

Plymouth College of Further Education

REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
2000-01

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 1999-2000, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1	2	3	4	5
	%	%	%	%	%
Curriculum areas	6	44	44	7	0
Cross-college provision	9	45	38	8	0

Source: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1999-2000: Chief inspector's annual report*

Sample size: 112 college inspections

Note: percentages subject to rounding

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 1996, would appear in the results for 1997-98 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

Plymouth College of Further Education *South West Region*

Inspected November 2000

Plymouth College of Further Education is a large general further education college with two main centres in Plymouth. It also provides courses at over 35 other centres in the South West. The college offers courses in all 10 of the programme areas funded by the FEFC and has effectively widened participation in education in the Plymouth area. Provision in seven curriculum areas together with basic skills was inspected, including courses offered in the local community and by franchise partners.

The college produced a detailed self-assessment report. The judgements in the report were supported by clear evidence. The production of the report involved all teaching staff, support staff, managers, governors and franchise partners. The self-assessment process was well planned. It drew on curriculum and support service self-assessment reports, observations of teaching and learning and surveys of the views of staff and students. College performance data and national benchmarks were effectively used to inform judgements about students' achievements. Inspectors agreed with the grades awarded by the college for all eight curriculum areas selected for inspection. They also agreed with three of the five cross-college grades. In two areas they judged that the area

merited a higher grade than that awarded by the college. Prospective students are well informed about the range of courses and the opportunities available. Tutorial support and additional learning support for students is good. Teaching and learning is effective in most theory and practical lessons. The proportion of good and outstanding lessons is higher than in the previous inspection and higher than the national average for all lessons observed by inspectors in 1999-2000. Overall, retention and achievement rates have improved since the last inspection and in many areas they are above the national average. The college is well governed and well managed. Governors have an excellent range of expertise. They effectively oversee the strategic direction, financial management and quality of courses offered by the college. Senior managers provide strong and effective leadership. The quality assurance system is well developed and effective. Links with employers and community organisations are productive. There are well-equipped libraries, good computing facilities and much good accommodation. The college should address: low achievement rates on some courses, in particular science and mathematics; weaknesses in curriculum management; the quality of data relating to students at centres in the community; the sharing of good practice across college departments; the quality of some tutors' records of students' progress; and the quality assurance of franchised provision.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Science and mathematics	3	Support for students	1
Computer literacy and information technology	3	General resources	1
Motor vehicle and GNVQ engineering	2	Quality assurance	2
Professional business	2	Governance	1
Leisure and tourism	1	Management	2
Childcare and nursery nursing	2		
Access to higher education	2		
Basic skills	2		

Context

The College and its Mission

1 Plymouth College of Further Education was established in 1970. It operates from two main sites and six smaller centres in Plymouth. Four of these are 'neighbourhood colleges' which mainly provide information technology (IT) and basic skills programmes for their local communities. One of the main sites, the Goschen centre, includes the 'Goschen Business Communications Centre'. Since it opened, 18 months ago, it has provided a wide range of support services for over 350 small and medium-sized enterprises. Franchise arrangements with local partners account for about 10% of college provision. Franchised programmes include engineering, business, health and social care and humanities. The college also provides IT courses in over 35 community venues throughout the West Country.

2 There are approximately 250,000 residents in the City of Plymouth, with another 75,000 in the travel-to-work area. Until recently, Plymouth's economy depended heavily on defence industries, particularly naval shipbuilding and repairs. Since the mid-1980s, cuts in defence expenditure have reduced this dependence. However, the city remains a major manufacturing centre in Devon. Shipbuilding and repair, aerospace engineering, medical and precision instrument manufacture and radio engineering are important local industries. There is a major naval base and dockyard with approximately 7,000 employees. In the 1990s there has been growth in the service sector and in tourism. There are over 3,000 full-time equivalent jobs in the tourism sector. Call centres, primarily involved in telephone sales, have generated about 5,000 new jobs in the last three years. Plymouth City, which became a unitary authority in April 1998, employs approximately 13,500 staff.

3 Unemployment in the Plymouth travel-to-work area has fallen by 28.6% in the last 12 months. In October 2000,

unemployment was 3%, compared with the national average of 3.4%. However, over 40% of the unemployed are long-term unemployed. This is well above the national average. Some parts of the city have high levels of unemployment. The local socio-economic position is reflected in the city's designation as an action zone for education, health and employment. Plymouth is the most deprived local authority in the South West on two of the four measures used in the government's index of local deprivation. Minority ethnic groups make up about 1% of the population. In summer 2000 Plymouth was identified as a site for the dispersal of asylum seekers. Since then over 150 asylum seekers have enrolled on English courses and vocational programmes at the college, significantly increasing the proportion of minority ethnic students in the college.

4 The college operates in a very competitive environment. There are three selective grammar schools in the area. All but two of the area's comprehensive schools have sixth forms. Seven comprehensive schools are designated community colleges offering adult education. Two of these community schools, in partnership with the college, offer a joint programme of adult education across the city. Within the city there is a specialist art college and two higher education institutions. The Saltash annex of St Austell College is within the travel-to-work area.

5 The college offers a wide range of programmes in eight of the 10 Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) programme areas. To avoid duplication with other providers, the college restricts its offer in the other two programme areas, art and design and agriculture. There are courses at all levels from basic skills to higher education. At the time of the inspection, there were 2,724 full-time and 20,959 part-time students enrolled on college courses; 91% were aged 19 or over. The college employs 669 full-time equivalent staff of whom 382 are involved in teaching and learning.

Context

6 The college participates in a wide range of public, private, and voluntary sector partnerships and works closely with Plymouth University. It has developed two University for Industry (Ufi) learning centres in a partnership, which includes the other Devon and Cornwall colleges. The college's commitment to the local community, its students and partners is reflected in a mission which prioritises the needs of local students and businesses and emphasises the needs of particular areas of inner city deprivation. The mission focuses on developing people to enable them to progress to employment and higher levels of study. The current key strategic priorities are:

- 'improving student success rates'
- 'helping businesses succeed through excellent workplace learning, assessment and accreditation'
- 'expanding activities to benefit individuals, community groups and small businesses in areas of inner city deprivation in Plymouth'.

The Inspection

7 The college was inspected during the week beginning 13 November 2000. The inspection team had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and information about the college held by other directorates of the FEFC. Data on students' achievements for 1998 and 1999 were derived from the college's individualised student record (ISR) returns to the FEFC. Data on students' achievements for 2000 were provided by the college before the inspection. Inspectors checked the data against class registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies and found the majority to be reliable. Achievement data for students at centres in the community were not reliable, a table has not therefore been included. Inspectors also considered that an analysis of students' achievement rates for basic skills using

ISR data would not give a realistic indication of students' progress in this curriculum area and a table has not been included in the report.

8 The inspection was carried out by a team of 14 inspectors and an auditor working for a total of 69 days. It included inspection of courses provided by local franchise partners and computer literacy programmes in community venues throughout the South West region. Meetings were held with governors, managers, employers, teachers, students and support staff. Inspectors observed 85 lessons and examined students' work and college documentation.

9 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1999-2000. Of the lessons inspected, 68% were judged to be good or outstanding. This figure is above the average of 62% for all lessons observed by inspectors in 1999-2000.

Context

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	2	3	1	1	0	7
GCSE	2	0	3	0	0	5
GNVQ	6	6	4	1	0	17
NVQ	0	4	4	0	0	8
Higher education, including access	5	3	4	0	0	12
Other vocational	4	16	5	1	0	26
Other	0	7	3	0	0	10
Total (No.)	19	39	24	3	0	85
Total (%)	22	46	28	4	0	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1999-2000 (%)	17	45	31	6	0	100

Source for national average: Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1999-2000: Chief inspector's annual report

Note: percentages subject to rounding

10 The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1999-2000.

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Plymouth College of Further Education	10.4	79
National average, all inspected colleges 1999-2000	10.3	76

Source for national average: Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1999-2000: Chief inspector's annual report

Curriculum Areas

Science and Mathematics

Grade 3

11 Inspectors observed 11 lessons and one tutorial. They agreed with some of the findings in the self-assessment report, but judged that insufficient weight had been given to retention and achievement rates. They identified some additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- much good teaching
- the high standard of students' practical work
- good laboratories and learning resources
- productive links with outside organisations

Weaknesses

- low retention in general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) science and in general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) mathematics
- low retention and achievement in GCE A level mathematics
- some ineffective course management

12 The college offers a broad range of GCE A level, GCSE, vocational and access to higher education science courses. The inspection included GCE A levels in biology, chemistry, environmental science, human biology, mathematics and physics, and GCSEs in biology, chemistry, human physiology and health, mathematics and physics.

13 Most teaching is good. In most lessons students are clearly informed about what they are expected to learn and achieve. Students' interest is maintained through a variety of discussions, exercises and practical tasks. For

example, in an environmental science lesson, introduction to the hydrological cycle was developed through discussion of diagrams, processing data, evaluation of newspaper articles and map work. Many teachers systematically check students' understanding through questions and answers. Their effective questioning tests the students' ability to apply knowledge as well as recall facts. Students' work in class is good and their answers to questions show a good grasp of scientific terminology and precision in its use. In several lessons teachers did not summarise and consolidate key learning points. In some less effective lessons, teachers failed to make sure that students were involved in productive learning. The working relationship between teachers and students is particularly good. Teachers give supportive, constructive guidance. They often find time outside lessons to help individuals and small groups, particularly with revision and examination practice.

14 Students achieve high standards in practical lessons. They work methodically and confidently, even when handling hazardous materials. The importance of safe working practices is emphasised. Experiments are well chosen to complement theory and build on students' experience. In one biology lesson, the study of micro-organisms involved practical work with yoghurt and cheese: in one physics lesson the properties of logic gates were studied through building a circuit for a doorbell which would only operate in daytime. Practical lessons are well supported by specialist technicians.

15 Students' achievements in GCSE sciences are satisfactory. Retention rates in human physiology and health are good. Retention on GCE A level science courses is poor and has declined over the last three years. Pass rates in GCE A level sciences are satisfactory. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment judgement that the proportion of high grades gained by those who complete courses is a strength. Achievement in mathematics at all levels is poor.

Curriculum Areas

At GCSE, retention is consistently low. GCE A level mathematics retention and pass rates have been consistently low for the past three years.

16 Weaknesses in course management affect students' performance. The college's entry requirements for GCE A levels are inconsistently applied. As a result, some students are inappropriately enrolled on GCE A level courses. Attendance data have not been used effectively to improve attendance. Attendance in some subjects is low. The college sets achievement targets for individual students and compares their progress with their predicted grades. However, this does not start promptly at the beginning of students' courses. Some students are not well informed about their progress. The match between predicted grades and those finally achieved is not good.

17 Resources for learning are very good. Classrooms and laboratories are large, comfortable, modern, well looked after and well equipped. The science suite is enhanced by

displays of students' work, especially field and project work. Good computing facilities in science laboratories are well used during experimental work. There is an extensive range of worksheets, study guides, and practice problems and questions, particularly in mathematics. The library is well stocked with books, videos and journals. Students frequently use CD-ROMs and the Internet to find information.

18 Many students have enriched their science studies through projects with schools and other organisations. For example, environmental science students helped pupils from a primary school to collect measurements for their 'Coastline 2000' project. Biology students have worked with a community nature reserve and the Devon Rare Breeds Society to research an endangered species of butterfly. The range of such work in biology was recognised in 1998 with a Beacon Award. In 1999, the work of chemistry students with a novel form of carbon 'Bucky Ball' also achieved a Beacon Award.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in science and mathematics, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
GCSE human physiology and health	2	Number of starters	46	24	21
		Retention (%)	98	83	86
		Achievement (%)	33	60	50
Other GCSE sciences	2	Number of starters	83	22	28
		Retention (%)	82	68	71
		Achievement (%)	40	53	40
GCSE mathematics	2	Number of starters	*	*	187
		Retention (%)	*	*	53
		Achievement (%)	*	*	29
GCE A level sciences	3	Number of starters	65	71	61
		Retention (%)	52	48	46
		Achievement (%)	74	74	74
GCE A level mathematics	3	Number of starters	37	34	20
		Retention (%)	46	53	60
		Achievement (%)	41	41	42

Source: ISR (1998 and 1999), college (2000)

* data unreliable

Curriculum Areas

Computer Literacy and Information Technology

Grade 3

19 Inspectors visited the two main college sites and 12 centres in Devon and Cornwall. They agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report. However, they considered that too much reliance had been placed on inaccurate retention and achievement data and on the findings of a survey that was completed by few students.

Key strengths

- successful widening of participation through provision in many remote rural areas
- high pass rates for students entering for examinations
- good support from tutors for students at the main sites
- improved IT skills of many students

Weaknesses

- failure of a majority of students to take examinations
- unreliable retention and achievement data
- inadequate support for some students at centres in the community
- some unsatisfactory aspects of the management of community provision
- the slow return of marked work to some students in classes at outreach venues

20 The college provides open learning courses in computer literacy and information technology and other computing and business courses at both main sites in Plymouth and at over 30 centres across Devon and Cornwall. Most of

these centres are situated in rural areas that are poorly served by public transport and many of the students taking computer literacy and information technology courses at them would not participate in education if they had to attend college. This innovative provision was awarded a Queen's Award in 1998. The centres in the community are managed and staffed by employees and volunteers appointed by the local county council. Volunteers are normally on duty during the appointed opening hours.

21 There is no formal teaching on the computer literacy and information technology courses. Students are provided with comprehensive workbooks and access to a computer running the appropriate software. The books are clearly written, well presented and make good use of graphical representations to assist learning. At the main sites, and a few of the centres in the community, qualified tutors are available most of the time to help students. At the other outreach centres, volunteers are usually available to assist students. Most of these volunteers are not experts in IT. If a volunteer is unavailable or unable to provide the necessary help, students may use a video-linked computer to talk to a duty tutor at the main site. If necessary, the tutor can take remote control of the student's computer to demonstrate a solution and to reset the screen. The link facility can be used to send work by electronic mail to tutors for marking. Some of the work mailed electronically for marking is returned too slowly. Some students do not use the video link because they lack the confidence or knowledge to use the technology. At a few of the centres visited by inspectors in the community the video link was not working.

22 The computers and software available for students studying computer literacy and information technology courses are good. All have modern operating systems and software packages that are typically used in many businesses. The facilities at both main sites are well managed. A booking system is operated,

Curriculum Areas

but there are usually enough spare computers for students to call in without booking. The accommodation at some of the community centres is business-like and conducive to learning. For example, the centre at Pensilva has six machines all with full Internet access and is situated in a modern business unit in the town. Some centres are situated in schools or village halls. Such accommodation is conveniently located and usually of a satisfactory standard.

23 There is little reliable information on students' achievements and retention rates. As a result no achievement table can be published. Many students are recorded as continuing their courses when their status is not known. It is recognised in the self-assessment report as a weakness that only about 30% of students take an examination at the end of their course. For those who take the examination, pass rates are high. In the last two years approximately 80%

of entrants were successful. This compares favourably with the national average of 63%. Many students who do not sit an examination nevertheless improve their IT skills. There are numerous examples of students, many of whom are elderly, acquiring the skills and confidence to use computers in their business, use the Internet, or help their children to develop IT skills. One student, who spoke to inspectors, was starting to build her own website.

24 Some aspects of the management of the provision in the community are unsatisfactory. Individual students' progress is not adequately monitored. Course review and action-planning is underdeveloped. The self-assessment report relies heavily on a survey that was returned only by 5% of the students. There is inadequate reporting to senior managers and governors of the quality of the provision offered at community venues.

Curriculum Areas

Motor Vehicle and GNVQ Engineering

Grade 2

25 Inspectors observed 12 lessons covering motor vehicle engineering at the college's main site and at a franchise partner and general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) engineering at the main site.

Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. They identified some additional strengths, but judged the report to be insufficiently critical of some aspects of teaching and learning.

Key strengths

- good and improving retention and achievement rates on most courses
- productive liaison between course teams and employers
- good use of project work
- wide range of courses with effective initial assessment and guidance
- good resources to support student learning
- high level of attendance

Weaknesses

- some weaknesses in lesson planning
- failure to involve all students in a significant number of theory lessons
- inadequate checks on learning in a significant number of classes

26 There is a wide range of engineering courses covering foundation, intermediate and advanced levels, including craft and technician qualifications. Systematic initial assessment and guidance ensures that students study the most appropriate course at the right level. There are

suitable opportunities for progression.

Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment judgement that the department has strong links with the industry and with its franchise partner. Students taught by the partner have a similar experience to that of students at the main site.

27 All lessons were satisfactory or better, but there were few examples of outstanding teaching. Students' practical learning is based on well-designed tasks which are enthusiastically carried out by the students. Participation in substantial projects, for example, the design and construction of the hovercraft displayed in the college reception area, play a significant role in students' learning experience. This strength was recognised in the self-assessment report. Many projects have received national awards. Some theory lessons are poorly planned. Teachers did not question students effectively and often failed to encourage students to participate in discussion.

Self-assessment did not identify this weakness. Assessment tasks are clear and appropriately scheduled. Teachers provide challenging and encouraging feedback, which helps students to improve their performance. Careful attention is paid to the development of key skills. Most teachers correct spelling, punctuation and grammar. Good monitoring systems ensure that most students complete their assessments on time and go on to complete their course successfully. Students' punctuality and attendance are good. Teachers provide incentives for good attendance. In a GNVQ intermediate tutorial the students meet in groups to monitor their own attendance. The best performing group is awarded a prize of CD vouchers.

28 Achievement rates on most programmes are at or above the national average. They have improved by approximately 10% over the last three years. Particularly good results are achieved on the GNVQ intermediate and the national certificate in motor vehicle engineering. Retention rates have also improved. On most

Curriculum Areas

courses retention is at or above the national average. Targets set at course level to improve performance are closely monitored. The quality of students' work is of a high standard. Good opportunities for project work compensate for the lack of work experience for full-time students. For example, during the inspection, students were at the modelling stage of building racing lawnmowers. They approached the project with enthusiasm. Motor vehicle students also work competently and safely on a range of tasks. They are well supported and supervised by the practical skills teachers.

29 Well-qualified teachers ensure that the curriculum requirements are met. Some teachers have benefited from industrial

secondments to update their knowledge.

Teachers who do not have teaching qualifications, including those employed by the franchise partner, are required to undergo teacher training and to achieve appropriate assessor qualifications. Accommodation at the main college site has been extensively modernised. It provides a stimulating place to work. Examples of students' project work are on display in the main engineering corridor. Accommodation at the franchise partner's premises is in need of updating. There are good resources for motor vehicle engineering, computer-aided engineering and welding. The library has good stocks of engineering books, periodicals and videos. Both the library and the IT resources are well used by students.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in motor vehicle and GNVQ engineering, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
NVQ in motor vehicle engineering	1	Number of starters	56	28	37
		Retention (%)	77	50	65
		Achievement (%)	65	86	79
C&G welding	1	Number of starters	38	37	35
		Retention (%)	82	70	89
		Achievement (%)	52	64	100
GNVQ intermediate engineering	2	Number of starters	16	29	19
		Retention (%)	63	90	95
		Achievement (%)	100	81	94
NVQ in motor vehicle engineering	2	Number of starters	50	40	32
		Retention (%)	62	83	74
		Achievement (%)	63	91	67
GNVQ advanced engineering	3	Number of starters	28	19	36
		Retention (%)	64	58	72
		Achievement (%)	83	64	62
National certificate in motor vehicle engineering	3	Number of starters	12	12	14
		Retention (%)	100	75	93
		Achievement (%)	100	100	100

Source: ISR (1998 and 1999), college (2000)

Curriculum Areas

Professional Business

Grade 2

30 Inspectors observed 11 lessons. They agreed with the strengths in the self-assessment report and identified a few additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- much effective teaching
- high achievement rates on management courses
- good retention on management and human resources courses
- the high standard of students' work
- good practical use of students' workplace experience

Weaknesses

- insufficient attention to the development of students' skills
- some weak course management
- some low achievement rates

31 The college offers professional courses in accounts, law, management, human resources and marketing. There are good progression opportunities in the human resources and management areas. Management courses are offered from levels 2 to 5. The offer of additional management qualifications enables students to adapt their courses to the needs of particular industries, for example, in hotel and catering, security, safety and supply chain management. Several courses contribute to the Ministry of Defence resettlement programme. Inspectors agreed that the scheduling of programmes to suit students in employment is a strength. For example, the certificate in personnel practice is offered in four blocks each of four days. Between each block students study course materials at home and are visited by tutors in their workplace.

32 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that there is much good teaching. Of the 11 lessons observed, nine were judged to be good or outstanding. Lessons are interesting and students are invited to explore topics in depth. In a well-structured national vocational qualification (NVQ) training and development lesson, an exercise based on a Japanese poem was used to illustrate the difficulty in designing and managing effective assessments. The best lessons draw on students' experience of work. Students on the management certificate programme make visits to the workplaces of other students. A report is then written reflecting what has been seen and learned. The teaching of marketing places too much emphasis on examination preparation and insufficient attention is given to the use of case study material. Materials used by students working at home on accounting courses provide insufficient guidance. There is insufficient development of students' skills such as the use of language, note-taking, report writing and critical evaluation. Students are given insufficient feedback on the skills that they demonstrate. Students were well supported in the collection of evidence for their NVQ portfolios. The assessor for the training and development courses visits students' companies to assist with the collection of evidence and to make assessments.

33 Informal communication within course teams is good, but some team meetings are not well recorded. Methods of recording students' progress and reporting it to them vary in quality. The internal verification of students' work is carefully carried out, but there is no internal verifier's report to assist the identification of recurring problems, action-planning and the sharing of good practice. Employers receive regular reports on the progress of their employees. Staff monitor retention and achievement comparing performance with national benchmarking data from the FEFC and awarding bodies.

34 Achievements on some courses are good. The pass rate of 96% for management courses is well above the national average. The pass rate

Curriculum Areas

for the Institute of Legal Executives part 1 examination consistently exceeds the national average by over 25%. In its self-assessment report the college recognised the low pass rate on accounting courses. Retention on most courses is good. The certificate in personnel practice has had 100% retention for the past three years. Most students are articulate and show a good understanding of the principles of business. They are well motivated and work attentively during lessons. Most of their portfolios are well organised. Assignments are designed to enable students to use their workplaces as case studies. Students produce good written work. Some reports are exceptionally good in their quality and depth of analysis. Most tutors mark students' work carefully and give positive feedback. Sometimes

tutors give insufficient advice on how students could improve their work.

35 Staff are well qualified and actively update their knowledge and skills. They make effective use of the training and resources offered by the professional awarding bodies. Most staff maintain familiarity with current business practice through links with employers, workplace visits or consultancy. Some staff have not yet achieved assessor and verifier awards. Classrooms are generally of a high standard, but there is a lack of business reference materials for use in class exercises and assignments. The library contains a good stock of local and national company annual reports, but some books are out of date and contain references to previous legislation.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in professional business, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
Association of Accounting Technicians foundation and intermediate accounts	2 and	Number of starters	19	73	43
	3	Retention (%)	68	84	79
		Achievement (%)	15	39	21
Certificate in marketing	3	Number of starters	28	21	11
		Retention (%)	75	86	91
		Achievement (%)	52	89	20
Certificate in personal practice	3	Number of starters	35	20	51
		Retention (%)	100	100	100
		Achievement (%)	97	80	86
National Examining Board for Supervisory Management certificate in management	3	Number of starters	63	63	57
		Retention (%)	86	94	100
		Achievement (%)	94	98	96
Institute of Legal Executives part one	3	Number of starters	21	13	7
		Retention (%)	24	92	86
		Achievement (%)	100	77	83
Certificate in management	4	Number of starters	34	15	26
		Retention (%)	94	100	88
		Achievement (%)	78	100	96
Diploma in management	4	Number of starters	18	15	11
		Retention (%)	94	93	100
		Achievement (%)	76	93	100

Source: ISR (1998 and 1999), college (2000)

Curriculum Areas

Leisure and Tourism

Grade 1

36 Inspectors observed 10 lessons in leisure and tourism courses. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report. By the time of the inspection some weaknesses had been addressed.

Key strengths

- the high standard of teaching and learning
- good retention and achievements on GNVQ courses
- good achievement of additional qualifications
- effective monitoring of students' progress

Weaknesses

- some unsatisfactory teaching of key skills

37 The college offers a GNVQ intermediate course in leisure and tourism and advanced vocational certificates in leisure and recreation and travel and tourism. Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that there are excellent opportunities for students to obtain additional qualifications to strengthen their employment prospects. These include coaching and leadership awards, airline ticketing qualifications and language qualifications. Students can also combine their vocational studies with a GCE A level qualification in, for example, sports studies. There are good opportunities for students to progress to higher national diploma and degree programmes.

38 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that lessons are well planned and effectively taught. Of the 10 lessons observed, eight were good or outstanding. Thorough schemes of work are complemented by detailed lesson plans. Teachers use an appropriate

range of teaching methods to extend students' knowledge and skills. However, the teaching of some key skills does not take sufficient account of the different needs of individuals. In most lessons students work in a business-like manner and make good progress. Students are very enthusiastic about the work they do. For example, in one lesson students enjoyed the interesting and challenging experience of identifying the impact of an increase in visitor numbers on Dartmoor. They were given 10 ideas to evaluate, including for example, the effect of holding a car rally on Dartmoor forest trails. There was lively discussion as they summarised the positive and negative impact of such an event.

39 Teachers effectively use a variety of learning activities. For example, a quiz between two competing groups of students covered revision of geographical locations. In another lesson the enthusiasm of the teacher and the style of teaching captured students' interest and generated constructive discussions. Teachers make skilful use of questions and students' responses demonstrate good subject knowledge. Students on travel and tourism courses develop appropriate competences when working in the classroom and in the commercial college travel agency. Practical sports lessons for leisure students are well organised. Students work safely and competently and make full use of the sports facilities.

40 Achievement and retention rates on the GNVQ intermediate leisure and tourism programme are well above the national average. Achievement on the GNVQ advanced level programmes is also well above the national average with 100% of the students achieving the qualification in 2000. Students taking additional qualifications also achieve well. For example, in 2000 all students taking the tour operators' qualification and the basic swimming teachers' award achieved the qualification.

Curriculum Areas

41 Students on all courses have well-designed resource materials. Students take part in a good range of educational visits to local amenities. Visits are normally linked to the assessment tasks. Assessments are varied and interesting, and assessment criteria are clear. All teachers agree assessment policy and there is a good system to verify assessments before they are issued to students. Students' written work is of a good standard, although few students have good note-taking skills. Teachers' written comments on students' work are supportive and help them to make progress.

42 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that courses in leisure and tourism are well managed. Teachers work well together to analyse the quality of courses and the results are used to inform curriculum planning. Teachers know their students well and systematically review and record their progress. Close attention is paid to students' attendance and punctuality. Effective tutorial support is appreciated by the students. Strong links with

local schools and industry enable students to gain sports coaching qualifications and to obtain work experience and part-time employment. For example, students who wish to gain the swimming teachers' award work with a local primary school and in the summer holidays they run sports activities for the children.

43 Most lessons are held in appropriate, well-equipped classrooms. Practical sports lessons take place at another college site, in a nearby leisure centre and in the University of Plymouth's sports hall. Football, hockey and rugby pitches are within walking distance of the college. These resources are adequate for the sport and leisure courses. Computers with appropriate industrial standard software are well used by students. There is a good range of books and other learning resources in the library. Teachers are well qualified; the majority have teaching and assessor qualifications. Newly appointed teachers have good industrial experience.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in leisure and tourism, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
GNVQ intermediate leisure and tourism	2	Number of starters	22	26	22
		Retention (%)	86	84	91
		Achievement (%)	84	95	90
GNVQ advanced leisure and tourism and national diploma courses	3	Number of starters	21	38	48
		Retention (%)	75	78	75
		Achievement (%)	80	97	100

Source: ISR (1998 and 1999), college (2000)

Curriculum Areas

Childcare and Nursery Nursing

Grade 2

44 Inspectors observed 16 lessons in childcare, including local franchised provision. They broadly agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report and identified additional strengths and additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- much good teaching
- effective integration of work experience on all courses
- high achievement rates on the national diploma in childhood studies
- demanding and vocationally relevant assignments
- rigorous monitoring of students' progress

Weaknesses

- low achievement rates on NVQ courses
- insufficient opportunities to develop key skills in lessons

45 The college offers a wide range of courses in childcare at levels 2 and 3. The range of full-time and part-time programmes, including NVQs at levels 2 and 3, meets the needs of mature students. Short courses held in the community effectively widen participation in education. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the range of provision meets local needs.

46 There is much effective teaching. Of the 16 lessons observed, 10 were good or outstanding. In a few less effective lessons, teachers fail to ensure that students understand the work. The best lessons are well planned, with clear aims and objectives that are shared with the students.

Teachers draw on students' personal experiences in life and the workplace. For example, in a lesson to identify how nursery nurses might support the teaching of mathematics in the national curriculum, students worked as a group to identify the knowledge and skills required by the children. The teacher checked their understanding and sensitively challenged students to justify their choice of activities. Effective use of a short video gave students a useful opportunity to observe children learning mathematics. Students are highly motivated. Their progress is monitored rigorously by tutors. In addition, students are required to continually monitor their own progress and prepare action plans for improvement.

47 Achievement rates on the full-time courses are at, or above, the national average for the sector. Achievement on the BTEC national diploma in childhood studies has been above the national average for the last two years. The NVQ child education and care programmes have good retention rates but achievement rates are low because many students take too long to complete their programmes. Retention rates on the Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education (CACHE) diploma in nursery nursing and the BTEC national diploma in childhood studies were below the national average in the last two years. An extended induction period ensures that students follow appropriate courses and can transfer to alternative childcare courses if it is reasonable to do so. There is good progression within the college to higher level courses and to employment.

48 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that student handbooks are well planned and give detailed information about the year's assignments. Assignments are vocationally relevant and set at an appropriate level. They often require students to use learning from different parts of their course. For example, an assignment for childhood studies students, based on their work

Curriculum Areas

placements, required students to draw on work from three units to evaluate the policies and procedures applicable to a child's transition from home to school. Students supported their work with appropriate references to the role of the nursery nurse at this stage of a child's development. Assignments are fairly assessed and clear written feedback enables students to improve their work. There is an effective internal verification system for all courses. Schemes of work and lesson plans are detailed but lack a corporate style. Lesson plans fail to identify adequately opportunities for students to demonstrate key skills.

49 The self-assessment report identifies the college's strong links with employers. Annual employer forum meetings help to maintain good links and update employers on curriculum developments. A well-managed work

experience programme enables students to relate their lessons to practice in the workplace. Students work in a range of childcare settings, including the college nurseries. Courses are well managed; weekly team meetings include student representatives. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that well-qualified staff have a good range of relevant professional qualifications.

50 The range of books, journals and videotapes in the library meets the needs of childcare students. Useful additional resources are held in course base rooms. Good-quality handouts provide further material to assist research and learning, but there is little use of the Internet for research. Most accommodation is fit for its purpose, but some rooms used for activities with water are not located near enough to a water supply.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in childcare and nursery nursing, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
NVQ early years care and education	2	Number of starters	*	*	61
		Retention (%)	*	*	99
		Achievement (%)	*	*	32
Certificate in childcare and education	2	Number of starters	21	20	15
		Retention (%)	76	75	80
		Achievement (%)	69	93	75
CACHE diploma nursery nursing	3	Number of starters	40	64	62
		Retention (%)	73	67	60
		Achievement (%)	83	81	86
BTEC national diploma in childhood studies	3	Number of starters	20	21	22
		Retention (%)	75	76	55
		Achievement (%)	80	100	100
NVQ early years care and education	3	Number of starters	*	*	68
		Retention (%)	*	*	91
		Achievement (%)	*	*	32

Source: ISR (1998 and 1999), college (2000)

* data unreliable

Curriculum Areas

Access to Higher Education

Grade 2

51 Inspectors agreed with all but one of the main findings of the self-assessment report. Some weaknesses had already been addressed by the time of the inspection. The inspection covered access to higher education provision in the humanities and social sciences based at the college and at a local franchise centre. Inspectors observed 13 lessons.

Key strengths

- flexible timetable arrangements and modes of attendance
- effective teaching in many lessons
- good progression rates to higher education
- the high standard of students' work
- effective use of good-quality handouts

Weaknesses

- the restricted range of learning methods used in some lessons
- inadequate written records of students' progress
- unsatisfactory resources at the franchise centre

52 The college and its franchise partner in Estover offer access students a wide choice of humanities subjects. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that provision in both places responds to the needs of adult students by offering a variety of modes of attendance and timetable arrangements suited to the needs of individual students. Close links with local universities help access students to adapt to the demands of degree courses. There are insufficient curriculum links between the college and the franchise centre. Students based at the college are well supported by knowledgeable

administrative staff and their teachers.

Arrangements to support access students at the franchise centre are satisfactory.

53 Inspectors observed some very good teaching at both centres. In the best lessons, teachers give students a clear sense of direction. Students' interest is sustained by a variety of demanding activities. In a sociology lesson, students were presented with a variety of data on overhead transparencies from which they drew conclusions about the significance of social class. Teachers use well-devised handouts. For example, students of English gathered ideas on a task sheet in preparation for an assignment. As they watched an Alan Bennett monologue on video, they noted key words under headings. Further ideas were added during the subsequent group discussion. In some less effective lessons, teachers talk too much. They fail to provide a sufficiently varied range of activities appropriate to students with different levels of ability. In some lessons, teachers fail to make clear the learning objectives. In others, they pay too little attention to checking what students have learned. These weaknesses in teaching and learning are not acknowledged in the self-assessment report. Students' programmes include lessons in a range of study and key skills. However, insufficient use is made of IT in subject teaching. There are inadequate written records at the college to chart students' progress. Evidence is not properly recorded to demonstrate the award of grades.

54 Access students are well motivated. They speak with enthusiasm about the benefits of their course and the impact it is having on their lives. In lessons, they work purposefully in small groups and benefit from attentive listening to other students' views. They make good use of their experiences during lessons. In many cases, their apt observations demonstrate skills of analysis and evaluation. Students produce written work of an appropriate standard. Some project work is of high quality. Pass and retention rates for students on access courses

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generally exceed the national average, although there was some decline in 2000 compared with 1999. Access students are successful in gaining places in higher education. Progression rates are high. The majority of students choose to study at local institutions. Former students say they were well prepared for university because of the skills and standards they achieved on their access courses.

55 Most classrooms used by access students are spacious and well furnished. At the franchise centre they are poorly equipped. In one classroom, there is only a small flip chart.

Teachers at the franchise centre rely heavily on handouts because there is inadequate provision of audiovisual aids and library resources. There is no Internet access at the franchise centre. In the college library at the main Goschen centre, there is a good range of books, periodicals, videotapes and project material. Library staff work closely with teachers and access students to meet the students' needs. Students appreciate the individual support given by staff in the library and IT centre. However, the bookstock for a few humanities subjects is out of date.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in access to higher education, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
Access to higher education (humanities and social science)	3	Number of starters	*	140	139
		Retention (%)	*	81	74
		Achievement (%)	*	87	77

Source: ISR (1998 and 1999), college (2000)

* data unreliable

Curriculum Areas

Basic Skills

Grade 2

56 Inspectors observed 12 lessons including courses taught at the main sites, in the college's four neighbourhood colleges and at a franchise partner. They agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. However, the report did not evaluate the quality of all key skills provision below level 2.

Key strengths

- effective teaching and learning
- good use of volunteers and support staff
- careful monitoring of progress by students and tutors
- the widespread provision of courses at several locations in Plymouth

Weaknesses

- inadequate recording of students' achievements and progression at the end of some courses
- underdeveloped co-ordination between basic skills and key skills staff
- inappropriate and insufficiently precise primary learning goals for some students

57 Basic skills provision includes part-time literacy and numeracy courses, literacy and numeracy lessons which are taught as part of full-time or part-time vocational or academic courses, and individual support for students in their lessons or in one of the learning centres. The part-time basic skills courses are taught in the college's four neighbourhood colleges and in other community facilities. In addition, some courses are taught by a franchise partner. This range of venues in Plymouth provides good opportunities for adults to learn basic skills at a convenient location.

58 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that teaching for individual students is well planned. Each student on a part-time course has an initial interview and a learning programme is designed around the student's needs, learning style and goals. This learning programme is reviewed with the student at regular intervals. Students are also assessed to identify their basic skills support needs. The assessment methods are effective. The results are discussed with each student and a support programme is agreed. This includes identification of the students' primary learning goals. Some of these goals do not adequately reflect what students are learning. For example, one student's primary learning goal was 'to use metric measurement with confidence'. This did not reflect the broader numeracy skills the student was learning. These brief statements are not sufficient to enable teachers to assess whether the goal has been achieved by the end of the year.

59 Students' progress during their programmes is carefully monitored. Each student holds a file of completed work and a record sheet that identifies tasks completed. This is used to measure and review their progress. It also ensures that students feel responsible for monitoring their own development. Systems for recording students' final achievements and progression are underdeveloped and achievements are not all recorded on the college management information system. Destination information does not identify whether students on the discrete basic skills courses progress to other basic skills courses or other provision.

60 Teaching is effective and meets students' needs. In most lessons for students on the discrete part-time courses, students work at their own pace with individual programmes designed around their particular goals and needs. In many lessons, teachers ensure that there is a good mixture of group activities and individual work. Teachers are effective in

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teaching classes where there are students working at different levels on both their literacy and numeracy skills. Volunteers and support staff are well used to help students. Two mentors, with youth work and social service qualifications, support one group of young learners, who have been outside the education system for some time. Students improve their basic skills. Study has helped many students to develop self-confidence as well as new skills. Most students do not take an accredited qualification. Those who wish to do so may take a National Open College Network (NOCN) qualification. Some lessons take place in rooms

that have computers. However, in some of these lessons students focus on the development of their IT skills at the expense of their basic skills.

61 There are effective links with schools and community organisations. These help the college to plan provision across Plymouth and widen participation in education. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that, within the college, there is insufficient co-ordination of basic skills and key skills. Some full-time students are taught literacy and numeracy by both basic skills teachers and key skills teachers without an overall plan linking the two.

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Support for Students

Grade 1

62 The college carried out a detailed self-assessment of its support services for students. Inspectors agreed with the majority of the judgements in the self-assessment report. By the time of the inspection, action had been taken to address the weaknesses.

Key strengths

- highly regarded personal support for students
- full and balanced advice for students during recruitment
- effective learning support services
- thorough and effective induction
- good tutorial, personal and career planning advice
- well-used counselling, welfare and childcare services

Weaknesses

- poor recording of students' action-planning and targets in some cases

63 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that a high standard of support is provided for students. Questionnaire responses show high levels of satisfaction. Arrangements for supporting students are well co-ordinated by college managers using agreed policies and procedures. The quality of the service is closely monitored. Staff receive training, and are given comprehensive handbooks to encourage consistent practice.

64 The college offers full and balanced advice for prospective students during recruitment and enrolment to help them choose the right course. There is good liaison between the college, local schools, community organisations and

employers. Students and their parents are made aware of the college through an extensive range of open days and 'taster' days.

Application and admission arrangements are clear. Enquiries and applications are handled promptly. Students who are undecided about their future receive impartial pre-entry guidance from college careers officers. Prospective full-time students have detailed individual interviews with subject tutors. Regular contact is maintained after interview through newsletters and invitations to attend college events.

65 All students have a thorough induction to the college and their courses. Training in the use of the college library is particularly effective. The college has addressed a weakness identified in the self-assessment report and all students starting courses late or at intervals throughout the year now receive suitable induction. Handbooks issued to students set out their entitlements and responsibilities. Requests to transfer between courses are dealt with by a college careers officer. The college maintains good communication with parents and employers. Parents of 16 to 18 year olds receive termly progress reports and can meet tutors to discuss their children's progress.

66 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that learning support is a key strength. All students are entitled to learning support. Their needs are identified at interview. In addition, the literacy and numeracy skills of full-time students on foundation and intermediate courses are assessed at the start of their course. There is good liaison between personal tutors and support tutors. The majority of students identified as needing support receive the support they require. At the time of the inspection, over 400 students on a wide range of courses were receiving support, mainly from learning support tutors in lessons and in group or individual support lessons. In 1999-2000, few students who received such support withdrew early from the college.

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Support for students with specific learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well structured. They attend for one day a week during the year before they start their course. This enables staff to assess their needs and it helps the students to get used to the college. They are well supported by specialist staff and suitable equipment.

67 Tutorial support is good. All full-time and substantial part-time students have personal tutors who are readily available and provide excellent support. There is a clear tutorial framework for full-time students, which sets out the requirements for group and individual tutorials. Students undertake personal development and career planning modules. Minimum tutorial entitlements for part-time students are also defined. Inspectors observed tutorials in many curriculum areas and found much good practice. Attendance monitoring and reporting is strong. Inspectors agreed with the college that some of the recording of students' action plans and targets by tutors is less than adequate.

68 The college offers a well-developed programme of guidance for students who are considering higher education. There is a comprehensive range of resources in the careers library. Students receive good support with their university applications. Good support is also available for students seeking employment at the end of their course.

69 The counselling and welfare services available to students are well publicised, fully used and effective. They have good access to counsellors and other specialists. The welfare team provides a wide range of services relating to finance, transport and accommodation. Students speak well of these services. The students' union is active and well organised. Members work closely with senior managers to publicise and resolve issues raised.

70 The accommodation and facilities for childcare are very good. There are modern and well-equipped day nurseries at each of the main

sites. Altogether there are 90 places available and they are filled. Students' children, who have priority, take 90% of the places. There are after-school clubs at both sites for 46 children up to the age of 12 years. There are crèches at two of the neighbourhood colleges and a third is due to open in early 2001. Almost all the students' children are supported by access funds and the childcare costs their parents nothing.

General Resources

Grade 1

71 Inspectors agreed with the strengths identified in the report. Several weaknesses had been addressed by the time of the inspection. Detailed action plans show how other issues will be addressed.

Key strengths

- high-quality, well-maintained accommodation
- clear strategies to improve accommodation and learning resources
- extensive development of local centres to widen participation in the city and the rural community
- excellent libraries and learning centres
- good access to modern computers for students and staff
- effective reprographics service
- widespread use of students' work to brighten classrooms, workshops and public areas

Weaknesses

- less satisfactory accommodation at some centres in the community

72 The college provides an interesting and lively environment for staff and students. Accommodation and learning resources are of

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high quality. Reception areas are attractive and welcoming. College premises are clean and well looked after. There have been many improvements to the main sites since the last inspection. Access for students with restricted mobility has improved and is good. Students' work and commercial artwork is used to excellent effect in classrooms and public areas to brighten the college. The college operates food and flower shops, prominently located near to the reception area, to ensure that students see the benefits of their work. Some accommodation for students studying with franchise partners and at other centres in the community is not so good as that at the main sites, but most is satisfactory.

73 Accommodation developments are linked to the priorities identified in the strategic plan. Upgrading specialist resources, improving central facilities and improving access to computers and other learning resources are the central themes of the strategy. A survey by external consultants found that staff and students value the accommodation and facilities. Since the last inspection, new college centres, known as neighbourhood colleges, have been opened in the city centre and in localities where few students have previously chosen to enter further education. These centres offer local people the opportunity to improve their basic skills and qualifications. They are attractive places, well equipped with computers and some specialist facilities. They have proved popular with students.

74 Inspectors agreed with the college that libraries and learning centres on both main sites are well designed and well used by students. They contain a wide range of resources for learning. Good levels of library funding ensure that there is an adequate bookstock in most curriculum areas. There are six professionally qualified librarians each linked to one of the college departments. They attend departmental team meetings as appropriate and brief teachers on new

resources that are available. Surveys indicate that students are positive about the resources available to them in these centres.

75 Students and staff have good access to modern computers, a strength identified in the self-assessment report. Computers are available in 'drop-in' centres and in many classrooms and workshops. The college has invested heavily in hardware and software over the last three years. It has supported this investment with sensible policies to encourage the use of computers. For example, any student on a course of over 120 hours has to wordprocess at least one assignment in the first term. Staff appraisal tests the extent to which staff are effective in their use of computers. If necessary, staff development is provided. Each department has a member of staff known as an 'information and learning technology champion' who supports other teachers in the department and encourages them to improve their information and learning technology skills.

76 The reprographics service enables teachers to produce high-quality handouts and other materials to use in their teaching. A small team of graphic designers and technical staff offer a rapid and accurate service to teachers. Teachers can send materials on disc, paper or by electronic mail for design, presentation and reproduction. Of the work, 90% is completed and returned within 24 hours. There is an emergency service in the early morning to help teachers who are taking lessons at short notice. Inspectors agreed that materials used by teachers were of high quality.

77 The college identified the inadequacies in its sports facilities as a weakness. Inspectors did not agree because the college makes arrangements and provides transport for students to use sports facilities at other centres in the city. Development of college sports facilities has been delayed by lengthy negotiations with partners in the city. Plans are well advanced to build a sports hall at

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Kings Road when the current building programme has been completed. Recreational common room facilities at the Goschen centre are excellent. At Kings Road the common rooms are satisfactory.

78 The college implements policies and practices to minimise the impact of its activities on the environment. The transport policy reduces the number of cars used by staff. The college offers loans for the purchase of bicycles. A new 2,500 square metre building is due for completion in January 2001. It is described by the architects as an 'environmental exemplar building'. Numerous cost saving and energy efficient features are built into the design. 'Green materials' are used wherever possible, for example, solvent-free paint.

Quality Assurance

Grade 2

79 Inspectors agreed with the majority of the judgements in the self-assessment report. They identified additional strengths and one additional weakness.

Key strengths

- good integration of quality assurance with strategic and operational planning
- effective audit of compliance with quality assurance procedures
- thorough self-assessment process involving all staff and governors
- comprehensive and self-critical self-assessment report
- good lesson observation scheme
- effective collection, analysis and use of students' views
- effective staff appraisal and development

Weaknesses

- insufficient sharing of good practice identified in lesson observations
- underdeveloped quality assurance procedures at franchise centres

80 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that it has a comprehensive and well-developed quality assurance system. The clear policy and framework is fully understood by staff. The outcomes of annual quality assurance processes provide timely information for strategic and operational planning. Quality assurance procedures embrace all areas of the college's work. All curriculum and business support areas are required to produce self-assessment reports. However, inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that quality assurance at franchise partners is underdeveloped and that procedures are not fully implemented.

81 Quality assurance is well managed. A quality systems manager and quality assurance officers in each department effectively support the vice-principal for curriculum and quality. Senior managers, team leaders and curriculum and support teams review quality issues on a regular basis at team meetings. The college has good systems to support and audit quality assurance procedures. Eight departmental quality assurance officers audit programme management files and review course action plans in departments other than their own. They provide advice and assistance when needed. The academic board reviews underachieving courses. Fourteen courses were reviewed in the autumn term 2000. Reasons for review include poor retention and achievement rates and low achievement of value-added measures. At each review, remedial action is identified. Progress is monitored by the assistant principal for the area concerned and reported to the department's board of studies. Attendance is also closely monitored. The

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principalship receives monthly attendance and retention reports. These detailed reports include information on students' progress with assignments.

82 There is an annual cycle of course review and self-assessment. Each course team produces a detailed self-assessment report identifying strengths, weaknesses and actions. Assistant principals validate these reports. Most reports are of good quality. The findings are used to produce self-assessment reports for each curriculum area. The curriculum area reports are used to compile the college's self-assessment report. At each stage, judgements are made about students' attendance, retention and achievement. The use of targets is well developed and most course teams use them effectively. There has been an overall improvement in retention since the last inspection.

83 The college produced its second self-assessment report for the inspection. The self-assessment process was thorough. It involved all staff and governors and drew on a wide range of evidence. The report covers all areas of the college's activities. It had been updated before the inspection to indicate the progress made with action plans. The final report is comprehensive, accurate and self-critical. Inspectors agreed with the majority of judgements. They identified a few additional strengths and weaknesses. There was a close match between the grades awarded by the college and those awarded by inspectors. Inspectors agreed with all eight of the college grades for the curriculum areas inspected. They agreed with three of the five cross-college grades, and judged that the college had underestimated the grade in the other two areas.

84 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that it has a well-developed lesson observation scheme. In 1999-2000, a team of trained college staff carried out 285 graded lesson observations. The college rated 75% of

lessons as good or outstanding, compared with 68% by inspectors. The graded observations are supplemented by management observations and peer observations. All full-time and most part-time staff are observed twice a year. Although lesson observation benefits individuals, the good practice identified in the best lessons is not disseminated to staff across the college. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report. Lesson observation has recently been introduced at franchise centres. It is less well developed at these centres than in the college.

85 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that there is effective collection, analysis and use of students' views. There are two college surveys a year and each department carries out at least one additional survey. Responses are analysed in detail and results are disseminated to all curriculum and support teams. Issues identified in surveys are followed up. For example, timetable changes on some courses have contributed to improved retention. In mathematics, the order in which modules are taught was changed in response to feedback from students. The college also sends out a survey questionnaire to employers each year. There are appropriate charters covering all aspects of the college's work. They are reviewed annually and monitored continually. Most support areas have service standards as part of their charters and they evaluate their work regularly. Complaints are dealt with promptly and within the deadlines set in the charter.

86 Staff appraisal and development is well managed and effective. All full-time staff and most part-time staff are appraised annually. The staff development programme is linked to the college's strategic and operational objectives. Staff development needs are identified through self-assessment and staff appraisal. Staff are encouraged to achieve teaching qualifications, improve their professional qualifications and update their skills through industrial secondments.

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Governance

Grade 1

87 Inspectors and auditors agreed with the strengths identified in the college’s self-assessment report. They judged that the few weaknesses had been overstated and that action to address them had been effectively implemented.

Key strengths

- knowledgeable governors with an impressive range of expertise
- effective clerking and management of the board’s business
- governors’ informed involvement in strategic planning
- governors’ clear understanding of the respective roles of governors and managers
- the close scrutiny of college provision by the quality assurance committee
- the board’s rigorous monitoring of its performance
- the board’s explicit commitment to openness

Weaknesses

- there are no significant weaknesses

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

89 Since the last inspection, the corporation has introduced measures to further improve governance. The board’s strategic planning committee co-ordinates the monitoring of the

board’s performance. Comprehensive and detailed records of evidence support judgements in the board’s self-assessment report. At its termly meeting the board monitors its progress in addressing identified weaknesses. This process benefits from the advice of an experienced consultant. For the last six months, all meetings of the corporation and its committees have concluded with an assessment, against a set of performance indicators, of the contribution that the meeting has made to the work of the corporation and the college.

90 Governors possess a wide range of skills and demonstrate a sound knowledge of further education both locally and nationally, a strength recognised by self-assessment. At each corporation meeting, governors receive a presentation on important developments in the sector or in the college from senior managers, fellow governors, the clerk or external speakers. Governors are formally attached to curriculum areas. They are clear about the purpose of their attachment and are knowledgeable about their area’s work. Their knowledge is amply demonstrated through their full involvement in strategic planning, a strength recognised in the self-assessment report. The annual strategic planning weekend brings together governors and senior managers. Prior to the event, governors individually scrutinise sections of the plan, in consultation with the managers of the curriculum areas to which they are attached. During the weekend, they ensure that proposals are consistent with the college’s mission and are financially sound. As a result, the final version is based on informed discussion and rigorous analysis. The board formally approves the plan at its normal meeting and progress is subsequently monitored at each corporation meeting.

91 The board has recently reviewed its size and has determined a membership of 14. There are no vacancies. Four governors are female and there are staff and student members. Business governors are nominated by the

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Plymouth Chamber of Commerce and Industry; other governors are from the public services, education and training and voluntary work in the community. Through its effective search committee, the board phases governors' terms of office to ensure continuity and maintain an appropriate blend of skills. There is a good balance of experienced and new governors. Effective induction procedures involving the clerk, chair and principal help new governors to understand their role. All governors have individual meetings with the clerk, typically twice a year, to discuss the effectiveness of the board and to identify their training needs. The clerk makes arrangements for governors to attend relevant training events. Recently the board has introduced a procedure to ensure that information gained from these events is shared with all governors.

92 The corporation manages its business effectively and is well supported by the clerk. He is a member of the senior management team, but has a separate job description as clerk. There is a clear annual timetable of corporation and committee meetings. Additional meetings are scheduled as necessary. Agendas, papers and minutes are clear and concise. They fully support the transaction of corporation and committee business. The board has a code of conduct, a college-wide code of ethics, a 'whistleblowing' policy, standing orders and a register of interests that is updated annually. Details of corporation business are held in the college's reference library and their availability is publicised at reception. Inspectors agreed that the board's commitment to openness in its affairs is a strength.

93 The corporation has an appropriate and effective committee structure with terms of reference and standing orders for each committee. However, the terms of reference of some committees do not adequately specify the membership. Governors' experience and background are carefully matched to the committees, each of which is serviced by

appropriate senior managers. The finance committee closely monitors the financial position of the college. All governors receive the monthly financial report. This clear and concise document assists governors and managers in their respective roles. The chair of the finance committee reports key issues to the corporation.

94 The college established its quality committee prior to incorporation. Over the years, its terms of reference have been reviewed and developed. Its responsibilities include oversight of the college's self-assessment process, the college's quality assurance targets and strategies for improving the quality of provision. The committee also monitors management's responses to formal complaints. The recent establishment of a committee of student affairs has strengthened the monitoring of students' perceptions of the college. Inspectors agreed that the work of this committee is a strength.

95 The close working relationship between the principal, senior managers and governors is supportive, but challenging. The board has a well-established procedure for the appraisal of senior postholders.

Management

Grade 2

96 Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- strong and effective leadership
- good strategic and operational planning
- successful initiatives for widening participation
- good financial management
- good communications
- productive collaboration with a wide range of external organisations

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Weaknesses

- some ineffective curriculum management at department and course level
- unreliable achievement data relating to provision in the community

97 The college is successful in its mission to widen participation in education and meet local needs. Since the last inspection the college has opened several new local centres and developed many innovative programmes for people who may not otherwise have entered education. Student numbers have increased and the college has achieved its funding targets. Overall student retention and achievement rates have improved and are above the average for the sector, although inspectors identified some areas of less satisfactory retention and achievement.

98 There is strong and effective leadership by the principal and senior staff. Senior managers are demanding, but supportive. The principalship consists of the principal and five senior managers responsible for curriculum and quality, estates and law, finance and administration, human resources and marketing, respectively. Their responsibilities logically reflect the range of college activities. The college has a clear line management structure based on departmental principles. All teaching and business support staff are assigned to departments. Individuals understand their roles and the line management arrangements. Accountability is clear. The self-assessment report nevertheless identified inadequacies in the effectiveness of curriculum management in some areas. Inspectors agreed that although most curriculum areas are well managed, there is unsatisfactory practice in the planning and teaching of some programmes and insufficient sharing of good practice between departments.

99 The college has a well-developed strategic planning process. Staff and governors have contributed to a strategic plan that provides clear direction for the college. The planning

process makes good use of market research information from a variety of sources, including local labour market information and community contacts. Operational plans reflect the college's strategic and financial objectives and include targets for meeting them. Governors and managers carefully monitor the progress made against annual objectives. Explanations are required for any variances.

100 Communication in the college is good. There are appropriate opportunities for staff at all levels to participate in decision-making. Seminars and discussions are used to develop and disseminate the college values. Staff feel that the principal and senior managers respect their views and are responsive to them. Teaching and support staff teams have regular meetings with their line managers. There is a clear reporting structure in place to ensure that issues raised in meetings or with line managers are followed up. Staff receive an informative newsletter every week. This ensures that key information is widely disseminated.

101 There is a comprehensive range of clearly written college policies. College committees have clear terms of reference. A detailed policy has contributed to effective promotion of equal opportunities. All full-time staff have received equal opportunities training. The equal opportunities group produces an annual action plan and monitors progress towards its achievement. There are comprehensive health and safety policies. The health and safety committee meets regularly. Monitoring reports are produced for the academic board and the corporation.

102 Curriculum and support managers have direct access to management information. Many regular, useful reports are available, such as those on the attendance of individual students. Staff use the college intranet to view student data, college policies, and documents such as the staff handbook. Before the inspection the college identified inaccuracies in its students'

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achievements data. The ISR returns for 1998 and 1999 were resubmitted to the FEFC. As a result most achievement data used by inspectors were reliable. However, data relating to students attending at centres in the community were not accurate.

103 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is good. The college is in a sound financial position. There is an appropriately qualified and experienced finance team. Monthly management accounts are available within approximately 10 working days of the end of the month. These comprise detailed income and expenditure information, a balance sheet, a cashflow forecast for the following 12 months and a commentary. The accounts are considered at meetings of the principalship. The process for allocation of budgets is clear and closely linked to operational plans. The college's financial regulations and procedures are regularly updated. Neither the internal nor the external auditors have identified any significant internal control weaknesses. In the current year, the college forecasts that approximately 10% of college funds will be derived from local franchise arrangements. There is a well-developed strategy for franchising, and a contingency plan should franchise funding be withdrawn. The regular financial reports on franchised provision produced for governors do not fully comply with FEFC guidelines.

104 The college has productive partnerships with external organisations. External representatives and community partners speak highly of the college's responsiveness. The college plays an important role in a number of community projects designed to improve participation in education and training. The college is involved in many collaborative activities with local schools. It is a partner college of the University of Plymouth and many of the college's students progress to higher education. There are strong links with industry.

The college is a major provider of training for the local training and enterprise council (TEC). These strengths are recognised in the self-assessment report.

Conclusions

105 The college's self-assessment report was detailed, self-critical, accurate and clearly presented. It provided a good basis for planning and conducting the inspection. Useful information was set out in a clear introduction. The judgements it contained were supported by appropriate references to evidence. All sections contained detailed action plans. Many of the weaknesses identified in the report had been addressed by the time of the inspection. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses in the report. The grades awarded by the college for the eight curriculum areas selected for inspection were agreed by inspectors. Inspectors also agreed with three of the five cross-college grades. In two areas they judged that the area merited a higher grade than that awarded by the college in its self-assessment report.

106 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 (October 2000)

Age	%
Under 16	0
16-18 years	8
19-24 years	14
25+ years	77
Not known	1
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (October 2000)

Level of study	%
Level 1 (foundation) and entry level	35
Level 2 (intermediate)	28
Level 3 (advanced)	19
Level 4/5 (higher)	3
Level not specified	6
Non-schedule 2	9
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (October 2000)

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision (%)
Science	322	5,110	23
Agriculture	33	79	0
Construction	167	899	4
Engineering	316	1,515	8
Business	440	4,325	20
Hotel and catering	270	1,944	9
Health and community care	505	4,623	22
Art and design	163	269	2
Humanities	422	1,387	8
Basic education	86	808	4
Total	2,724	20,959	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1998-99 ISR data, the college recruited 31% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions' Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (November 2000)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	247	98	0	345
Supporting direct learning contact	35	2	0	37
Other support	283	0	4	287
Total	565	100	4	669

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1998	1999	2000
Income	£20,436,000	£21,793,000	£23,003,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	£15.87*	£16.20*	£16.75
Payroll as a proportion of income	59%	60%	60%
Achievement of funding target	102%	101%	96%
Diversity of income	32%	31%	30%
Operating surplus	-£36,000	-£273,000	£377,000

Sources: Income – Council Circular 00/10 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)

ALF – Funding Allocations 1997-98 (1998), Funding Allocations 1998-99 (1999), college (2000)

Payroll – Council Circular 00/10 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)

Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1997-98 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)

Diversity of income – Council Circular 00/10 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)

Operating surplus – Council Circular 00/10 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)

* provisional data

Students' achievements data

Level	Retention and pass	Students aged 16 to 18			Students aged 19 or over		
		1997	1998	1999	1997	1998	1999
1	Number of starters	1,093	836	815	3,710	3,363	4,111
	Retention (%)	82	83	86	98	95	97
	Achievement (%)	67	73	74	71	73	79
2	Number of starters	1,880	1,716	2,052	3,371	2,876	3,165
	Retention (%)	77	81	82	88	90	90
	Achievement (%)	69	71	72	77	72	71
3	Number of starters	928	899	1,011	2,181	2,427	2,569
	Retention (%)	72	75	76	83	85	86
	Achievement (%)	71	76	82	71	72	67
4 or 5	Number of starters	14	7	5	579	395	386
	Retention (%)	93	71	80	94	84	82
	Achievement (%)	58	100	100	71	81	54
Short courses	Number of starters	1,227	1,249	945	14,506	11,575	11,064
	Retention (%)	99	99	97	99	98	98
	Achievement (%)	92	95	88	95	92	88
Unknown/unclassified	Number of starters	1,210	1,280	1,244	832	1,201	1,244
	Retention (%)	86	89	90	92	91	93
	Achievement (%)	66	66	58	81	80	75

Source: ISR

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