

Cricklade College

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1997-98**

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL***

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

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

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Grade Descriptors

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

Aggregated grades for aspects of cross-college provision, curriculum areas and lesson observations, for colleges inspected during 1996-97, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1	2	3	4	5
	%	%	%	%	%
Curriculum areas	9	59	30	2	–
Cross-college provision	18	51	27	4	–
Lesson observations	19	42	31	7	1

Source: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1996-97: Chief inspector's annual report.* Grades were awarded using the guidelines in Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*.
Sample size: 122 college inspections

Retention and Pass Rates

Where data on students' achievements appear in tables, levels of achievement are shown in two ways:

- as a retention rate, which is the proportion of students who completed a course in relation to the number enrolled on 1 November in the first year of the course
- as a pass rate, which is the proportion of students which passed examinations in relation to the number entered. Pass rates for GCE A level are quoted for grades A to E unless otherwise specified. Pass rates for GCSE courses are quoted for grade C or above unless otherwise specified. Pass rates for vocational and professional awards are for successful completion of the full award.

Summary

Cricklade College

South East Region

Inspected November 1997

Cricklade College is a tertiary college in Andover, north-west Hampshire. The college's first self-assessment report involved both governors and staff, but took no view external to the college. Inspectors found that the report overestimated strengths and underestimated or failed to identify weaknesses in many of the sections. The college has made suitable plans to improve the areas of weakness identified in the self-assessment. Plans to address the additional weaknesses found by inspectors will now be required.

A wide range of courses is offered by the college. A sample of courses from seven of the FEFC's programme areas was inspected, together with aspects of cross-college provision and collaborative work undertaken on the college's behalf in Plymouth. The lesson observation grades awarded by inspectors fell below the national average for colleges inspected in 1996-97, and there were fewer outstanding and more poor sessions than were found in the previous inspection in 1994. The standards achieved by students fall below the national average in several areas. There are poor retention and pass rates, and some have

deteriorated since 1994. Student support is well managed. The college has good accommodation, and is generally well supported with learning resources including computers, although the library budget is modest.

Accommodation and equipment have been significantly improved since 1994. The quality assurance system has failed to maintain and improve academic quality and standards. The college's governors have good links with the community and local business, but the governance of the college is less than satisfactory overall. The management information system is unreliable, and the financial management of the college is weak.

Teaching, the standards achieved, quality assurance arrangements and management are good in the collaborative provision at Plymouth.

The college should: take steps to improve teaching on many courses; allocate more clearly roles and responsibilities at course level; address poor retention; improve low and declining pass rates on many courses; develop a rigorous quality assurance system; monitor more effectively students' achievements; improve the management information system; develop better financial management; and make improvements to governance and management.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Engineering	4	Support for students	2
Business and professional studies	3	General resources	2
Hotel and catering and leisure and tourism	3	Quality assurance	4
Art and design, performing arts and music	2	Governance	4
English and modern languages	3	Management	4
Basic education	3		
Access to further and higher education	2		
Outward collaborative provision	2		

Context

The College and its Mission

1 Cricklade College was founded in 1974 as a tertiary college. Its main site, close to Andover town centre, is shared with a community theatre and with public sports facilities. The college offers adult education and leisure courses on a number of other sites in Andover and at a school in Ludgershall, 10 miles to the north. Andover has one of the lowest rates of unemployment in the country, at less than 2 per cent. About 30 per cent of the local workforce, an unusually high proportion, are employed in manufacturing. The other major sources of employment are work in hotels, catering and retailing which employ 26 per cent of the workforce, and finance and business which employs 20 per cent.

2 The educational achievements of school-leavers in the area from which the college draws most of its younger students are below the average for Hampshire. The college is the only provider of post-16 education in Andover, and many of its students aged 16 to 19 previously attended the five 11 to 16 schools in the town and its vicinity. Good road and rail links connect Andover to several large towns within daily travelling distance. There are no other sector colleges within close proximity to Andover.

3 On 1 November 1997, the college had 1,259 full-time and 1,909 part-time enrolments. Of these a third were students aged 16 to 18 taking full-time courses, and a half were aged 25 years and over, mostly studying part time. In recent years, the number of full-time students has fluctuated in line with changes in the number of people aged 16 to 19 in the local population, but there has been a significant increase in the number of adult students. In September 1997, the college employed 185 full-time equivalent staff, of whom 89 were teachers.

4 The college has recently reviewed its mission statement and corporate aims. The

college's mission is 'to be a leading provider of high-quality education, training and services, contributing significantly to economic prosperity and individual achievement'. Its corporate aims are to:

- fulfil the education and training needs of local, national and international communities
- achieve the widest possible participation in education and training by providing a supportive environment which encourages excellence, effective planning and monitoring of provision
- increase access to college services using established and evolving information and communications technologies to support learning
- ensure responsiveness to continuing change and an increasingly competitive market by investing in, developing and maximising human and physical resources
- ensure financial viability through successful and profitable business development, growth and efficient expenditure.

Context

The Inspection

5 The college was inspected during the week beginning 10 November 1997. The inspection team had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and information about the college held in other divisions of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). The college submitted data on students' achievements for the three years 1995 to 1997 which were validated before the inspection against primary sources such as class registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies. The college was notified of the sample of its provision to be inspected about two months before the inspection. The inspection was carried out by 13 inspectors and an auditor for a total of 56 days. They observed 97 lessons, and examined students' work and college documents. One inspector spent three days inspecting collaborative provision at Achievement Training Ltd in Plymouth. Meetings were held with governors, managers, college staff and students.

6 Of the lessons inspected, 58 per cent were judged to be good or outstanding and 12 per cent were less than satisfactory. This compares with 61 per cent and 8 per cent, respectively, for all lessons observed during 1996-97 according to *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1996-97: Chief inspector's annual*

report. The average level of attendance during the inspection was 78 per cent. The following table shows the grades awarded to the lessons inspected.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	2	9	4	1	0	16
GCSE	0	3	3	1	0	7
GNVQ	1	5	6	4	0	16
NVQ	1	13	3	4	0	21
Other vocational	4	18	13	2	0	37
Total	8	48	29	12	0	97

Curriculum Areas

Engineering

Grade 4

7 Inspectors observed 10 lessons covering courses in motor vehicle, mechanical, electronic and software engineering. The college's self-assessment report understated weaknesses in teaching, students' achievements, planning and target-setting.

Key strengths

- well-planned course documentation
- well-designed learning materials in computer-aided design
- good specialist resources for computing
- good retention rates

Weaknesses

- lack of variety of teaching and learning methods
- failure of teachers to motivate students
- poor pass rates
- poor curriculum planning
- lack of staff development focused on the needs of the curriculum
- self-assessment report written in isolation

8 Teaching and learning on the national diploma in computer-aided design application were good, but this was untypical. The college's self-assessment report did not identify the weaknesses found by inspectors. Most teachers do not give sufficient time to planning their work and much of the teaching observed was dull and uninspiring. They do not use lesson plans and schemes of work are little more than lists of topics. In most lessons teachers failed to use an appropriate variety of teaching methods or provide sufficiently challenging work to prevent students from becoming bored and demotivated. In many lessons, teachers did not check that students understood the work and

were making progress in learning. Work is set regularly but it is not well marked. For assessments and assignments set as part of the course, the written criteria for success which teachers provide are not clear and it is difficult for students to know what is expected of them.

9 Whilst retention on most engineering courses is good, the college's self-assessment report did not identify as a weakness that pass rates are poor and have declined in the last three years. Pass rates on some courses, including the Engineering Training Authority joining materials and the City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) fabrication and welding part 3 certificate, were below 10 per cent in 1997. In the national diploma in engineering, the pass rate has been below the average as published in the FEFC engineering survey in 1996 for the last three years and was only 30 per cent in 1996-97.

10 Although there is a broad range of engineering courses there are gaps in provision at foundation level and students wishing to progress to higher level programmes need to go elsewhere. Course teams are led by two full-time and three part-time engineering teachers. Although the programme area manager holds meetings with each course leader, there are few opportunities for the course leaders to meet and communication between course teams is poor. There is a good range of engineering workshops, laboratories and classrooms. However, much of the equipment is underused and does not meet current industrial standards. Computing facilities are good.

Curriculum Areas

Examples of students' achievements in engineering, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Advanced vocational	Retention (%)	100	100	100
	Pass rate (%)	42	43	30
Foundation	Retention (%)	94	100	100
	Pass rate (%)	8	0	0
C&G motor vehicle repair and servicing	Retention (%)	69	91	100
	Pass rate (%)	36	52	55

Source: college data

Curriculum Areas

Business and Professional Studies

Grade 3

11 Inspectors observed 12 lessons in a sample of business studies courses leading to intermediate advanced and professional qualifications. Inspectors considered that the self-assessment report accurately identified key strengths but not the variations in the quality of teaching found during the inspection.

Key strengths

- well-structured induction
- appropriate use of differentiated tasks in the better lessons
- key skills developed within a vocational context
- good specialist accommodation
- well-resourced general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) workshop

Weaknesses

- inadequate schemes of work
- lack of lesson plans
- failure to involve students actively in learning in some lessons
- poor retention and achievement on GNVQ advanced and intermediate programmes
- teachers' lack of recent industrial experience

12 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment report that in the better lessons, teachers were enthusiastic and well organised. Their lessons were well planned, and they set suitable tasks for all students, made good use of resources, and frequently checked students' learning. In other lessons teachers made poor use of audiovisual aids and failed to engage or

sustain students' interest and involvement in the work. Schemes of work were poorly developed and few teachers prepared lesson plans. The quality of marking by some teachers is poor and some students do not receive sufficient feedback to enable them to improve their performance. Key skills in GNVQ courses are developed through their careful integration with vocational units and assignments.

13 In its self-assessment report the college identified the need to improve retention and achievement rates in business and professional studies courses. All students who completed the national vocational qualification (NVQ) level 2 course in administration in the last two years were successful. Pass rates for NVQ and higher national certificate business programmes are good. However, on the intermediate and advanced GNVQ courses, results have been poor. They fell sharply in 1997, mainly because students did not complete their portfolios. Results on the BTEC national certificate in business and finance are also poor.

14 Arrangements for the management of administration, business and professional courses have changed following the recent restructuring. The programme area has good links with the college's partner schools which provide most full-time students. A successful recruitment drive has doubled enrolments on NVQ administration programmes.

15 Teachers have relevant industrial experience but, in some cases, this needs updating. Classrooms are well furnished and are enhanced by interesting displays of students' work. A well-resourced GNVQ workshop is permanently staffed. Students make good use of the Internet and CD-ROM based information for their assignments.

Curriculum Areas

Examples of students' achievements in business and professional studies, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A level	Retention (%)	63	42	100
	Pass rate (%)	40	60	64
Advanced vocational	Retention (%)	61	50	63
	Pass rate (%)	68	54	63
Intermediate vocational	Retention (%)	83	67	81
	Pass rate (%)	70	100	38
NVQ administration	Retention (%)	56	70	60
	Pass rate (%)	78	100	100
Association of Accounting Technicians	Retention (%)	100	75	94
	Pass rate (%)	10	11	7

Source: college data

Curriculum Areas

Hotel and Catering and Leisure and Tourism

Grade 3

16 Inspectors observed 10 lessons, representing a sample of all courses in hospitality and catering, and leisure and tourism. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report but considered that the college failed to give sufficient weight to some significant weaknesses in leisure and tourism.

Key strengths

- good management and teamwork in hospitality and catering
- a high standard of hygiene and safety practices in practical workshops
- reliable assessment, internal verification and accreditation procedures in hospitality and catering
- motivated students appreciative of a supportive college environment
- well-managed tutorials
- good pass rates on NVQ courses in hospitality and catering
- appropriate work experience for hospitality and catering students

Weaknesses

- management leadership of leisure and tourism
- lack of integrated team approach to the teaching of leisure and tourism
- lack of additional vocational specialist courses for GNVQ leisure and tourism students
- poor retention rates in advanced GNVQ leisure and tourism
- lack of specialist vocational staff to teach leisure and tourism courses
- insufficient work experience for leisure and tourism students

17 There were considerable differences in the standards of teaching and learning across the two areas. Inspectors did not agree with the college's self-assessment report that teaching in one of these areas is effectively planned and implemented. Hospitality and catering students worked in a purposeful way and were attentive to their roles and responsibilities. In the production kitchen and restaurant, they displayed good practical skills and used safe and hygienic practices. There were frequent opportunities for their work to be assessed in the busy college restaurant. In some leisure and tourism lessons, aims and objectives were unclear, and this was particularly the case when teachers used methods which did not take into account the differing abilities and experience of students. Frequently students arrived late to sessions and were slow to settle. In some lessons on the intermediate level course, students constantly interrupted. Although these interruptions were firmly managed by the teachers, they slowed down the pace at which work was completed.

18 The provision for leisure and tourism lacks the vocational emphasis required for students to enter employment with confidence. Although the programme offers the bronze medallion in life-saving and other basic sports coaching awards, it does not offer specialist tourism trade certificates. The college does not have specialist tourism facilities to support teaching and learning and there is insufficient work experience for students. In contrast, hospitality and catering work experience is well managed. NVQ level 1 students attend two-week industrial placements every fifth or sixth week in a well-planned cycle and there are additional opportunities for more advanced students.

19 All hospitality and catering teachers are appropriately qualified and have verifier and assessor awards. They are well supported by good technicians. On their own initiative, teachers have arranged to update their commercial knowledge with the financial support of the college. In leisure and tourism,

Curriculum Areas

only two of nine teachers have specialist vocational qualifications and few have the necessary verifier and assessor awards. There is a lack of management expertise in this subject area.

retention has been consistently poor and the number of students achieving the advanced GNVQ is falling.

20 Accommodation for hospitality and catering and leisure and tourism is of a consistently high standard. An excellent base room for all GNVQ students is managed by learning support staff. The kitchens and the restaurant are well provided with a wide range of up-to-date equipment. The college does not have a dedicated bar to support food service. In its self-assessment report the college did not identify that it had no specialist resources such as a travel agency or a travel information office to support learning on tourism courses.

21 Teachers mark students' written work effectively and provide comments which help them to improve their performance. Students' portfolios are generally well presented and provide a clear record of their progress. Procedures and supporting documentation for monitoring students' progress are well established. In hospitality and catering, internal assessment and certification are well managed. Student retention is low but all those who have completed the course in the last two years have been successful. In leisure and tourism, student

Examples of students' achievements in hotel and catering and leisure and tourism, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Advanced GNVQ leisure and tourism	Retention (%)	71	60	62
	Pass rate (%)	90	67	25
Intermediate GNVQ leisure and tourism	Retention (%)	87	79	*
	Pass rate (%)	38	18	*
NVQ level 2 catering	Retention (%)	75	56	63
	Pass rate (%)	85	100	100

Source: college data

*course did not run

Curriculum Areas

Art and Design, Performing Arts and Music

Grade 2

22 Inspectors observed 17 lessons in music, performing arts and art and design, covering general certificate of secondary education (GCSE), general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level), intermediate and advanced GNVQs, and national diploma levels. Inspection finds generally confirmed the strengths and weaknesses identified by the college in its self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- a well-led and supportive teaching team
- effective teaching on most courses
- efficient curriculum management
- good examination results on most courses
- new building and equipment providing a good teaching and learning environment

Weaknesses

- poor teaching in three-dimensional art and photography
- poor achievements in intermediate GNVQ art and design

23 There is a wide range of courses in this programme area. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that the general standard of teaching is good and lessons are carefully planned. In some performing arts and music lessons, the quality of teaching was outstanding and the level of confidence, knowledge and participation of students reflected this. The quality of teaching was poor in a minority of art and design lessons, in which teachers relied on inappropriate or outdated content and methods. Course and teaching documentation is of a good standard and provides teachers and students with full and

clear information. Project briefs, information and test sheets are clearly written. Assessment is well managed and grading criteria are clear.

24 Students' achievements and retention are generally good. In the national diploma in performing arts, retention is good. In each of the last three years, all students completing this course have achieved the qualification. Pass rates in music and performing arts are also very good, with all or most of those who complete the course achieving the qualification. However, pass rates on the intermediate GNVQ in art and design, have fallen to below 30 per cent for the last two years, a weakness not identified in its self-assessment report. The college recognises that greater attention should be given to monitoring the progress of students on this course. Progression to additional further or higher education is generally good.

25 The programme area is well managed. It is appropriately divided into separate sections for art and design, and for music and performing arts. Teachers have appropriate experience. The new building provides very good accommodation and has room for expansion. The technical equipment in music, photography, and textiles courses is of a very high standard. The introduction of the advanced GNVQ in art and design will require more access to both two-dimensional and three-dimensional workshops. The development of a three-dimensional workshop would also benefit performing arts courses.

Curriculum Areas

Examples of students' achievements in art and design, performing arts and music, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Advanced vocational	Retention (%)	57	83	87
	Pass rate (%)	57	83	87
GCE A level	Retention (%)	59	60	55
	Pass rate (%)	68	85	64
Intermediate GNVQ art and design	Retention (%)	80	88	64
	Pass rate (%)	83	29	29

Source: college data

Curriculum Areas

English and Modern Languages

Grade 3

26 The scope of the inspection included GCE A/AS levels in English literature, English language and literature, French, German and Spanish, and GCSE in English and French. Inspectors observed 13 lessons. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report for English and modern languages but also found that a number of weaknesses had not been identified.

Key strengths

- good teaching, particularly at GCE A level
- good working relationships between staff and students
- good results in GCE A level examinations and GCSE English
- excellent facilities for modern language teaching

Weaknesses

- underdeveloped schemes of work
- teaching that failed to sustain students' interest in some lessons
- poor retention on some courses
- lack of effective management at course level
- inadequate accommodation for English

27 Inspectors did not agree with the college's self-assessment that all humanities programmes were effectively planned and delivered. Some teachers do not use lesson plans and this had an adverse effect on the quality of the lessons. In the better lessons, teachers used an appropriate variety of teaching methods, enabling students to participate effectively in working in pairs or groups and in making presentations. In other lessons, teachers failed to provide work which

was sufficiently challenging. Sometimes teachers failed to provide adequate support and encouragement for students who found the work difficult.

28 Students' written work is of an appropriate standard and is regularly assessed. Written comments by teachers on students' work are positive and encouraging though at times they give too little detail to help students to understand how they might improve their work. Students' progress is reviewed regularly. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that examination results for most courses are above the national average for general further education colleges. In GCE A level English literature the pass rate in 1997 was 95 per cent and 69 per cent of the students achieved grade C or above, although retention is poor. The recently introduced English language and literature course has been successful in terms of recruitment and examination results. Pass rates in GCE A level French and GCSE English are also good.

29 Schemes of work and course management are poor. Many schemes of work are, at best, no more than lists of topics to be covered over a given period. Staff tend to work in isolation and there is little evidence of teamwork in the planning of courses. Clear lines of management have not been established. There is no team leader for modern languages which is taught entirely by permanent fractional staff. Teachers collaborate informally but policies on marking, teaching methods and the provision of resources have not been developed.

30 The modern languages centre is equipped to a high standard with satellite television and 16 modern audio stations. The library supports these subjects with a good range of specialist books. Accommodation for English is no more than adequate; there is a classroom and a large study room.

Curriculum Areas

Examples of students' achievements in English and modern languages, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A level	Retention (%)	85	80	83
	Pass rate (%)	84	81	85
GCSE	Retention (%)	72	72	75
	Pass rate (%)	73	68	83

Source: college data

Curriculum Areas

Basic Education

Grade 3

31 Inspectors observed 12 lessons covering programmes in basic adult skills and separate specialist programmes for students with mild to severe learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The college's self-assessment report is detailed and comprehensive, but claims some strengths which are not yet fully achieved in practice. Though the report is contradictory in places inspectors agreed with its overall conclusions.

Key strengths

- the supportive learning environment
- accreditation and progression opportunities for all students
- work experience opportunities as an integral part of full-time programmes
- high levels of attendance and retention
- the quality of students' work

Weaknesses

- lack of rigour in the identification of individual students' primary learning goals
- overemphasis on teaching for qualifications rather than addressing students' needs
- emphasis on group teaching rather than the learning needs of individual students
- lack of staff experience and expertise in the teaching of students with behavioural difficulties
- the small number of adult students on basic skills courses who seek accreditation

32 The quality of teaching is satisfactory. Teachers prepare their lessons well. They are committed to their students and have developed good working relations. Students appreciate the

opportunities available to them in a supportive environment. Teachers are assisted by a large number of voluntary workers who provide good levels of support to meet the needs of individual students. Many teachers and support workers have considerable teaching and commercial experience which they use effectively.

33 Students are enthusiastic and, as their coursework and files demonstrate, make good progress towards achieving their primary learning goals. Students with moderate learning difficulties on 'bridges' courses demonstrate keyboarding competence and have a good appreciation of computing processes. Attendance and retention are good. All courses provide opportunities for students to gain accreditation at levels suited to their abilities. The majority of adults on basic skills programmes do not seek such accreditation.

34 The range of courses for students with learning difficulties and outreach provision for basic skills has expanded recently. Programmes are effectively managed and each has developed a clear ethos. Teachers form mutually supportive teams and staff meetings are held regularly. Some programmes concentrate too much on the aim of achieving qualifications and fail to address the learning needs of students. On full-time programmes, the predominance of group work results in some students being engaged in tasks not appropriate to their needs. Inspectors agreed with the college's own assessment that there is a lack of rigour in initial assessment procedures. Records of assessments often lack detail. Individual learning goals are not clearly stated in every case and the suitability of programmes is not effectively evaluated. The monitoring and assessment of students' progress is not effective. The recording of evidence is superficial and little use is made of the comparison of students' achievements and progression with their primary learning goals.

35 Accommodation is good, although the level of specialist equipment in classrooms is barely

Curriculum Areas

adequate. There is little evidence of the use of computers on basic skills courses. Continuing education students use practical areas such as workshops and science laboratories as part of their course. These provide a stimulating learning environment. Teachers have developed a comprehensive bank of course materials. Students with restricted mobility are able to reach all teaching and social areas.

Access to Further and Higher Education

Grade 2

36 Inspectors observed 13 lessons on a range of courses including 'Looking Forward', a course which provides access to further education and employment, the 'Crossroads' course for women returning to study, both accredited by the Hampshire Open College Network, 'Get Qualified', a course for adults, which includes GCSE and GCE A levels, and the access to higher education programme. In its self-assessment report, the college identified the strengths of this provision but failed to identify a number of weaknesses which were subsequently found during the inspection.

Key strengths

- effective course management
- the high level of support for students
- good pass rates on the 'get qualified' course
- good arrangements for internal progression

Weaknesses

- some weak schemes of work and lesson plans
- the lack of clear objectives in some lessons

- poor attendance and punctuality in some classes
- poor students' achievements on the access to higher education course

37 The quality of teaching is generally good. Some schemes of work are not sufficiently detailed and some teachers fail to state their objectives clearly in lesson plans. This resulted in some lessons where teachers failed to set purposeful work and did not maintain sufficient momentum. This weakness is not mentioned in the college's self-assessment report.

Assignments are set regularly and marked carefully. Teachers' comments are helpful and promote students' learning and confidence. Students make good use of support workshops and teachers offer additional subject support.

38 Students' achievements are good in all courses except the access to higher education course. Pass rates on this course have fallen since 1995 as have the numbers of students, although retention rates have improved significantly. Results are very good on the 'Get Qualified' course. In 1997, there was a pass rate of 100 per cent for students taking GCE A levels and pass rates were above the national average in 13 out of 15 GCSE subjects. The course team is seeking to improve the current retention rate of 77 per cent on the GCSE programme. Results on 'Looking Forward' courses are satisfactory. Students who complete the course generally achieve between four and eight credits. Retention is good at about 80 per cent or above. Many students progress to employment or higher education, and some have achieved outstanding individual success in higher education.

39 Following a recent reorganisation, the access to higher education course is managed with courses in the area of pre-vocational and community education. This area is well managed. Record-keeping is particularly effective.

Curriculum Areas

40 Accommodation and resources are generally good. There is a specific area for adult students which includes teaching spaces, social areas and meeting space. There are good displays of students' work and photographs which celebrate students' achievements and their involvement with the local community. The self-assessment report notes the need to improve the information technology resources to which the students have access.

Examples of students' achievements in access to further and higher education, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Access to higher education	Retention (%)	87	58	85
	Pass rate (%)	70	47	50
Looking Forward	Retention (%)	*	93	85
	Pass rate (%)	*	78	84
Get Qualified	Retention (%)	*	94	98
	Pass rate (%)	*	81	74

Source: college data
*data not available

Curriculum Areas

Outward Collaborative Provision

Grade 2

41 The college has had a collaborative provision agreement with Achievement Training Ltd in Plymouth since 1996. Ten teaching sessions were inspected covering NVQs at levels 2 and 3 in administration, accounting, information technology, customer care and childcare. The self-assessment report identified many of the strengths and weaknesses confirmed during the inspection.

Key strengths

- good support for students
- flexible programmes to meet the needs of adult returners
- realistic working environment
- good-quality work produced by students
- high retention rates and achievements above the national average

Weaknesses

- few books and manuals in some training rooms
- some very long sessions in which students were engaged on only one activity

42 Achievement Training Ltd offers high-quality training to the long-term unemployed, adult returners and school-leavers. Teaching is planned and monitored effectively. There is considerable flexibility in the management of programmes. Students are able to start a programme at any time and course hours are set to meet the needs of shift and part-time workers or of parents with children at school. The company provides students with the opportunity to develop their competences in realistic settings. For example, students staff the reception area and switchboard, or work in the reprographics area and NVQ students help

to manage the payment of registration and examination fees. Good relationships exist with local companies which provide work experience for students.

43 Teaching is generally good. In the better lessons, teachers set challenging work for students and make good use of their previous experiences. In some poorer lessons, students were unnecessarily engaged on one activity for the whole session and in others, teachers failed to check that learning was taking place. On information technology courses, students' keyboarding skills are not given enough attention. Students are well motivated and work well during lessons. Teachers provide effective support through workshops and individual tutorial and profiling sessions. The quality of the students' work is good. Their portfolios are well organised and well presented. Retention rates are high on most courses and pass rates are above the national average.

44 Teachers have professional qualifications in their specialised fields and relevant verifier and assessor awards. Many have recent industrial and commercial training experience. The centre has been refurbished and provides a stimulating working environment. Access to information technology is good. The number of computers is sufficient to meet the needs of all the students. The software provided meets current industrial standards and access to the Internet is available. Some training rooms do not have sufficient large whiteboards, overhead projectors and additional resources such as text books and manuals.

45 A good relationship exists between Achievement Training Ltd and the college. The vice-principal visits the centre each month and staff from Achievement Training Ltd visit the college regularly. The quality of the provision is carefully monitored by the directors of the company who verify some of the work. Surveys of students' views on the provision are carried out and regular meetings held for all

Curriculum Areas

programme areas. Action plans are agreed and timetables set for their implementation.

Examples of students' achievements in outward collaborative provision, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
NVQ administration	Retention (%)	*	*	97
	Pass rate (%)	*	*	81
Computer accounts	Retention (%)	*	*	100
	Pass rate (%)	*	*	89
Bookkeeping – manual	Retention (%)	*	*	94
	Pass rate (%)	*	*	78
Information technology modular programmes	Retention (%)	*	*	88
	Pass rate (%)	*	*	87

Source: college data

*courses not running

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Support for Students

Grade 2

46 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that support for students has many strengths but found weaknesses that the self-assessment report did not identify.

Key strengths

- effective links with partner schools
- good recruitment and course guidance
- well-managed college and course induction procedures
- effective arrangements for reporting on and reviewing students' progress
- comprehensive careers and higher education guidance for full-time students
- helpful information and welfare services

Weaknesses

- poor practice in some tutorial sessions
- too few staff and too little equipment for learning support

47 A team of staff take responsibility for different aspects of student support. The guidance and admissions manager, welfare officer, marketing team, careers adviser, and student association officers are centrally located to provide ease of access for students. These arrangements work well and the service provided to students is good. The only area for improvement identified by the college in its self-assessment report is the service provided to part-time students.

48 The college has effective links with nine partner schools. Staff work closely with the schools to ensure that pupils are given impartial advice and guidance in order to ensure smooth progression to the college. All prospective full-time and many part-time students are interviewed. The college's attractive and informative publicity material is widely

distributed. Specific information and advice for adult returners and about full-cost courses are available at the learner services centre.

49 All new full-time students receive a two-day induction programme to familiarise them with the college, its policies and procedures. Activities include a visit to the resource centre where students receive advice on how to access the Internet and other information technology services. Full-time students receive a useful diary/notebook and detailed course handbooks. The information provided to part-time students is not as comprehensive. There are satisfactory arrangements to enable students to transfer from one course to another.

50 Tutorials for full-time students are of variable quality. The tutorial system has recently been reorganised and at the time of the inspection, the appointment of three lead tutors, whose main responsibility will be to monitor the quality of tutorials had just been confirmed. Central to the tutorial programme are four individual student reviews each year. Written reports on each student are shared with parents at review evenings. The arrangements for reporting and reviewing work well.

51 Students on all full-time and some part-time courses are tested to assess their level of literacy and numeracy. About a quarter of all full-time students are identified as needing help. Students requiring additional support are timetabled to attend the learning support unit. Learning support is well managed. However, only 75 per cent of students identified as needing help attend the lessons and not all of these attend regularly. The amount of teacher time given to the unit is 26 hours a week. Although this time is sometimes extended, the allocation is insufficient for the number of students needing help. There is little access to computers for students in the learning support unit and there is no software for students with dyslexia. There is good equipment to assist hearing and visually impaired students.

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52 Careers advice and guidance are well managed. The college careers adviser, assisted on two days a week by another careers officer, provides a good service. There is a comprehensive range of resources to help students plan their careers. An annual programme of careers events includes specialist presentations on preparing for higher education. Talks for students who intend to enter employment concentrate on preparing applications and interview skills and self-awareness.

53 The college welfare officer provides information and advice on financial, health, childcare and travel issues. Assistance for students seeking accommodation is also provided. Personal counselling is available from the college counsellor who is also a teacher. Two trained volunteer counsellors also visit the college on request. Students elect a student council each year. This is successful in organising social events, supporting students' activities and raising funds for charity.

General Resources

Grade 2

54 Inspectors confirmed the college's own assessment of its general resources. Considerable investment has been made in this area since the last inspection.

Key strengths

- the new teaching block and the closure of poor accommodation
- good-quality equipment and furnishing in all curriculum areas
- well-equipped resource centres
- extensive information technology equipment
- good wheelchair access

Weaknesses

- poor directional signs
- insufficient analysis of space utilisation
- incomplete central catalogue of divisional learning resources

55 The quality of most accommodation is good and the new building opened in 1997 provides high-quality facilities. All buildings are well maintained, clean and fit for their purpose. Good displays of students' work enhance the interiors of all buildings. There is good access for wheelchair users except in one building, Cricklade House, which is used mainly by adult students. Internal and external directional signs are poor. The college nursery with places for 18 children is in temporary accommodation some distance from the college. The small centre about 10 miles from the main site which the college uses is well-furnished but underused.

56 The college has ample accommodation for current needs. An analysis of space utilisation is being carried out to inform the new accommodation strategy. Numerous modifications have been made to the internal layout of the main building and further modifications are proposed. The college provides a pleasant, modern environment in which to study. Most classrooms are well equipped and furniture and fittings are generally of a good standard and in good condition. A new indoor social area and the refectory and landscaped paved areas with bench seats and tables provide students with a good range of meeting and recreational space. The total of 162 study spaces in the resource centre, the GNVQ workshop and the learning workshop in the new building is sufficient to meet students' needs.

57 The resource centres are well managed. They are staffed by four qualified librarians and five part-time assistants. The annual library budget of £25,000 is modest, amounting to about £13.90 per full-time equivalent student,

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and it has not been increased for three years. Five thousand pounds is spent on teaching and learning materials provided by the Further Education National Consortium and one-third of the remainder on subscriptions to periodicals and general reference material leaving little for the purchase of new books. However, there are approximately 21,000 books in the centre and, with 29 CD-ROM titles, the collection is adequate for current demand. Programme areas spend £15,000 each year on new textbooks, about 15 per cent of the annual supplies budget. This policy is currently under review. Some resources held in curriculum areas are not included in the central catalogue and the college recognises this limitation on their use. Staff and students have access to good reprographic facilities which include colour copying and binding.

58 The college has 230 computers for academic use. This provides a ratio of one machine for every 7.8 students. There are seven computer rooms with 16 modern machines in each. Although students are allowed access to computers which are not being used in timetabled classes, it is difficult for them to check their availability. Other computers available to students in the resource centres are sufficient to meet current needs. An extensive range of specialist software includes a three-dimensional simulation imaging package. The college subscribes to the Internet which is well used by students. Computing facilities for administrative staff are adequate. All workstations have access to the Internet and electronic mail. The college network does not extend to Cricklade House where computing facilities are inadequate. The college's centre away from the main site has 16 modern machines which are available to students. Computers in staff rooms are linked to the college network.

Quality Assurance

Grade 4

59 Inspectors agreed with the college's own assessment of the strengths of its quality assurance work in some service areas. Other strengths were overstated, and there were additional weaknesses not identified by the college. The self-assessment report outlines the steps which have been taken recently, or which will be taken in the coming year, to secure a more consistent quality assurance environment.

Key strengths

- quality assurance processes in student support and learning resources
- a newly-constituted academic board with clear responsibility for quality assurance
- the impact of increased self-criticism in the most recent curriculum quality development plans
- careful monitoring of collaborative provision

Weaknesses

- slow response to previous criticism by the inspectorate
- known weaknesses which have been allowed to persist
- few specific targets for improvement
- ineffective quality assurance in some curriculum areas
- lack of central analysis and aggregation of results of questionnaires to students
- ineffective staff appraisal
- professional development plans not always linked to strategic priorities

60 Much of the quality assurance structure remains unaltered since the last inspection and many criticisms made then are still valid.

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Inconsistent implementation of procedures and a lack of central control continue to be significant weaknesses. Management reviews in 1995 and 1996 clearly identified shortcomings and the changes that were needed to rectify them. Little of substance was done until the academic year 1996-97. The changes that have been made, or which are now in hand, are well conceived. They build on sustained good practice in areas such as learner services and learning resources. These areas have used statistical targets and performance data to monitor and raise steadily the effectiveness of their work. The experience of staff who have been successful in these service areas is now being applied to improving quality assurance across the college. A collaborative arrangement has been running for a year in Plymouth. In establishing it, the college followed the FEFC's guidance on good practice.

61 A similarly measured approach to quality assurance is now being adopted across the college. The new management structure will make it easier to monitor the performance of curricular areas and to draw useful comparisons between them. The quality assurance manager has increasingly good information about curriculum areas. This is drawn from 'quality development plans'; access to centrally held and more accurate student data; careful oversight of the complaints system; and the records of class observations which began in the spring of 1997.

62 Teachers benefit from the observation of their lessons by an experienced colleague but there is no mechanism, such as grading, which supports comparisons of standards in curriculum areas. There are persistently low, or falling, students' achievements in some areas, and students have made formal complaints about teaching standards. Evidence about students' achievements has not been presented in sufficient detail to the responsible bodies such as the academic board or governors. Until that is done, the college will find it difficult to establish baselines from which targets for improvement can be set.

63 Scepticism about the value of quality assurance among some teachers and the isolation of some former small curriculum divisions have been barriers to improvement. These factors were reflected in the low standard of critical reflection in many annual 'quality development plans'. Their incisiveness improved in the summer of 1997. Other forms of corporate action such as 'quality circles' of support staff and regular meetings of internal verifiers have met with more success. This increasingly willing attitude among staff is an important step forward. It needs to be harnessed through more formal quality assurance which involves students as a matter of course, which is based on secure information about performance and which results in measurable schemes for improvement. Preparation of the college's first self-assessment report for inspection allowed for the involvement of all staff and many found the experience rewarding. Judgements in the report are not sharp enough.

64 The college has committed itself to attaining the Investor in People standard by July 1999. It is addressing some of the shortcomings identified in the audit of staff opinion, notably weakness in communications. The college has had an appraisal scheme for some years, based on biennial reviews. The scheme is not regarded as a success and it is being changed. Appraisal has informed staff development. Arrangements need to be made which ensure that quality assurance data reliably inform professional development plans and that these relate to strategic priorities.

65 The self-assessment report was prepared specifically for the inspection. The process which started about eight months before the inspection was conducted at the same time as a major restructuring exercise and in the context of severe financial difficulty. The college was also attempting to introduce new quality assurance procedures based on existing good practice in a few areas of provision. Only in these areas were staff fully involved in the

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self-assessment process. There was no formal moderation of the self-assessment process. Action plans do not address all the weaknesses identified by inspectors.

Governance

Grade 4

66 Members of the corporation evaluated their own work by means of a questionnaire which they completed individually. Inspectors agree with most of the strengths recorded in the self-assessment report. Several weaknesses identified in the report are underestimated and other significant weaknesses identified by inspectors are not mentioned.

Key strengths

- the range of governors' links with the community and local business
- the high level of commitment demonstrated by board members

Weaknesses

- poor fulfilment of responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC
- poor compliance with the instrument and articles of government
- limited involvement in strategic planning
- ineffective clerking arrangements
- an unrecognised lack of financial expertise among members
- inadequate attention to curriculum and student matters
- inadequate appraisal arrangements for senior staff

67 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is weak. The corporation does not substantially conduct its

business in accordance with the instrument and articles of government. It has not substantially fulfilled its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC.

68 The corporation has a membership of nine independent members, one TEC member, one staff member, one student member, and one co-opted member. The principal is also a member. The corporation has established a register of interests which most members have completed. It has not been extended to include college staff who have significant financial responsibility. The search committee has been effective in identifying appropriate members, and it has conducted a review of the skills needed by the corporation. The need for professional financial expertise was not identified.

69 Members believe that the poor financial position of the college has been partly caused by a problem relating to the conversion of enrolments into funding units. Serious errors in entering course file information onto the college's computerised information system have led to substantial financial clawback by the FEFC. The college commissioned a detailed review of the controls on the student record system by its internal auditors. These auditors reported that the controls were unreliable in 1996-97. There is no evidence that the warnings given during the last inspection about inaccurate data, which put into doubt enrolment, achievement, and retention figures, were heeded or acted upon by members. There have also been a number of activities undertaken by the college, approved by the corporation, which have contributed to the current financial position, and endangered the solvency of the college.

70 The clerking of the corporation is poor. There is an apparent lack of awareness of current best practice relating to governance and clerkship issues. There are appropriate terms of reference for the corporation's committees but, in the course of meetings, the scope of the

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debate has not always adhered to these. It is difficult to establish from minutes when or how decisions are being made; the 'action' column is rarely used and there is no apparent cross-checking on the completion of action required at subsequent meetings. The corporation decided that the minutes should be made freely available to staff and students. There is no evidence that this decision has been put into effect. The minutes are available for review from the clerk's office. There is no indication that staff or students have requested them. An incorrect interpretation of the quoracy requirements for meetings of the corporation has resulted in one inquorate meeting.

71 Governors give little time in their meetings to academic matters. Members acknowledge that they have had too little involvement in the academic life of the college. There are no formal links between members and the programme area groups. Recent proposals for the board to receive detailed briefings in subject forum sessions have been agreed, but so far only one has taken place. Minutes show that data on students' achievements are received annually by the board but there are no records of debate or analysis or evidence that members form an accurate view of the standards achieved by students.

Management

Grade 4

72 The college's self-assessment report identifies a number of weaknesses in management. Inspector concluded that it omits some serious weaknesses and overstates the strengths.

Key strengths

- the recent management restructuring to address long-standing weaknesses
- the positive attitude and commitment of managers to remedying these weaknesses

Weaknesses

- the poor financial health of the college
- poor analysis and use of management information
- failure to monitor the quality of teaching and learning and students' achievements
- the lack of consistency in the planning and teaching of courses
- inefficient deployment of staff
- inadequate management and communication in some curriculum areas

73 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is weak. Between July 1995 and July 1997, the college reserves declined from a surplus of £700,000 to a deficit of £1 million. During the same period, the ratio of the college's current assets to current liabilities has reversed from 3.5:1 to 1:3.5. The rapid financial decline raises concerns as to whether the governors had sufficient financial information to allow them to fulfil their duties in ensuring the solvency of the college.

74 The causes of the current financial position have been partially recognised by senior managers. A new post of financial controller has been created and a number of improvements in financial reporting and monitoring have been put in place. Rigorous steps are now being taken to ensure that reliance can be placed on the data provided by the management information system. A recovery plan has been drafted and is being monitored by the FEFC.

75 At the time of the inspection, the college had just implemented a major reorganisation of its management and committee structure. The college had indicated in its self-assessment report that the former structure was ineffective. The inspection in 1994 had identified inconsistencies in management and insufficient

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understanding of strategic issues at divisional level. These weaknesses have persisted, although there are early signs that the new structure, introduced in September 1997, could remove some of the underlying weaknesses of the former arrangements. Systematic efforts are being made to achieve greater efficiency in the deployment of staff. Staff welcome the easier access to managers as do managers to senior managers. Nevertheless, while lines of communication are improving, the inspection of curriculum areas confirmed that there is still unsatisfactory and inconsistent practice in the planning and teaching of many programmes. At course level, roles and responsibilities have yet to be clearly established so that effective supervision and review of teaching and learning can be assured. There is still work to be done to ensure that the new management and committee structure will bring about the necessary improvements at all levels of the organisation. Greater determination and more effective management than was evident following the first inspection will be required to achieve this. The college plans to review its new arrangements following the inspection.

76 In the past two years, a re-appraisal of student data has revealed that the college did not achieve planned growth targets. More systematic market research has been undertaken to ensure that the development of education and training programmes meet an identified need. The new strategic plan involved staff at all levels of the organisation. The college has specified targets for the recruitment, retention and achievements of students. Staff recognise the importance of achieving the targets and are working together towards this end.

Conclusions

77 The college's self-assessment report provided an adequate basis for planning and carrying out the inspection. It identified some weaknesses which the college still needs to

address. It underestimated the significance of many weaknesses and failed to identify others. Some of the strengths were overstated and given undue weight in making the overall judgement. In seven areas selected for inspection, three of the grades awarded by the college were confirmed by inspection findings. There was little agreement with the grades for cross-college provision. In only one cross-college area, general resources, did inspectors agree with the grade awarded by the college. In all other curriculum and cross-college areas inspectors considered the grades awarded by the college to be overgenerous.

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

College Statistics

Student numbers by age (November 1997)

Age	%
Under 16	1
16-18 years	33
19-24 years	9
25+ years	52
Not known	5
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (November 1997)

Level of study	%
Foundation	10
Intermediate	38
Advanced	44
Higher education	1
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	7
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (November 1997)

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	291	365	21
Construction	0	6	0
Engineering	64	160	7
Business	127	421	17
Hotel and catering	93	36	4
Health and community care	149	112	8
Art and design	119	235	11
Humanities	364	346	23
Basic education	52	228	9
Total	1,259	1,909	100

Source: college data

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (November 1997)

	Permanant	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	74	12	3	89
Supporting direct learning contact	18	2	0	20
Other support	73	0	3	76
Total	165	14	6	185

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Income	£6,272,000	£6,145,000	£4,720,291
Average level of funding (ALF)			
Out-turn to 1995-96; funded 1996-97	£13.81	*	£16.26
Payroll as a proportion of income	66%	75%	82%
Achievement of funding target	125%	*	92%
Diversity of income	28%	24%	24%
Operating surplus	£337,000	-£416,000	-£1,043,000

Sources: Income – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

ALF – Performance Indicators 1995-96 (1994-95 and 1995-96), Funding Allocations 1996-97 (1996-97)

Payroll – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1995-96 (1994-95 and 1995-96), college (1996-97)

Diversity of income – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

Operating surplus – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

*agreed data not available

Performance data for students aged 16 to 18

Qualifications		1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
GCE A level	Number of candidates	236	227	254
	Average point score per entry	4.6	4.7	4.4
	Position in tables	top third	top third	middle third
Advanced vocational	Number in final year	72	56	46
	Percentage achieving qualification	64%	70%	52%
	Position in tables	bottom third	middle third	bottom 10%
Intermediate vocational	Number in final year	*	30	31
	Percentage achieving qualification	*	50%	55%
	Position in tables	*	bottom third	bottom third

Source: DfEE

Note: the majority of the college's students are 19 years of age or older

The achievements of these students are not covered in published DfEE performance tables

*1994-95 intermediate vocational results not available

Students' achievements

		1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Advanced academic	Pass (%)	76	82	81
	Retention (%)	60	57	60
Intermediate academic	Pass (%)	54	54	54
	Retention (%)	87	81	88
Advanced vocational	Pass (%)	79	72	46
	Retention (%)	66	64	65
Intermediate vocational	Pass (%)	84	78	83
	Retention (%)	58	53	76

Source: college data

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