above the national averages. Pass rates for individually set learning goals on adult basic literacy courses are at the national levels. Students with learning difficulties on FE studies and access to FE courses make good progress against their individual targets. Students on skills for shift workers courses achieve good pass rates in the national tests at levels 1 and 2.

131. Many students on key skills communication courses are unable easily to extract meaning from text. They have difficulty structuring writing and spelling and punctuating correctly. Many students on application of number courses cannot use the four rules of number well enough to do the more complicated calculations needed for their courses.

A sample of retention and pass rates in literacy and numeracy, 2001 to 2003

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
Basic literacy	entry	No. of starts	129	53	107
		% retention	100	94	81
		% pass rate	100	100	86
Key skills communication	1	No. of starts	56	56	241
		% retention	98	100	88
		% pass rate	53	13	19
Key skills application of number	1	No. of starts	58	84	265
		% retention	98	100	89
		% pass rate	54	7	18
Key skills communication	2	No. of starts	52	122	93
		% retention	100	99	100
		% pass rate	44	25	59
Key skills application of number	2	No. of starts	23	20	78
		% retention	100	100	100
		% pass rate	35	100	46
GCSE mathematics (one year)	2	No. of starts	48	34	32
		% retention	67	74	66
		% pass rate	69	72	62

Source: ISR (2001 and 2002), college (2003)

Quality of education and training

132. Too much teaching is unsatisfactory. In many lessons, the specific outcomes of the lesson are not clear to students. Some teachers' own understanding of grammar and grasp of correct spelling is insecure. In one lesson, the teacher gave a verbal explanation of the role of verbs which muddled meaning with function, confused verbs with gerunds and lasted for 20 minutes. Some teachers give the correct spelling, but offer no strategies for reinforcement. Handouts are sometimes hard to read or have insufficient space to write on. Some teachers take too much of the session talking themselves instead of getting students to talk. Some teachers allow students to stay on tasks with which they feel comfortable but which do not extend their skills. In key skills lessons, much time is given to presentation but little to skills development. Where teaching is good, teachers plan carefully. In one key skills application of number lesson on bar charts and graphs, the teacher used a snowballing technique to extract and build on what students already knew about the topic. Students then moved to reading information from a simple chart, added an additional bar to an existing chart and finally produced their own chart from given information. Learning by both adults and students aged 16 to 18 is satisfactory and in some cases good. Students are attentive, interested and eager to learn.

133. Assessment and monitoring of students' progress are satisfactory. All students are initially assessed using a recognised tool. Teachers on adult courses undertake their own form of diagnostic assessment with varying degrees of thoroughness. There is no diagnostic assessment on key skills programmes and little recording of progress beyond a record of completed assignments. Effective individual feedback is given throughout lessons by most teachers. Good records of progress are kept on skills for shift workers courses, courses for students with learning difficulties and on some adult literacy and numeracy courses. However, individual targets set on adult programmes are often too broad to measure progress against them effectively.

134. There is insufficient literacy and numeracy support for students. Approximately 100 students receive support in class. However, some learning support assistants do not have sufficient experience to provide effective literacy or numeracy support. Little individual support is available for students outside classes. The college has designated a dedicated resource area for dyslexia and out of class support, but this is not yet ready for use. Out of 20 students assessed, 18 have been diagnosed as needing dyslexia support. Due to staff shortages, only the six students need the most specialist support are currently receiving it. Literacy and numeracy support for students with learning difficulties and disabilities is well managed by teachers who give clear instructions to assistants.

135. Resources are satisfactory. Most teachers on access to FE and FE studies are experienced and competent. Most adult literacy and numeracy teachers have a specialist teaching qualification and some learning support assistants have a specialist initial certificate. However, many key skills teachers are ill equipped to help students at level 1 develop their skills sufficiently to pass the key skills tests. Training to address this weakness, which has been identified by the college, has not yet taken place. Most classrooms are well designed

and pleasant. IT equipment is easy to access and much used in teaching and learning. Numeracy materials are of high quality and coded to the core curriculum but are only available to teachers on the adult programme. Literacy materials have not yet been indexed and coded and are hard for key skills teachers to access without help.

136. The range of courses is satisfactory. Work on embedding literacy and numeracy in access to FE is underway. Good partnership work has extended the range of the adult programme. A successful, innovative programme of courses in IT with a key skill, run in partnership with union and employers for local print work company employees, has greatly increased the number of men obtaining national test qualifications. Courses are provided in partnership with two local hospitals. A recent appointment has been made to extend work with employers. However, many students with literacy or numeracy skills well below the level of their vocational course are required to follow an inappropriate key skills syllabus with no alternative qualification offered. New entry-level qualifications are being adopted, but training for staff on these has not extended across the college. Several adult literacy and numeracy courses have too few students to constitute a successful learning experience.

Leadership and management

137. Leadership and management are unsatisfactory. Quality assurance is inadequate. Teaching observations carried out by non-specialist staff have not identified weaknesses in teaching or identified good practice. There is little sharing of good practice and of resources for literacy and numeracy between the adult programme, key skills and additional learning support. Self-assessment does not identify significant weaknesses or address the very low pass rates in key skills at level 1. There is little use of data to inform quality improvement and course development. A recent re-organisation of management and co-ordination responsibilities has had insufficient time to address weaknesses. There is no overall strategy for literacy and numeracy development across the college. A vacant post for a basic and key skills co-ordinator for students aged 16 to 18 has left the programme without leadership. Training designed to address this gap was not successful, but has not been replaced with other development programmes.

Part D: College data
Table 1: Enrolments by level of study and age

Level	16–18 %	19+ %
1	44	37
2	29	27
3	15	19
4/5	0	3
Other	12	14
Total	100	100

Source: provided by the college in 2004

Table 2: Enrolments by curriculum area and age

Curriculum area	16–18 No.	19+ No.	Total Enrolments (%)
Science and mathematics	487	271	6
Land-based provision	168	302	4
Construction	0	0	0
Engineering, technology and manufacture	105	53	1
Business administration, management and professional	292	1,117	12
Information and communication technology	584	1,144	15
Retailing, customer service and transportation	8	57	1
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	207	510	6
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	50	51	1
Health, social care and public services	470	1,994	21
Visual and performing arts and media	54	306	3
Humanities	225	205	4
English, languages and communication	478	162	5

Curriculum area	16-18 No.	19+ No.	Total Enrolments (%)
Foundation programmes	417	392	7
Other/Unknown	494	1,219	14
Total	4,039	7,783	100

Source: provided by the college in 2004

Table 3: Retention and achievement

Level (Long Courses)	Retention and pass rate	Completion year					
		16-18			19+		
		2000	2001	2002	2000	2001	2002
1	Starters excluding transfers	295	317	982	1,549	817	1,032
	Retention rate %	91	82	96	89	86	87
	National average %	76	75	76	73	69	70
	Pass rate %	65	75	92	36	73	80
	National average %	65	69	71	66	68	71
2	Starters excluding transfers	298	681	417	937	845	813
	Retention rate %	75	89	83	82	69	69
	National average %	72	70	72	70	68	68
	Pass rate %	73	86	76	62	79	78
	National average %	67	69	71	64	68	72
3	Starters excluding transfers	130	195	421	886	868	883
	Retention rate %	75	53	81	86	63	61
	National average %	67	71	77	69	68	70
	Pass rate %	78	78	72	59	77	79
	National average %	75	77	79	66	69	72
4/5	Starters excluding transfers	*	*	*	116	155	126
	Retention rate %	*	*	*	78	66	32
	National average %	**	**	**	67	67	67
	Pass rate %	*	*	*	41	39	65
	National average %	**	**	**	58	55	56

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

Sources of information:

1. *National averages: Benchmarking Data 2000 to 2002: Retention and Achievement Rates in Further Education Colleges in England, Learning and Skills Council, September 2003.*
2. *College rates for 1999/2000 to 2001/02: College ISR.*

** fewer than 15 students enrolled*

*** data unavailable*

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

Courses	Teaching judged to be:			No of sessions observed
	Good or better %	Satisfactory %	Less than satisfactory %	
Level 3 (advanced)	57	32	11	53
Level 2 (intermediate)	47	37	16	51
Level 1 (foundation)	47	47	7	15
Other sessions	22	56	22	9
Totals	49	38	13	128

Notes