

Yeovil College

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1999-00**

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL***

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

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

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Grade Descriptors

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

Audit conclusions are expressed as good, adequate or weak.

Aggregated grades for aspects of cross-college provision and curriculum areas, for colleges inspected during 1998-99, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1	2	3	4	5
	%	%	%	%	%
Curriculum areas	10	53	30	7	–
Cross-college provision	14	54	23	7	2

Source: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1998-99: Chief inspector's annual report*
Sample size: 104 college inspections

Student Achievements

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

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

Summary

Yeovil College is a tertiary college in south Somerset. It has made good progress in many respects since the last inspection. The college produced its second self-assessment report for this inspection. All college staff and governors were involved in the self-assessment process. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses in the report. Some statements in the report describe rather than evaluate the provision. The college effectively assesses the quality of its teaching and learning through an extensive and thorough lesson observation programme, although little use was made of the results of this in some areas of the report. The report understates the effects of inadequate data regarding students.

Governors and managers have a clear strategic view for the college. There has been good progress in implementing the recovery plan. The college's accommodation has improved significantly over the last two years. This has resulted in good-quality teaching areas which teachers can use flexibly and which enable students to study on their own. Retention and

achievement rates on many courses are good. Until recently, the college has been poor at recording the achievements of its students.

Inspectors found that some students were more successful than shown in the college's centrally held data. There is good teaching and learning in engineering, business, English and basic skills. Courses in basic literacy and numeracy for adults, and summer schools for younger students who intend to study engineering and art and design are effectively raising standards. Links with employers and parents are strong. The college should improve: the quality of its data on students' achievements; the standards of teaching and learning in mathematics and computing and for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities; governors' monitoring of students' performance; the use of performance indicators and targets for improvement; and some aspects of curriculum management.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Mathematics and computing	3	Support for students	2
Engineering	2	General resources	2
Business	2	Quality assurance	3
Sport and leisure	2	Governance	3
Health and care	2	Management	3
English and modern foreign languages	2		
Provision for students with learning difficulties	3		
Basic skills	2		

Context

The College and its Mission

1 Yeovil College is a tertiary college which was formed from the merger of a local school and the technical college in 1974. It acts as the sixth form centre for school-leavers from seven local schools which do not have sixth forms, recruits students from local 11 to 18 schools and provides a wide range of full-time and part-time courses for older students. The number of pupils of school-leaving age in Yeovil schools rose by 9% in 1999. In the wider catchment area the number of school-leavers declined by around 6%. Most students live in the Yeovil travel-to-work area which covers parts of south Somerset, and north and west Dorset, within a 25-mile radius of the town. The nearest further education colleges are Strode College in Street (15 miles) and Kingston Maurward College (20 miles). Bridgwater College, Somerset College of Arts and Technology and The Richard Huish College in Taunton are all 25 miles from Yeovil.

2 The college is based on an attractive six hectare site near the town centre. Over the last three years, provision has gradually been transferred to the main site, moving out of seven sites that were previously used as teaching bases. To help accommodate the increase in students on the main site, the college has built a large study centre and improved much of the rest of the accommodation.

3 Yeovil is a market town with a population of around 40,000. It acts as the retail centre for a large rural area, with a population of around 150,000, containing some smaller towns and many scattered small communities. The economy is very dependent on the large engineering and manufacturing industry in the town. Much of this work is in the aerospace industry. The large naval air station nearby is also an important contributor to the local economy. Of the workforce, 33% is employed in engineering. South Somerset and Yeovil had an

unemployment rate of 1.9% in October 1999, compared with the national rate of 4% at the same time.

4 In November 1999, the college had 6,298 students enrolled. Of these 1,319 are on full-time courses. The college employs 428 full-time equivalent members of staff, 241 of whom have direct learning contact with students and 62 support direct learning. The college is one of the four largest employers in the area.

5 The college's mission is to become a 'regional focus for lifelong learning'. The key strategic aims include:

- to offer relevant and stimulating learning opportunities which are accessible to the communities served by the college
- to treat every learner as an individual, add value to their previous experience and ensure progression
- to ensure financial stability and invest in staff and the learning environment
- to contribute to the economic, cultural and social well-being of the region

The Inspection

6 The college was inspected during the week beginning 14 February 2000. The inspection team had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and reviewed information held about the college by other directorates of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). The inspection was one of the first to include an inspection of the scope of basic skills provision below level 2. The inspection covered basic skills provision in separate specialist programmes, where it is integrated with vocational programmes and as part of learning support. The college acknowledged, prior to the inspection, that the data it held on students' achievements for 1997 and 1998 contained inaccuracies. It reviewed these data and resubmitted them to the FEFC in

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December 1999. The resubmitted data still contained acknowledged inaccuracies in some curriculum areas. The college provided data for 1999 that were checked by inspectors before the inspection and found to be largely accurate.

7 The inspection was carried out by 14 inspectors and an auditor working for a total of 60 days in the college. Inspectors observed 106 lessons and examined students' work. The inspection team examined documents provided by the college to support its self-assessment report and held meetings with students, governors, parents, representatives of partner schools, managers, and staff. Eight inspectors from the Training Standards Council (TSC) worked with the inspection team during the inspection. The TSC inspectors concentrated on the work-based training supported by the college in engineering, hairdressing and beauty

therapy, business administration, health, care and public services and hospitality. They spent 34 days based at the college. They observed instruction sessions and interviewed trainees, employers and college staff. Where it was appropriate to the FEFC inspection framework, evidence gathered by TSC inspectors was taken into account when grading college provision.

8 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1998-99. Of the 106 lessons inspected, 62% were judged to be good or outstanding and 4% were less than satisfactory. This profile is similar to the national average. Much of the weakest teaching was identified in mathematics and computing and in the work for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. In other areas, teaching and learning was often good.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	4	11	5	0	0	20
GCSE	1	3	3	0	0	7
GNVQ	1	7	6	0	0	14
NVQ	4	2	0	0	0	6
Other vocational	3	9	9	0	0	21
Other*	5	16	13	4	0	38
Total (No)	18	48	36	4	0	106
Total (%)	17	45	34	4	0	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1998-99 (%)	20	45	29	6	0	100

Source for national average: Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1998-99: Chief inspector's annual report

**includes work for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and basic skills*

Context

9 The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1998-99.

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Yeovil College	9.9	82
National average, all inspected colleges 1998-99	11.2	78

Source for national average: Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1998-99: Chief inspector's annual report

Curriculum Areas

Mathematics and Computing

Grade 3

10 The inspection included courses leading to general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs) in information technology (IT), general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) and general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) subjects, and numeracy and short IT skills courses. Eleven lessons were observed. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report, but concluded that there was insufficient attention to teaching and learning. Some of the strengths were overstated and inspectors identified additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- broad and flexible provision with clear progression pathways
- effective use of IT to help learning in mathematics
- good achievement rates on short IT skills courses and GCE A level courses
- close working with local schools

Weaknesses

- undemanding work in some lessons
- poor retention and achievement in GNVQ intermediate and advanced IT
- consistently poor achievements in GCSE mathematics
- poor organisation of work by many GNVQ students
- underdeveloped links with industry
- inadequate analysis of performance data

11 As identified in the self-assessment report, the college offers a wide range of full-time and part-time courses in mathematics, computing

and IT. Courses are well planned and course teams work effectively. There are good progression routes from GNVQ intermediate through to higher national diploma and higher national certificate. There are mutually beneficial curriculum links with local schools. A few teachers teach GCSE courses in partner schools. There are joint activities which help students' transition to GCE A level study and encourage a further interest in mathematics. Course reviews take into account feedback from students but do not rigorously analyse students' performance. Data used by course teams do not match centrally held college data. These issues were not identified in the self-assessment report.

12 There is some good teaching. In the best lessons, teachers ensure that students are fully involved and regularly check that they understand the work. Practical exercises are broken down into clearly specified steps, activities are varied and teachers provide helpful handouts to guide students in their learning. These points are not included in the college's self-assessment. Teachers make effective use of IT in the teaching and learning of mathematics. Students use computer simulations to illustrate mathematical concepts or to check and predict results. In one lesson, students investigated the approximations to trigonometric functions as angles got smaller by using a graph plotting facility and then used a spreadsheet to check their own calculations. Students find helpful the prepared worksheets and model answers available on the college intranet. In some lessons, teachers failed to give the students work which was demanding enough for their abilities and thought-provoking questions raised by students were not followed up. In a minority of computing and IT lessons students arrived ill prepared and made little progress. Links with industry are underdeveloped. The self-assessment report acknowledges that there are few opportunities for students to obtain experience of professional

Curriculum Areas

and industrial practices through work placements or visits.

13 Most students' written work is well presented. Key skills are well integrated with assignment work. However, many GNVQ students demonstrate weak action-planning skills. Last year too many students failed to complete and hand in their assignments on time. This was identified as a weakness by the college. There are good retention and achievement rates on short IT skills courses, as acknowledged in the self-assessment report. Achievement rates in the City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) modules are well above national averages. Pass rates on GCE A level computing improved significantly in 1999, but retention has fallen steadily to below the national average for the sector. Students completing GCE A level mathematics have pass rates above the national average, but value-added data indicate that they are consistently achieving less well than predicted by their GCSE grades on entry. Staff do not recognise

or use these data in their analysis of performance. Retention rates are below 70% on both GNVQ intermediate and advanced programmes. Only five out of 16 students who started the GNVQ intermediate IT course last year achieved a pass. The self-assessment report acknowledges these weaknesses and strategies are in place to address them. For the last three years, student achievement rates on GCSE mathematics have been poor. The college has developed numeracy courses as an alternative for those students who are not ready to start on a full GCSE programme.

14 At all levels, accommodation and resources for mathematics are good. The self-assessment report identifies that some computer rooms have poor ventilation and are too small. This hinders learning especially in theory lessons. Hardware and software is up to date and students have easy access to the Internet. There are few opportunities for IT students to use specialist network facilities and to update and install software.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in mathematics and computing, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
IT applications and programming	1 and 2	Number of starters	*	266	322
		Retention (%)	*	*	*
		Achievement (%)	*	*	*
C&G numeracy	2	Number of starters	+	+	*
		Retention (%)	+	+	*
		Achievement (%)	+	+	*
GCSE mathematics	2	Number of starters	262	196	158
		Retention (%)	77	73	81
		Achievement (%)	32	25	32
GNVQ intermediate IT	2	Number of starters	*	19	16
		Retention (%)	*	68	69
		Achievement (%)	*	46	45
GNVQ advanced IT	3	Number of starters	*	15	35
		Retention (%)	*	93	63
		Achievement (%)	*	93	67

Curriculum Areas

**A summary of retention and achievement rates in mathematics and computing, 1997 to 1999
(continued)**

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GCE A level mathematics	3	Number of starters	96	119	*
		Retention (%)	81	73	*
		Achievement (%)	72	77	*
GCE A level computing	3	Number of starters	28	40	29
		Retention (%)	79	68	66
		Achievement (%)	50	67	89

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)

**data unreliable*

+course did not run

Curriculum Areas

Engineering

Grade 2

15 The inspection covered national certificate programmes in electronics and mechanical/production engineering, and craft courses in basic engineering competences, welding and fabrication, mechanical production, and aeronautical and electrical installation work. Inspectors observed 10 lessons and agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. The college underestimated the quality of teaching and learning. Action plans to address weaknesses are leading to improvements in learning.

Key strengths

- good teaching and learning in practical and theory lessons
- high achievement and retention rates on most courses
- effective development of students' skills to high levels
- good partnership with industry
- well-prepared schemes of work and lesson plans
- well-managed courses
- well-planned workshop and laboratory programmes

Weaknesses

- poor retention and achievement on a few courses
- some outdated equipment
- insufficient feedback from teachers on some students' work
- underdeveloped key skills programme on craft courses

16 The college offers a wide range of engineering courses to meet the needs of local industry. A one-year full-time foundation course is offered jointly with employers and, as stated in the self-assessment report, is highly regarded locally. Prospective students are tested to establish levels of literacy and numeracy. The results of these tests are made available to employers to assist with their recruitment. The college runs summer schools which help potential engineering students to improve their mathematical skills. Companies appreciate the action taken by the college to raise the mathematical skills of potential trainees. Nearly all those completing the foundation course progress to modern apprenticeships. National vocational qualifications (NVQs) are also offered to employees on employers' premises. Courses are well managed. Course tutors meet frequently. Course review procedures are effective. Communication within the department is good.

17 Students benefit from good teaching both in theory lessons and in workshops. Inspectors judged that the quality of teaching and learning is understated in the self-assessment report. Schemes of work are well planned and assignments are carefully designed. Teachers sustain students' interest by using a variety of appropriate methods, including interesting exposition and practical exercises. Students are encouraged to participate in class discussion and are prepared to seek help when required. In electronics lessons, theoretical topics are integrated with assignment work which students tackle with enthusiasm. Practical work in workshop lessons is well planned and meets the requirements of awarding bodies. Instructions to students are clear and contain the relevant assessment criteria. Students' work is generally well marked, but there were some instances where teachers made insufficient written comments on students' work. Key skills are well integrated with technician courses, but further development is required on some craft courses. Students take basic skills tests early

Curriculum Areas

on in their course in order to determine whether they are likely to require extra help. Specialist tutors joining engineering lessons often provide such help.

18 Most students produce work of a high standard in practical lessons. Students acquire good practical skills and make good progress to relevant employment. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that there is a high level of achievement on many courses, including the first certificate programme in engineering and the Engineering and Marine Training Authority basic engineering training course. Over 90% of students on the EMFEC welding course at parts 2 and 3 complete successfully each year. The college identified the low achievement rate on the national diploma in engineering as a weakness and has

replaced this with a GNVQ programme.

Retention rates are also low on a few craft courses. Some of the students on these courses leave to take up alternative employment.

19 Engineering facilities on the main site are well equipped and efficiently used, though some of the equipment is outdated, especially in the welding workshop. Some courses are taught in workshops on two local industrial estates. These are well equipped and maintained. For example, the motor vehicle workshop includes a selection of diagnostic equipment and a range of modern vehicles. Teaching staff are suitably qualified for the courses they teach and have appropriate industrial experience. Technicians provide a good support service. An adequate range of learning resources is available to students in the study centre.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in engineering, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
Engineering and Marine Training Authority basic engineering training	1	Number of starters	*	50	76
		Retention (%)	*	94	91
		Achievement (%)	*	94	86
C&G 2010 basic engineering competence	1	Number of starters	22	24	17
		Retention (%)	82	92	88
		Achievement (%)	94	73	93
C&G 2301 machine setting and operation part 2	2	Number of starters	14	16	27
		Retention (%)	93	94	100
		Achievement (%)	92	93	81
First certificate in engineering	2	Number of starters	36	29	49
		Retention (%)	97	86	90
		Achievement (%)	91	88	93
GNVQ engineering (intermediate)	2	Number of starters	+	11	7
		Retention (%)	+	91	86
		Achievement (%)	+	80	83
National certificate in engineering (electrical)	3	Number of starters	22	14	20
		Retention (%)	95	79	60
		Achievement (%)	88	78	92
National certificate in engineering (mechanical/manufacturing)	3	Number of starters	53	32	40
		Retention (%)	94	88	78
		Achievement (%)	66	68	89
National diploma engineering	3	Number of starters	10	7	11
		Retention (%)	100	86	91
		Achievement (%)	50	33	60

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)

* data unreliable + course did not run

Curriculum Areas

Business

Grade 2

20 Inspectors observed 17 lessons covering a range of full-time and part-time business programmes. They agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. Inspectors judged the quality of teaching and learning to be a strength. This was not recognised in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- good teaching and learning
- good achievements on many courses
- effective curriculum management
- students' achievements of a wide range of additional qualifications
- good use of IT by students
- effective use of the resources centre

Weaknesses

- poor retention rates on two-year full-time courses
- lack of individual study spaces
- lack of systematic target-setting by course teams

21 As the self-assessment report comments, there is a wide range of courses in business. Courses are available at the main site and in two town centre sites and are increasingly offered to employers on their own premises. Student numbers are increasing particularly on foundation level programmes in IT in the new town centre sites. The self-assessment report identified the need to work more closely with local business organisations. A business project manager has been appointed and training programmes designed specifically to meet the needs of employers are now running.

22 There is much good teaching, as noted in the self-assessment report. Staff are enthusiastic and use a variety of appropriate teaching methods to motivate students. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that there are good working relationships between staff and students. Students speak positively about their satisfaction with their courses. In one lesson, GNVQ intermediate business students were encouraged to explore the various functions of Yeovil College to understand the relationships between internal and external customers. The students enjoyed the lesson and were able to explain the relationships well. Full-time students make full use of the resource centre to improve their skills and to undertake research for their assignments. The teacher based in this centre uses students' practical business experience to good effect and helps them to find suitable resources. Increasing use is made of the Internet as a source of materials for learning. In some of the weaker lessons, teaching was unimaginative and opportunities to relate the topic to current business events were missed.

23 Achievement rates are good on many business courses. For example, GCE A level business studies has had very high pass rates for the last three years. There are also high pass rates on courses for accounting qualifications and integrated business technology level 2 qualifications. Retention rates for most courses are in line with national averages, although those for two-year full-time courses are often below the national average. Many full-time students achieve additional qualifications, such as computer literacy and information technology qualifications. As the self-assessment report identifies, students produce some good work. Students' portfolios and project work are of an appropriate standard. Some of the assignments produced by part-time students studying for professional qualifications are of good quality and based on their experiences at work.

Curriculum Areas

24 The business curriculum is well managed. However, some course reviews are insufficiently detailed, particularly in the analysis of students' performance. There is little systematic target-setting for individual courses. The self-assessment report identifies weaknesses in the induction and management of part-time staff. A recent effort to recruit more part-time tutors has increased the number with current commercial or professional experience. Several full-time staff have arranged industrial placements as part of

their continuous professional updating.

25 Accommodation on the main site and in the town centre is suitable for the courses offered. Much of the accommodation is not easily accessible to students with restricted mobility. At all sites there are sufficient high-quality computers for students to use. The resource centre has a good stock of books and other resources for business courses. Students are sometimes unable to find sufficient spaces where they can work quietly and on their own.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in business, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
Computer literacy and information technology	1	Number of starters	286	389	704
		Retention (%)	89	86	93
		Achievement (%)	61	64	62
Integrated business technology	2	Number of starters	8	66	172
		Retention (%)	100	86	90
		Achievement (%)	63	70	65
Wordprocessing stage II (one-year course)	2	Number of starters	87	64	105
		Retention (%)	95	89	97
		Achievement (%)	54	68	44
NVQ administration	2	Number of starters	15	19	10
		Retention (%)	80	89	90
		Achievement (%)	*	47	44
GCE A level business studies	3	Number of starters	15	39	43
		Retention (%)	67	54	72
		Achievement (%)	100	90	90
GNVQ advanced business	3	Number of starters	55	60	36
		Retention (%)	75	65	61
		Achievement (%)	87	77	73
NVQ Association of Accounting Technicians intermediate	3	Number of starters	33	19	20
		Retention (%)	79	100	75
		Achievement (%)	*	*	73
National Examining Board for Supervisory Management certificate in management	4	Number of starters	19	17	10
		Retention (%)	95	88	100
		Achievement (%)	100	*	80

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)

*data unreliable

Curriculum Areas

Sport and Leisure

Grade 2

26 The inspection covered a range of courses in sport and leisure offered by the college. Ten lessons were observed. Inspectors agreed with the strengths identified in the self-assessment report. They considered that the strengths of the enrichment programme were overlooked and that some weaknesses were understated.

Key strengths

- good teaching and learning
- good students' achievements on full-time and some part-time courses
- good retention on most full-time and part-time courses
- extensive and well-used network of community links
- wide range of enrichment activities
- effective development and assessment of key skills
- wide range of provision with good progression routes

Weaknesses

- some ineffective course management
- poor support for new teaching staff
- little recent professional updating

27 The broad range of provision enables students to progress from foundation to higher national level. The links with other organisations provide a wide range of work experience opportunities. Last year over 60 placements were used, some of which were outside the United Kingdom. Most full-time programmes include opportunities for students to gain additional qualifications which are of

value to them when seeking employment. Enrichment provision is extensive with over 400 students participating in the wide range of activities, a strength understated in the college's self-assessment report.

28 Most teaching was good and in some cases, it was outstanding. This strength is identified in the self-assessment report. The most successful lessons were well planned and teachers communicated the aims and learning objectives clearly to the students. In a GCE A level history of sport lesson, students had to research, plan and then take part in a physical education lesson as it would have been in 1902. The lesson brought their previous theory lessons to life for them. Following an analysis of how students learn, new materials have been produced to include more visual stimulation for students. A resource base has been set up on the college intranet where students can access this material and use it in their assignments. Attendance is closely monitored and monthly reviews sent to tutors. Key skills are effectively taught. Assignments are set in relevant contexts. Staff give informative and constructive feedback. Work placements are a strength on many courses. The department has established an excellent network of community links to extend the curriculum and provide valuable experiences for students such as working in local primary and secondary schools and, in particular, working with students who have severe learning difficulties. Students' involvement ranges from weekly visits to conduct coaching sessions at local residential centres to organising local school sporting events. In some weaker lessons, the teaching was dull and repetitive and teachers failed to provide work which was sufficiently demanding for the students.

29 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that students' achievements are a strength. GNVQ students' achievements are well above the national average for the sector. All the students who started the first diploma in

Curriculum Areas

sports studies in 1998 completed it and passed. Retention and achievement on NVQ programmes are improving and are now above national averages. Some short part-time courses, in particular the Royal Life Saving Society national pool lifeguard and life support awards, show high retention and achievement rates. Although achievement rates on GNVQ advanced programmes are high, some students on these programmes are not achieving as well as their GCSE grades on entry would predict. The college recognises and values students' other achievements. College teams have a tradition of success both regionally and nationally. A number of students have gained international honours most recently in rugby, football and athletics.

30 A weakness not identified in the self-assessment report is the ineffective management and recording of some course reviews and course team meetings. The self-assessment report fails to recognise the poor support offered to some staff in terms of staff development, and the mentor system in the

department is ineffective. The link between staff appraisal and continuing professional development is poor and there are too few qualified assessors and verifiers. Recent professional updating for teachers through work placements is lacking.

31 Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report regarding the quality of the specialist accommodation and facilities. Outdoor sporting facilities are good, but the indoor sports hall is inadequate. The fitness centre is small and inappropriate. The acoustics in the hall are poor, the floor surface is unsuitable for team sports such as volleyball and basketball causing high degrees of stress on body joints when players are jumping and landing, and many of the line markings are worn away. The fixed equipment in the hall and the fitness equipment is satisfactory. The heating and ventilation system is noisy and affects the quality of learning. The new study centre is well used and valued by students.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in sport and leisure, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
Royal Life Saving Society life support levels 1, 2 and 3	1	Number of starters	*	71	8
		Retention (%)	*	99	100
		Achievement (%)	*	99	100
Royal Life Saving Society bronze medallion	1	Number of starters	*	53	8
		Retention (%)	*	94	100
		Achievement (%)	*	54	62
GNVQ intermediate leisure and tourism	2	Number of starters	18	19	15
		Retention (%)	94	79	80
		Achievement (%)	71	60	92
First diploma science (sport studies)	2	Number of starters	*	13	10
		Retention (%)	*	100	100
		Achievement (%)	*	69	100
NVQ sport and recreation	2	Number of starters	16	13	15
		Retention (%)	81	85	73
		Achievement (%)	77	55	91

Curriculum Areas

A summary of retention and achievement rates in sport and leisure, 1997 to 1999 (continued)

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
Royal Life Saving Society national pool lifeguard	2	Number of starters	*	184	186
		Retention (%)	*	100	99
		Achievement (%)	*	89	92
GNVQ advaced leisure and tourism	3	Number of starters	53	59	31
		Retention (%)	83	73	84
		Achievement (%)	93	91	85
GCE A level sports studies	3	Number of starters	43	50	43
		Retention (%)	63	68	72
		Achievement (%)	100	94	100

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)

*data unreliable

Curriculum Areas

Health and Care

Grade 2

32 Inspectors largely agreed with the college's assessment of the quality of the provision in health and care. Twelve lessons were observed. The self-assessment report is not sufficiently comprehensive. Inspectors identified further strengths and weaknesses. Some action has already been taken to address issues raised in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- effective teaching and learning
- well-planned lessons
- good retention and achievement rates
- effective response to widening participation
- well-managed courses
- strong classroom support for students' individual needs
- outstanding resources and accommodation

Weaknesses

- insufficiently demanding teaching in a minority of lessons
- some ineffective planning for internal verification
- failure of some students to complete NVQ programmes within intended timescales

33 The college provides a wide range of courses in childcare and health and social care. Courses are available from foundation level to higher education. As identified in the self-assessment report students can study in ways that suit their circumstances. Short courses are provided in response to demand. There are

good opportunities for progression. Many students progress to further and higher education or to employment.

34 Good practice was observed in many lessons. Lessons are well planned. Schemes of work are detailed and clear. Teaching materials are well chosen. Most teachers are skilled at making their lessons interesting and productive. This was particularly so in two childcare practical lessons where students were given interesting tasks to do in groups and provided with abundant resource materials. The students enjoyed the work and extended their knowledge of how to look after young children. In one all-day practical lesson, students made good use of the facilities available in the open-plan learning area, using computers and paper-based resources and discussing their work with the teacher. Students receive good individual support from teachers. All full-time students attend timetabled workshops where they receive individual advice and guidance on their assignments. A subject support co-ordinator with specialist knowledge of the care curriculum helps students to find resources specific to their assignments. Most teachers make helpful comments on students' assignment work but, in a minority of cases, students are not given sufficient written feedback. All full-time students participate in well-managed work experience programmes. This work experience is frequently drawn upon in lessons. In some lessons teachers do not give students work to do which is sufficiently demanding for their abilities and fail to use questioning techniques well to ensure that all students are participating in and understanding the work.

35 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that there are high standards of achievement on full-time courses. Retention and achievement rates are consistently at, or better than the national average. For example, the GNVQ advanced health and social care

Curriculum Areas

course exceeded the national average by 10% for retention and 5% for achievement in each of the last three years. Most students' written work is of an appropriate standard. Students are skilled at using computers but some are less skilled in working with numbers. Students are good at planning their work and working to the deadlines set by teachers. While most students on NVQ care and childcare courses eventually achieve their full awards, many take longer than originally planned.

36 Courses are managed effectively. There are strong links with care establishments. The advisory group comprises teaching staff and representatives from the care services sector in the local area. Course teams meet regularly and frequently. Review and evaluation leads to

planned action. Internal verification systems are in place, but on some courses, planning and recording these verifications is inadequate. The analysis of NVQ results is made difficult since they are inaccurately recorded on the college's central system. The college's self-assessment report identified as a weakness a lack of specialist equipment, resources and accommodation for practical care teaching. Since the report was written, care studies have moved into a purpose-built open-plan suite with outstanding resources to support teaching and learning. Teachers use displays of students' work effectively. Most teachers are appropriately experienced and qualified but some have little recent relevant work experience.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in health and care, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
Introduction to counselling	1	Number of starters	+	63	37
		Retention (%)	+	95	97
		Achievement (%)	+	88	83
GNVQ health and social care	2	Number of starters	22	21	23
		Retention (%)	82	95	83
		Achievement (%)	100	95	100
Therapeutic counselling	2	Number of starters	+	13	21
		Retention (%)	+	100	83
		Achievement (%)	+	100	83
GNVQ health and social care	3	Number of starters	26	32	31
		Retention (%)	77	88	90
		Achievement (%)	70	79	79
Diploma in nursery nursing	3	Number of starters	33	36	15
		Retention (%)	76	81	80
		Achievement (%)	88	93	92

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)
+course did not run

Curriculum Areas

English and Modern Foreign Languages

Grade 2

37 Inspectors observed 17 lessons in English and modern foreign languages. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment report, although they identified additional strengths and weaknesses. The report makes insufficient reference to teaching and learning.

Key strengths

- much good teaching
- rigorous assessment of students' work
- high levels of achievement in English courses
- a wide range of courses
- good specialist technical resources

Weaknesses

- poor retention and achievements on some courses
- inadequate management of part-time adult courses in modern foreign languages
- little provision to help students learn on their own

38 The college provides modern foreign language courses at GCE A level in French, German and Spanish. Evening courses are available in six languages at levels 1, 2 or 3. English is offered at pre-GCSE, GCSE and GCE A level for full-time and part-time students. GCE A level communication is also available for full-time and part-time study. Recruitment to GCE A level English language has remained buoyant over the last three years, but recruitment to GCE A level English literature, GCE A level communication and modern foreign language courses has declined. Course

planning and organisation in English and some modern foreign language courses is effective. English course teams meet regularly to review programmes of study, monitor students' progress and prepare materials. Management of part-time courses in modern foreign language is inadequate. There are no course review processes and communication is poor. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report.

39 Most teaching in this area is good and lessons are well planned. In the majority of lessons teachers provided an appropriate variety of activities which sustained students' interest. There was a good combination of individual, group and whole-class work. In one language lesson the class held a lively discussion on the advantages and disadvantages of organic food. In an English lesson, as part of a study of the development of words, students worked in pairs taking on the role of marketing teams, devising names for new products. In a minority of lessons the teacher talked too much and provided insufficient opportunities for students to learn from one another. In most lessons skilled teacher questioning led to productive participation by the majority of students. In modern foreign language lessons there was a high level of communication in the language being learned and students were encouraged to extend their use of the language. Teachers provided good-quality handouts and made effective use of a range of audiovisual aids. In English, students take part in a wide range of additional activities. They attend theatre productions and lectures and are regularly involved in performance workshops on plays they are studying. Students' work is carefully assessed and when marking their work teachers make clear reference to examination criteria. Feedback on work is constructive and comprehensive. Facilities and assignments to enable students to learn on their own outside lessons are inadequate. Insufficient links are made between private study and lessons and students on some courses make little use of the

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resource and language centres. Few of these strengths and weaknesses are identified in the self-assessment report.

40 Inspectors broadly agreed with the college's judgements on students' achievements in the self-assessment report. Achievement on English courses is good. GCSE English results have been above the national average for the last three years. Pass rates for GCE A level English language and literature are good, and above the national average for the sector. Of particular note is the good proportion of students who gain high grades in these subjects. Pass rates in GCE A level German declined from 80% in 1997 to 53% in 1998. Value-added data show that there is under-performance in GCE A level communications. Many full-time two-year GCE A level courses have good retention rates. However, retention rates in GCE A level communications are below the national average and fluctuate on entry level modern foreign

languages courses. Students of English achieve good standards in their written and oral work. GCE A level English language students have a good grasp of the grammar and usage of the language. The best students in modern foreign languages speak with confidence and have a good command of vocabulary.

41 Teachers are well qualified and experienced. There are good specialist technical resources. A language study centre has recently been established. Students can use up-to-date language laboratory facilities, CD-ROMs and video equipment. The GCE A level communications teaching room contains an impressive suite of computers which students use effectively for project work in lessons. Much of the teaching in this area takes place in a newly opened attractive study centre. However, English classrooms are too small for the size of many classes and the absence of good soundproofing causes interruptions to lessons.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in English and modern foreign languages, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
Language proficiency (French, German, Italian and Spanish)	Entry	Number of starters	+	116	89
		Retention (%)	+	34	94
		Achievement (%)	+	40	32
GCSE English	2	Number of starters	142	97	106
		Retention (%)	73	67	78
		Achievement (%)	46	80	55
GCE A level English communications (one-year course)	3	Number of starters	32	46	53
		Retention (%)	63	57	89
		Achievement (%)	80	73	68
GCE A level English communications (two-year course)	3	Number of starters	210	222	162
		Retention (%)	73	79	79
		Achievement (%)	95	88	93
GCE A level French	3	Number of starters	50	36	31
		Retention (%)	86	81	97
		Achievement (%)	81	86	73
GCE A level German	3	Number of starters	41	21	10
		Retention (%)	49	90	70
		Achievement (%)	80	53	100

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)

+course did not run

Curriculum Areas

Provision for Students with Learning Difficulties

Grade 3

42 Inspectors observed 16 lessons across the full-time and part-time provision for students with learning difficulties. Although they agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report, and with the college's assessment of the quality of its work, they identified some additional weaknesses. Some early action had been taken to address significant weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- a wide range of courses and vocational options
- successful practical lessons

Weaknesses

- inappropriate learning activities in some lessons
- inappropriate programmes and activities for some students
- too little effective checking of students' learning or of their prior knowledge

43 The college has a strong commitment to making provision for students with learning difficulties. As the self-assessment report recognises, students with learning difficulties benefit from a well-planned range of courses and vocational options. Three full-time entry level courses for over 60 younger students provide steps towards the skills needed for employment or a foundation level vocational qualification. The most advanced students can work towards an NVQ in animal care, retail, business administration, agriculture or furniture studies. Pre-vocational options

include care, catering, construction, motor vehicle, retail and hairdressing. A successful project day takes place each Wednesday, when students can choose to participate in a café project, trail walking, European studies, a media project or a day of music and drama. Some students progress to other courses in the college. Adult part-time students can choose from a range of 10-week or 30-week courses which include catering, art and craft, dance, drama and music, skills for work, self-presentation, and IT. Over 200 part-time students are currently enrolled.

44 Students were observed learning most successfully in practical lessons. The café project provided a range of opportunities for students of all abilities to learn a wide range of skills in a realistic setting. Students learned to set up the room, buy, prepare, cook and serve food, communicate with customers, handle money, behave appropriately and clear up efficiently. In a dance lesson, adult students communicated effectively with each other, learned to take different roles and co-operated as a group. Their increased self-confidence and self-awareness were clear as the lesson progressed. In a lesson on skills for work, a middle-aged student made a telephone call for the first time in her life. Students learning catering prepared attractive Spanish dishes for the college canteen. A group of students preparing for the computer literacy and information technology examination successfully constructed and used databases.

45 Lessons were ineffective when students were engaged in activities which demanded reading and writing skills which they did not possess. Frequently teachers failed to check students' learning or find out the extent of their previous knowledge. The programmes for the most able and least able students did not always meet their needs. Some students were inappropriately on a course for students with learning difficulties when a full NVQ level 1 programme would have been more suitable.

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The programme for some adult part-time students was not sufficiently demanding. Some students with very severe disabilities did not have appropriate activities in some of their lessons. These weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment report. In some less successful lessons, all the students were required to carry out the same activities, in the same way, despite considerable differences in their skills and abilities. The college acknowledged this weakness in the self-assessment report.

46 Since September 1999, the newly appointed curriculum manager has begun to address the significant weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. At the time the report was written, there was no coherent system to monitor students' progress and achievements. A new monitoring and review system has been devised and has recently become operational. The tutorial system was judged to be weak and has been revised to better meet students' needs. Links with schools are being strengthened. These improvements are at too early a stage of development for judgements to be made about their effectiveness.

47 The provision has recently moved from ageing temporary classrooms to more suitable rooms within one of the main buildings. Good use is made of other accommodation in the college such as the training kitchen, the open learning centre and the IT suites. Vocational and pre-vocational work usually takes place in the appropriate vocational area. Students participate in trips and visits organised for other groups in the college. Events such as a recent visit to Barcelona and a planned trip to the Millennium Dome enable them to mix with other students as well as providing valuable opportunities for them to learn and practise social skills.

Basic Skills

Grade 2

48 The inspection covered courses in literacy and numeracy at entry level and level 1. Thirteen lessons were observed. Inspectors broadly agreed with the college's self-assessment report. A few additional weaknesses were identified.

Key strengths

- good teaching, especially for adults
- individually negotiated and regularly reviewed learning programmes
- systematic approaches to helping students with their assignments
- good range and use of resources
- effective summer schools
- well-managed provision for adults providing good progression

Weaknesses

- insufficient co-operation between learning link tutors and course teams
- insufficient recording of adult students' progress

49 The college provides a wide range of part-time courses for adults in basic literacy and numeracy at the main site and in nine other centres outside Yeovil. Learning link tutors and learning support workers support full-time students with basic skills needs who are studying on vocational courses. Learning link tutors provide individual support to students. Learning support workers support students in their vocational lessons. Some basic numeracy is taught through courses organised by the mathematics section. As the self-assessment report identifies, these various

Curriculum Areas

approaches are not sufficiently linked together to provide a coherent programme of teaching and support.

50 Students with weak literacy and numeracy skills are identified through an assessment programme, by self-referral and by referral from tutors. The programme, which has started since the self-assessment report was written, assesses the level of students' need by considering the literacy and numeracy requirements of their chosen course. An individual learning programme is then drawn up in discussion with the student. These programmes effectively identify areas of need and form the basis for teaching. These procedures are particularly effective for adult students, and include an extended assessment period of up to six weeks. In this way, students are helped to express their expectations and to record the progress they are making.

51 Most teaching is good. It is consistently good on courses for adults. This strength is identified in the self-assessment report. In the best teaching, teachers use clearly stated learning objectives as the basis for planning learning and assessment. For example, a tutor identified an GNVQ advanced student as confusing the words 'which' and 'witch'. The teacher then focused on similarly spelt words and extended the students' understanding of the accurate use of words. Relationships between teachers and students are friendly and supportive. Staff have high expectations of their students. An atmosphere of hard work is quickly established and maintained. Learning link tutors provide help for students with literacy and numeracy difficulties that arise during their coursework. However, in some cases they do not concentrate sufficiently on literacy even when this has been identified as an area of need. All lessons are recorded. Most of the records detail the activities undertaken and not the learning achieved. As a consequence, some records are of little use in planning future work.

52 Adult students make good progress. They regularly achieve their qualifications and progress to more advanced courses. This increases their self-confidence. One student who was recently

employed as a care worker attributed this success to the confidence gained from obtaining basic skills qualifications. Often, other family members of successful students join courses and achieve success. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the achievements of adults on basic skills courses is a strength. The college has successfully developed a range of summer schools to develop literacy and numeracy. There are now specific courses for students on, or about to start, engineering and art and design courses. Employers speak highly of this work and the improvement in standards they observe. Students value the summer schools and evaluations show that they have contributed to raising the level of their basic skills. This strength was also identified by the college's self-assessment process.

53 Basic skills provision and especially the work with adults is well managed. Effective meetings and course reviews ensure that across all the centres work is of a consistently high quality. Action plans resulting from course reviews are rigorously implemented. The work with full-time students has strengths, but also some weaknesses, particularly in the planning of literacy lessons and recording of students' learning.

54 There is a good range of resources to support basic skills teaching at the main site and in centres in the community. Computers are available and used effectively. Centres that previously had no computer facilities have now been provided with a laptop computer and a printer. Learning link tutors are based in a new study centre which makes it more easy for all students to contact them.

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Support for Students

Grade 2

55 Inspectors agreed with the majority of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. Further strengths and weaknesses were identified. Action has been taken to address the weaknesses relating to the assessment of basic skills.

Key strengths

- good pre-entry information and guidance for all students
- good identification and provision of additional support needs
- effective induction
- close liaison with parents and employers
- well-regarded counselling, welfare and financial advice services

Weaknesses

- some ineffective recording of students' progress and target-setting
- ineffectiveness of some group tutorials
- underdeveloped careers education and guidance for some students

56 There are good support services for students and the college has made good progress in addressing issues raised at the last inspection. Student support is managed effectively by an assistant principal with the help of five senior tutors. A student guidance committee effectively oversees the quality of the student support services. Quality assurance monitoring of areas of student support is leading to improvement. Some aspects of support for students are still being developed.

57 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that there is effective pre-entry advice and

guidance for prospective students. Publicity materials are attractive and informative. An extensive range of services to schools is offered, including talks to pupils and visits by them to the college. There are open events for prospective full-time and part-time students, 'taster' days when school pupils can sample the areas they wish to study, advertisements in the local press and publicity materials available in a wide range of local venues. The college also provides a guidance service after the publication of GCSE and GCE A level results.

58 Application and admission arrangements are clear. Enquiries and applications are handled promptly. All prospective full-time students receive an interview with a senior tutor. Interviews are available on request for part-time students. All interviews include access to a member of the college's student welfare support team. Students find college staff friendly and welcoming. Between May and September the college operates an effective call centre providing advice, guidance and enrolment opportunities, particularly for part-time students. Induction programmes are well organised. Students find induction a helpful and informative introduction to the college and their courses. There are effective procedures for students to change or amend their course of study.

59 The college identifies any additional support that students need. The self-assessment report includes the lack of systematic assessment of students' basic skills as a weakness. It has now introduced assessment for all students on intermediate and foundation level courses to address this weakness. Students' literacy and numeracy abilities are carefully compared with the needs of the course they are to study. Students may be referred to learning link tutors for individual support or support may be provided in their lessons. There is open access to learning support tutors and materials in the study centre. In 1998-99, 60% of students identified with additional needs took up the support

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offered. This has now increased in 1999-2000 to 87%. Communication between support tutors and subject teachers is satisfactory. Students' progress is reported to their personal tutor, but sometimes there is little response to requests for additional information about the student. Most students who have used the learning support service say that it has helped them. The college runs summer schools specifically for prospective students of engineering and art and design to improve their basic skills before they start their course.

60 Students have a personal tutor who also usually teaches them as part of their course. The support provided by personal tutors is good. There is a clearly stated tutorial entitlement for all full-time and substantial part-time students, a college-wide tutorial programme and a useful handbook for personal tutors. Regular individual reviews enable students to discuss their progress with tutors. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that these reviews are supportive, but the recording of some reviews is poor. Clearly expressed targets for improvement are sometimes missing. Some group tutorials are not effective. Sometimes they are used only to deal with administrative matters. Students' attendance at some group tutorials is low.

61 Counselling, welfare and financial advice services are accessible and well publicised. This strength is identified in the self-assessment report. Students speak well of these services. There are good links with outside agencies that enable referrals for specialist assistance to be made quickly. The college chaplain is based in the study centre. There is an extensive enrichment programme which includes a wide range of sporting activities and clubs for full-time students. High-quality childcare provision is available. There is an attractive college nursery on site, but students take up a minority of the available places.

62 As the self-assessment report comments, the college liaises closely with parents and employers regarding students' attendance and

progress. A group of parents form the parents' liaison committee. They monitor and comment on the quality of students' experiences. There are regular parents evenings to discuss students' progress. Parents receive detailed reports five times a year. Employers also receive regular reports on students' progress and attendance. They are contacted quickly if there are concerns about matters such as student attendance or quality of work.

63 A number of careers events and visits are arranged, particularly for sixth form centre students, but there is no structured careers education programme. Only one in six potential leavers receives a formal careers interview. The college's self-assessment does not identify this weakness. There is a useful open-access careers centre in the study centre. Students can book appointments with college careers tutors and may attend workshops on aspects of careers and entry to higher education.

General Resources

Grade 2

64 Inspectors agreed with the college's comprehensive self-assessment report. Since it was written, a major new building has been opened and other improvements have been completed. Most of the weaknesses noted in the report are being addressed.

Key strengths

- effective accommodation strategy based on curriculum needs
- new resource centre
- high-quality computers for students and staff
- good provision of learning materials in the resource centre
- good access for students with restricted mobility

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Weaknesses

- poor environmental conditions in one building
- insufficient social and recreational areas for students

65 The self-assessment report identifies the accommodation strategy as a strength. Its main objectives of improving efficiency and the quality and flexibility of teaching spaces are being realised. There have been substantial improvements to the general accommodation since the last inspection. The college now operates from one attractive site near the town centre and two smaller sites in the town centre. The new resource centre and other improvements on the main site provide accommodation which teachers can use more flexibly and which students can use to study on their own more easily. The resource centre is a large two-storey building which replaces the former library and resources centre and provides a new base for students to study key skills as well as facilities for English and modern languages. Books, journals, periodicals, videotapes, and CD-ROMs are clustered in appropriate subject-based bays. A team of study support staff works alongside teachers in the centre to assist students with information retrieval and study skills. The adaptations in the main tower building have created open spaces that can be flexibly used with centralised IT stations. These facilities are of high quality and allow teachers to plan for a wider range of student activities than was possible previously.

66 There are still some areas that require improvement. The self-assessment report identifies these. The building housing art, design and some engineering requires better air extraction in some areas and improvements to the toilets. The facilities for indoor sports are inadequate. General classrooms are of a good

standard. They are equipped with whiteboards, blinds, overhead projectors and screens. Most rooms are comfortably furnished and in good decorative order. At the time of the last inspection, many lessons took place in hatted accommodation. The college has significantly reduced this to a very small amount and plans to take the remaining few huts out of use in the near future. A few classrooms are too small for the groups which use them. Accommodation surveys show that there are high levels of use of much of the accommodation during the day, in the evening and at weekends.

67 All students have good access to modern computers. The new resource centre has extended opening hours so that students can use the facilities in the evening and on Saturdays. The new resource centre houses computers linked to both a college network and to the Internet. Access to computing facilities for part-time students has been improved by the provision of two new IT business centres in Yeovil. They are very well used and are open 64 hours each week, including Saturdays.

68 The appropriateness and appearance of common areas for students and staff have been improved. The self-assessment report identifies this progress. Full-time and part-time staff have workspaces in secure staff rooms close to their teaching rooms and resources. There is good provision of small rooms which can be used for interviews and confidential tutorials. There are adequate facilities for the wide range of sporting activities on offer. These are popular with students. The refectory is well managed. Although it is large and contains new furniture, it is the only communal meeting space for students. It is already operating at capacity. Surveys of students' views confirm that it is an inadequate space in which to meet and socialise.

69 Access for people with restricted mobility is generally good. In some areas, specialist equipment has been purchased to improve

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conditions for students who have restricted mobility. Tables in the refectory have been adapted for wheelchair use and there are seven fully equipped toilets for people with disabilities across the site. However, access to much of the business studies section is very difficult for students with restricted mobility. The self-assessment report identifies this and the college has recently placed an order for the installation of a new lift to overcome this problem.

Quality Assurance

Grade 3

70 Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report, but identified an additional strength and some additional weaknesses. Some of the weaknesses identified by the college had been addressed by the time of the inspection.

Key strengths

- consultative and thorough self-assessment process involving all staff
- effective and well-managed professional development programme
- recent improvements to quality assurance procedures
- effective programme of lesson observation

Weaknesses

- underdeveloped use of performance indicators and target-setting
- some poor-quality course reviews and inadequate monitoring by managers
- underdeveloped use and monitoring of service standards
- ineffective internal verification in some areas

71 The college has made many improvements to quality assurance procedures over the last two years. The self-assessment process was a consultative and thorough process involving all staff. A quality assurance manual including all policies and procedures is available on the college intranet. The manual covers all aspects of the college's work. The 'quality' committee has the clear responsibility to develop quality assurance in the college. In 1998-99, the first full round of appraisal for all college staff took place. The first two-year cycle of lesson observations was completed in May 1999. The college achieved the Investors in People award in December 1999. Standards have been set for the work of support services, but these have yet to be effectively monitored. Unreliable data regarding students' achievements has led to slow progress in the use of performance indicators and targets.

72 The quality committee meets monthly, is chaired by the principal and has members from across the college. It has been effective in raising the profile of quality assurance. Governors have a quality and strategy committee which receives minutes from the quality committee. The vice-principal and the quality manager take forward issues from the quality committee for consideration by the governors. Reports and actions regarding the monitoring of students' attendance, setting retention and achievement targets and discussing the outcomes of lesson observations have been on the quality committee's agendas. The committee has started to monitor the quality of tutorial work.

73 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the lesson observation programme is a strength. However, many curriculum areas made little use of the information arising from lesson observations to inform their judgements in the self-assessment report about the quality of teaching and learning. A team of trained observers visits each curriculum area at least once in each two-year cycle. Where problems

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are identified visits are more frequent. Reports from these observations also inform the staff development programme. The profile of grades awarded by the college is similar to that awarded by inspectors.

74 The college collects and uses students' views to inform its decisions. Each year, external consultants prepare and analyse a questionnaire which is given to all students. Analysis of this questionnaire provides a lot of useful information. Other questionnaires are used to inform course reviews. Some curriculum areas are less effective at designing questionnaires than others. The better questionnaires led to useful information from students. In other areas, this information proved less useful. The college has five charters for different client groups. They are widely distributed and, since September 1999, have been monitored by the college quality committee. Complaints are dealt with effectively and a full record of complaints is maintained.

75 Some college reviews were detailed and evaluative. Some were poor. The documentation used to record the reviews does not require staff to record how or why decisions have been taken. There was little analysis of students' performance in many reviews. A significant number of reviews do not have action plans. The setting and monitoring of standards on vocational courses is not consistently undertaken across the college. These weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment report. Internal verification takes place in vocational areas, but some of it is weak. External verifier reports go to the vice-principal who follows up any issues of concern with the course manager.

76 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the range and use of performance indicators and target-setting is restricted. Courses have targets for retention and achievement, but these are often not reported on consistently. Students' GCSE grades on entry are used to predict their performance on their course. Trends for the

last four years have been analysed and targets for individual students, teaching groups and subjects are set.

77 Inspectors agreed that there is an effective and well-managed professional development programme available to all teaching and support staff. There is a professional development group with a clear remit to raise standards in practice of all college staff. They set college standards for staff qualifications and then implement processes for meeting those standards. There are three annual conferences organised and held in the college each year. The college completed the first full round of appraisals in 1999, when all college staff had an appraisal and their training needs were identified.

Governance

Grade 3

78 The self-assessment report overstated some strengths, some of which are normal practice. Inspectors gave more weight to the inadequate monitoring of college performance by governors.

Key strengths

- range of skills and expertise of the corporation
- good oversight of the college's financial recovery
- effective monitoring of financial performance and accommodation developments

Weaknesses

- insufficient demands on managers to improve the quality of data about students
- insufficient monitoring of college performance against strategic objectives
- omissions in the recent implementation of some procedures

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

80 The corporation continues to oversee the implementation of the college's recovery. Governors have a clear strategic view for the college. They have sought ways to develop knowledge of key issues facing the college. Presentations by senior staff at board and committee meetings provide useful information to inform decision-making. For example, the human resources committee has received a presentation on equal opportunities, and the corporation was briefed on curriculum 2000. Governors request specific training and attend externally provided courses. Most governors have recently been linked with a curriculum cluster or cross-college function. In a few cases, this led them to be involved in the self-assessment for their linked area of work. The parents' liaison committee, set up in 1998, elects and works closely with the parent governor. Governors produce a report on the college and present it at a public meeting each year.

81 Financial forecasts are integrated with the strategic plan and are fully considered by the corporation before approval. There is close oversight and active support for managers dealing with the financial, staffing and accommodation issues. The finance and general purposes committee has been particularly effective in monitoring the college's financial position closely through a period of financial difficulty and major changes to the accommodation. All governors receive clear and relevant financial management information each month.

82 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the regular review of performance

against objectives is a key weakness.

Inadequate and inaccurate data on retention and achievement delayed the presentation of targets for 1999-2000 for governors' detailed consideration. Governors recognise that information is not always reliable and that their monitoring of students' achievement data is at an early stage of development. They have not yet questioned managers sufficiently about how they propose to achieve targets and produce accurate data.

83 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the present composition of the corporation is a strength. The membership of the corporation has changed significantly during the last six months. The transition to the revised membership will be complete in May 2000. Eight governors will have joined the corporation since summer 1999. The search committee has effectively considered the procedures for appointment to each category, drawn up a job description for governors, identified the communities the college serves, and formulated a training policy. The new appointments relate closely to the outcomes of a skills audit undertaken in September 1999. The range of expertise and interests of governors is considered when they are allocated to corporation committees.

84 There is an appropriate range of corporation committees. A policy of rotation of membership of committees has been established so that individual governors obtain a wider view of the college's operations. Most committees have updated terms of reference and determined membership criteria. The audit committee terms of reference have not, however, been properly updated to reflect the guidance in Council Circular 98/15, *Audit Code of Practice*. The clerk, appointed in 1999, has established procedures for the conduct of the corporation. However, auditors identified omissions in the recent implementation of some procedures. The clerk effectively supports the business of the corporation, with clear minutes,

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agendas and papers. The corporation has recently updated the code of conduct with a code of ethics. The procedures in respect of the register of interests properly reflect relevant guidance. The remuneration committee has been slow to establish a formal process for the evaluation of performance of senior postholders other than the principal.

Management

Grade 3

85 The self-assessment of management identifies most of the strengths found by inspectors. There have been improvements in communications since the report was written. The report understates the significant weaknesses regarding the quality and use of data regarding students.

Key strengths

- clear strategic planning processes
- productive community links and external liaison
- effective monitoring of financial performance
- progress in implementing the college's financial recovery and accommodation strategy

Weaknesses

- insufficiently reliable data to inform management decisions
- weaknesses in some aspects of curriculum and cross-college management
- slow development of procedures to monitor students' achievements
- inadequacies in operational planning

86 Between 1995 and 1998, the college encountered significant financial difficulties. The college's recovery plan, agreed with the FEFC in 1997, included the sale of college property, management restructuring and closer monitoring of operational costs. There has been good progress in implementing the recovery plan and the college's financial status has improved. Pre-occupation with the recovery plan has resulted in slow progress in addressing issues in other areas, such as the monitoring, review and evaluation of students' performance. The self-assessment report recognises the need for a more rigorous approach to target-setting and monitoring of students' progress. Improving monitoring of students' achievements has been identified as a key strategic priority.

87 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is adequate. The director of finance, who is a member of the college's executive team, leads an effective and appropriately experienced and qualified finance team. Comprehensive management accounts are produced monthly and distributed to governors and the executive. The accounts are accompanied by a written financial commentary and cashflow forecast. Budget holders receive clear, monthly financial reports on actual and committed expenditure and appropriate advice and support from the finance team. Financial regulations are up to date. The college's internal and external auditors have not identified any significant weaknesses in the college's internal control system. However, weaknesses in the important areas of student number forecasting and the interpretation of funding criteria have yet to be addressed.

88 There are systematic procedures to develop the strategic plan. Staff have good opportunities to contribute to the planning process. The college's mission is well understood and accepted by staff. There is a strong commitment from

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everyone in the college to furthering the college's recovery, developing its provision and strengthening its place in the community. The current strategic plan identifies key corporate objectives which reflect the priorities in the college's mission. Operating plans are produced for academic and cross-college areas. In many cases, they lack quantifiable targets and do not effectively assist the monitoring and development of the work of the college.

89 Although inspectors identified examples of good management, particularly at cluster level, they also identified weaknesses in the management of curriculum and cross-college areas that had not been addressed by senior managers. These were not acknowledged in the self-assessment report. Most senior and middle managers fulfil several roles. The responsibilities held by some managers is very wide. This has led to an imbalance in workloads. In some areas there is fragmentation and duplication of effort, gaps in accountability and unnecessarily complex lines of communication. Managers do not always carry out their monitoring and control responsibilities effectively.

90 As the self-assessment report acknowledges, the college has found it difficult to produce comprehensive and reliable management information about students. Inspectors found that data relating to students' achievements were incomplete and some were inaccurate. Most staff lack confidence in the accuracy of data the management information system provides. There are discrepancies between data held in curriculum clusters and that held centrally. This adversely affects the efficiency of many aspects of the college's operation. For example, it limits the college's ability to analyse accurately and to monitor effectively, student retention and achievement trends and rates. Some registers have not been kept accurately. The college is taking action to improve systems that monitor learners' attendance.

91 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the college has extensive and productive links with external providers and the local community. It promotes the widening of participation in further education through a range of initiatives. Senior managers represent the college on numerous committees and steering groups. Links with schools are strong. The college has a close working relationship with the universities of Bournemouth and Exeter. It is a member of the Somerset Consortium of Further Education Colleges. Good links with the training and enterprise councils (TECs), training providers, and chambers of commerce have resulted in funding or the provision of training.

92 In response to a survey of staff views, a wide range of communication measures has been introduced. General information and the decisions made by the executive and governors are effectively communicated to staff through newsletters and an annual cycle of staff briefings. There are regular meetings at all levels, although not all part-time staff can attend these. Most staff welcome these developments, although some feel that opportunities to express their views, though improving, are still limited. These issues are identified in the self-assessment report. Publicity arrangements are successful in raising the profile of the college in the region. Indirect promotional activities, such as press releases on individual students' achievements, are used effectively.

93 The college has an appropriate range of policies and procedures, most of which are monitored well. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that there are weaknesses in the monitoring of the equal opportunities policy. Students and staff have raised issues with the group and appropriate action has resulted. The launch of an updated equal opportunities policy is intended to raise the profile of this group's objectives across the college.

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Conclusions

94 The college's self-assessment report was detailed and clearly presented. It formed a good basis for planning and carrying out the inspection. The judgements it contained were supported by a range of evidence. All sections contained detailed action plans. Some of the weaknesses identified in the report had been addressed by the time of the inspection. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses in the report. Some statements in the report describe rather than evaluate the provision. The report understates the effects of unreliable student data. Inspectors raised two curriculum grades and lowered one. They raised one cross-college grade and lowered two.

95 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 1999)

Age	%
Under 16	3
16–18 years	23
19–24 years	13
25+ years	61
Not known	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (November 1999)

Level of study	%
Level 1 (foundation)	30
Level 2 (intermediate)	14
Level 3 (advanced)	24
Level 4/5 (higher)	5
Non-schedule 2	27
Total	100

Source: college data

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

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision (%)
Science	236	1,450	27
Agriculture	2	0	0
Construction	3	42	1
Engineering	141	548	11
Business	75	636	11
Hotel and catering	107	129	4
Health and community care	93	401	8
Art and design	261	732	16
Humanities	378	712	17
Basic education	23	329	5
Total	1,319	4,979	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 2% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (November 1999)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	153	88	0	241
Supporting direct learning contact	42	20	0	62
Other support	99	26	0	125
Total	294	134	0	428

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1997	1998	1999
Income	£10,924,000	£11,911,00	£10,188,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	£18.71	£18.01	£17.40
Payroll as a proportion of income	76%	61%	61%
Achievement of funding target	102%	100%	100%
Diversity of income	24%	33%	25%
Operating surplus	-£307,000	£872,000	£551,000

Sources: Income – Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college (1998 and 1999)

ALF – Funding Allocations 1997-98 (1997 and 1998), Funding Allocations 1998-99 (1999)

Payroll – Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college (1998 and 1999)

Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1997-98 (1997 and 1998), college (1999)

Diversity of income – Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college (1998 and 1999)

Operating surplus – Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college (1998 and 1999)

Students' achievements data

Level	Retention and pass	Students aged 16 to 18			Students aged 19 or over		
		1996	1997	1998	1996	1997	1998
1	Number of starters	1,326	1,689	1,859	710	1,189	1,118
	Retention (%)	85	87	89	78	79	76
	Achievement (%)	29	22	27	54	54	53
2	Number of starters	962	1,157	1,173	902	1,161	1,346
	Retention (%)	83	80	82	79	74	80
	Achievement (%)	44	45	51	47	65	65
3	Number of starters	1,753	1,719	1,880	962	1,212	1,037
	Retention (%)	82	80	73	81	82	81
	Achievement (%)	76	81	82	55	53	53
4 or 5	Number of starters	n/a	n/a	n/a	116	229	196
	Retention (%)	n/a	n/a	n/a	92	83	75
	Achievement (%)	n/a	n/a	n/a	57	42	64
Short courses	Number of starters	157	277	692	2,714	1,691	3,294
	Retention (%)	86	94	93	95	93	97
	Achievement (%)	37	26	73	27	33	62
Unknown/unclassified	Number of starters	1,395	546	356	979	549	639
	Retention (%)	87	77	63	88	87	76
	Achievement (%)	18	21	45	12	58	64

Source: college

n/a not applicable

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