

South Devon College

REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1999-00

THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL

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FUNDING COUNCIL***

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

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

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Grade Descriptors

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

Audit conclusions are expressed as good, adequate or weak.

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

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

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

Student Achievements

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

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

Summary

South Devon College

South West Region

Inspected May 2000

South Devon College is a large general further education college serving Torbay and the surrounding rural areas. The college offers a broad range of courses in all programme areas funded by the FEFC and has extensive franchised provision. Provision in seven programme areas was inspected together with basic skills and franchised provision. The self-assessment process involved governors and staff at all levels. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the report, but identified some significant weaknesses not noted by the college. They awarded a lower grade for one curriculum area and one cross-college area. They agreed with the other grades in the college's self-assessment report.

The college offers a good range of support to its full-time students, but support for part-time students is less effective. There are some good students' achievements, but in several curriculum areas there are low levels of retention and poor achievement. The college has introduced a wide range of actions to improve retention and achievement. Teaching and learning is effective in many areas. IT is used effectively in lessons in many subjects.

There have been improvements to the quality of the college's accommodation since the last inspection with the addition of good-quality learning centres. The college has for some time faced severe financial problems. Senior managers are working with the FEFC to address these problems and are implementing a recovery plan to secure the future of the college. Governors are committed to the college, but they have not been sufficiently rigorous in the oversight of the college's financial position or the college's performance. The quality assurance process is thorough but the college's data regarding retention and achievement of students are unreliable. This hampers the analysis of trends over time and limits the college's ability to judge the success of any changes it makes in teaching and learning. The college should address: low retention and achievement rates on some programmes; weaknesses in support for part-time students; the poor quality of much of its data regarding students' achievements and retention; weaknesses in financial forecasting; weaknesses in the management of some franchised provision; the insufficient oversight by the corporation of the college's financial position and performance; and the management of corporation business.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Computing and information technology	4	Support for students	3
Agriculture	3	General resources	3
Engineering	3	Quality assurance	3
Hospitality and catering	3	Governance	4
Health and social care	2	Management	3
Art and design	2		
Social science	3		
Basic skills	3		

The College and its Mission

1 South Devon College is a large general further education college serving urban communities in Torbay and the largely rural communities of the South Hams and Teignbridge. There is a population of approximately 320,000 in the area the college serves. The main college campus is in Torquay; an additional site in Paignton provides accommodation for specialist motor vehicle engineering courses. The college has a further seven centres in the community where the majority of the students are adults on information technology (IT) courses. Franchise partnerships are operated with a number of local providers, including some of the schools and community colleges. The college has significantly reduced its franchised work following changes in the Further Education Funding Council's (FEFC's) policy.

2 Within the college's catchment area there are 17 secondary schools. These include two single-sex grammar schools, a mixed grammar school, a bilateral school, eight 11 to 18 secondary schools, four 11 to 16 secondary schools and a joint Church of England/Roman Catholic school. Five of the schools have developed sixth forms since 1993. This has led to intense competition for school-leavers and a reduction in the number of full-time 16 to 18 year olds studying at the college. Relations with the schools have improved recently. The college works closely with some local schools, providing vocational options for key stage 4 students. According to information provided by Cornwall and Devon Careers for Torbay, 69% of year 11 pupils remained in post-16 education in 1999 and, of these, 25% went to a further education college. The nearest further education colleges are in Plymouth and Exeter.

3 In the area served by the college, there are a small number of large employers and many small and medium-sized enterprises and micro-businesses. Nearly 90% of the businesses in the college's catchment area employ fewer than 10

staff. Many local jobs rely on tourism and are subject to seasonal fluctuations in demand. Unemployment in Torbay is above the national and regional averages and worsens during the winter months. Over 84% of the working population are employed in service industries. Over 30% of Torbay's population are aged over 60. Minority ethnic groups comprise less than 1% of the population.

4 The college offers courses in all FEFC-funded programme areas. Courses range from foundation to higher national diploma level. The college is a partner college of the University of Plymouth and also has links with the universities of Exeter and Salford. The college provides programmes sponsored by the local training and enterprise council (TEC) and the Employment Service, through its subsidiary company, Dartington Tech. It actively supports a number of learning, economic and regeneration partnerships in the area. At the time of the inspection, the college had enrolled 14,284 students, of whom 2,418 were full time. Of the college's students 82% are aged over 19. In 1999-2000, 4% of students studied on higher education courses.

5 The principal was appointed in August 1997, the deputy principal in August 1999, the director of operations in 1995 and the director of finance and corporate planning in January 2000. Financial difficulties which were identified in 1997 resulted in a three-year recovery plan that was agreed with the FEFC. The college has had an extensive programme of franchised provision. Changes in national policy on franchising and the need to reduce reliance on income from franchised provision, contributed to financial difficulties in 1999-2000. This, combined with significant under-recruitment on core activities, has resulted in major restructuring and redundancies. The FEFC is assisting the college with a package of measures. At the time of the inspection, the college employed 462 full-time equivalent staff of whom 373 are involved in teaching and learning.

Context

6 The college mission was recast in 1999, following consultation with staff and external partners. The mission is 'to raise educational standards in South Devon by providing high-quality learning opportunities.'

The Inspection

7 The college was inspected during the week beginning 15 May 2000. The inspection team had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and had studied information about the college held by other directorates of the FEFC. Inspectors used data derived from the individualised student record (ISR) returns as a basis for their judgements relating to students' achievements for 1997, 1998 and 1999. Much of these data were found to be unreliable. It has not been possible to publish achievement data for engineering and social science. The college was notified in February 2000 of the sample of its provision to be inspected. The inspection was carried out by

14 inspectors and an auditor working for a total of 59 days in the college. Five inspectors also spent 19 days inspecting franchised provision. Inspectors observed 116 lessons. They also examined students' work and college documents. There were discussions with governors, managers, staff, students and partner organisations.

8 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1998-99. Of the lessons inspected, 61% were judged to be good or outstanding and 5% were rated as less than satisfactory. This compares with the national averages of 65% and 6%, respectively.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	0	4	1	0	0	5
GNVQ	2	9	4	2	0	17
NVQ	6	12	7	0	0	25
Higher education access	0	2	1	0	0	3
Other vocational	7	16	15	3	0	41
Other	1	11	12	1	0	25
Total (No)	16	54	40	6	0	116
Total (%)	14	47	34	5	0	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1998-99 (%)	20	45	29	6	0	100

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

*includes basic skills

Context

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

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
South Devon College	8.5	73
National average, all inspected colleges 1998-99	11.2	78

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

Curriculum Areas

Computing and Information Technology

Grade 4

10 Inspectors observed 17 lessons and agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. Some of the strengths in students' achievements were overstated.

Key strengths

- wide range of courses with flexible arrangements to suit students' needs
- good monitoring of individual students' progress
- above average achievement on computer literacy and information technology courses
- good IT equipment and software on mainstream courses

Weaknesses

- very poor general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) achievements
- low retention on some franchised courses
- low attendance on some courses
- insufficient checks on learning in some lessons
- less than satisfactory management of GNVQ provision
- insufficient staff development

11 A wide range of courses and qualifications is offered in this curriculum area. These include the general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) in computing, GNVQs in IT at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels and a computer literacy and information technology course. The college also offers courses at six of its centres in Devon and through franchise arrangements at other centres at some distance from the main site.

12 Most courses are well managed. Course files across different subjects are effectively kept to the same format. Annual quality review meetings and regular course team meetings produce realistic action plans and targets for the following year. However, the management of the GNVQ IT courses is inadequate. Action plans designed to counter consistently poor achievements were ineffective and were not monitored with sufficient rigour. The attendance rates on a GNVQ IT course piloted this year are very poor. The current course manager is addressing the problems by concentrating on improving attendance. Inspectors agreed that there is insufficient staff development and that it is not properly linked to the issues identified by the college in its self-assessment report.

13 Most courses are well designed and enable students to work on their own, for example, on the computer literacy and information technology courses. Students are provided with good paper or disk-based worksheets to allow them to progress at their own pace. Qualified tutors are always nearby to assist students with problems. This style of learning benefits most students, but some students do not receive enough help or encouragement.

14 Teaching and learning is mostly satisfactory or good. In the weaker lessons there are insufficient checks made by the tutor on the progress of the students. Sometimes a new topic is begun before students have fully understood the previous one, making progress in the new topic difficult. In a minority of lessons, some students were completely out of their depth and gained very little. In the better lessons teachers encourage students to take part in lively question and answer sessions. Some teachers make good use of printed handouts. For GNVQ courses, there are learning resources posted on the college's intranet. Students' written work from this year's GNVQ IT courses shows that students have used the Internet to research topics for their portfolio. Individual

Curriculum Areas

students' progress is carefully monitored and those deemed at risk of leaving their course are referred to the advice and guidance tutors or the learning support team, as appropriate.

15 The college has acknowledged in the self-assessment report that a significant number of courses have poor achievements. The pass rates and retention rates for GNVQ intermediate and advanced IT courses have been extremely poor for the last three years. The highest pass rate for the intermediate course has been 28% and in 1999 no students passed. The retention and attendance rates are poor on some of the franchised courses. Pass rates for students taking the computer literacy and information technology courses are good at 74% compared with a national average of 58%. A significant number of students leave the course after completing it without taking the examination.

16 Students have access to modern computers and software on the main site and at the local centres in the community. Most are linked to the college intranet and the worldwide web. There is a good range of software available for the courses on offer. All computers have up-to-date software applications for the computer literacy and information technology and other courses. There are higher specification programming languages installed on a few of the machines. Some of the computer hardware and software at the sites where the college has franchise arrangements are inadequate. The rooms and furniture used by students on computing and IT courses are generally good. Teachers are appropriately qualified for the subject they teach.

Curriculum Areas

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
Computer literacy and information technology	1	Number of starters	*	*	1,770
		Retention (%)	*	*	79
		Achievement (%)	*	*	74
C&G 7261	1	Number of starters	*	*	338
		Retention (%)	*	*	74
		Achievement (%)	*	*	*
NVQ	2	Number of starters	*	*	95
		Retention (%)	*	*	33
		Achievement (%)	*	*	69
GNVQ Intermediate IT	2	Number of starters	16	20	17
		Retention (%)	56	80	61
		Achievement (%)	28	18	0
C&G 7261	2	Number of starters	*	*	98
		Retention (%)	*	*	74
		Achievement (%)	*	*	*
GNVQ advanced IT	3	Number of starters	*	34	28
		Retention (%)	*	35	46
		Achievement (%)	*	29	15
GCE A level computing	3	Number of starters	18	13	9
		Retention (%)	89	69	67
		Achievement (%)	50	67	67

Source: ISR

*data unreliable

Curriculum Areas

Agriculture

Grade 3

17 Inspectors observed 12 lessons covering the animal care provision and horticulture. They agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report, but identified some additional weaknesses. By the time of the inspection, action had been taken to address some of the weaknesses identified.

Key strengths

- good practical teaching in horticulture
- good use of assignments for animal care students
- high retention rates on most courses
- effective learning support

Weaknesses

- insufficient work-based assessment on national vocational qualification (NVQ) courses
- low achievement on NVQ courses in 1998-99
- inadequate number and range of animals to support animal care provision
- the lack of detail in schemes of work
- some poorly structured theory teaching

18 Provision in this curriculum area includes NVQ levels 1 and 2 and a first diploma in animal care. Foundation level courses have recently been introduced in animal care and horticulture. The horticulture provision is taught in partnership with the Four Seasons Training Centre which is part of Torbay Social Services industrial services for the disabled. The Four Seasons Training Centre also provide a franchised NVQ level 1 in amenity horticulture. The regional centre for organic horticulture which is part of Dartington Tech runs franchised full-time NVQ level 1, 2 and 3 courses in commercial horticulture.

19 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the animal care courses are organised on a flexible basis to allow the students to undertake additional studies. These include general certificate of secondary education (GCSE), computer literacy and information technology and first aid. They all include work experience that is well organised for the NVQ students, but less well structured for the first diploma students. Course review at the college and at the regional centre for organic horticulture is well structured and incorporates regular student input and the use of information gained from surveys of students' views. There is no industrial input into course reviews or any advisory committee at any of the centres. Schemes of work lack detail and comprise little more than a list of topics.

20 The self-assessment report failed to identify that some of the theoretical teaching is poorly structured. Students spend too much time copying down notes. Teachers make few checks on students' learning. The horticultural practical teaching is of a good standard and based on real commercial and amenity facilities. The teaching of practical skills to the animal care students is hampered by the inadequate number and range of animals available. Little use is made of visits to outside establishments to compensate for this deficiency. Good use is made of assignments particularly for the animal care students. Assignment briefs are comprehensive and students receive detailed feedback on the standard of their work. A few portfolios for the NVQ courses are based on extensive evidence collected from the workplace and are of a high standard, but the majority depend heavily on evidence gathered from the centre at which teaching takes place. The lack of work-based evidence is particularly significant in animal care. The short duration of the commercial horticulture courses allows insufficient time for students to become fully competent over a growing season. Informal tutorial support is highly valued by the students at all the centres. Staff are responsive to

Curriculum Areas

students' requests for help. There are insufficient individual tutorials on some courses.

21 Retention rates are good on most of the courses and have improved over the last three years on the first diploma in animal care course to above the national average. Achievement rates on the NVQ courses in commercial horticulture and animal care were well below the national averages in 1999. Destination data are limited for the franchised provision, but they show that the college has had some success, albeit limited, in enabling unemployed adults to find employment.

22 As stated in the self-assessment report, the animal house is small and contains a limited number and range of animals. The building is

too small to accommodate groups of students involved in practical work or to provide adequate exercise areas for the larger animals. There is no access for students with restricted mobility. The Four Seasons Training Centre provision has adequate land and growing facilities, but toilet facilities are inadequate, there is no overhead projector or photocopier, and the mower and rotovator are inoperative owing to age and poor maintenance. The regional centre for organic horticulture is in the process of upgrading its facilities and operates a commercial scale organic vegetable production unit. All staff have relevant vocational experience. Good opportunities exist at all centres for ongoing staff development.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
NVQ commercial horticulture	1	Number of starters	*	2	20
		Retention (%)	*	100	95
		Achievement (%)	*	100	67
First diploma in animal care	2	Number of starters	17	20	15
		Retention (%)	71	85	93
		Achievement (%)	83	76	83
NVQ caring for animals	2	Number of starters	*	19	15
		Retention (%)	*	84	80
		Achievement (%)	*	75	42

Source: ISR

*course not running

Curriculum Areas

Engineering

Grade 3

23 Inspectors observed 17 lessons, covering electrical/electronic, mechanical and motor vehicle programmes. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report.

However, the report made little reference to the substantial off-site franchised provision. The data used for identifying strengths and weaknesses in students' achievements and retention were considered to be inaccurate.

Key strengths

- good achievement rates on first and national diploma motor vehicle courses
- flexible support for NVQ candidates on franchised programmes
- good use of project work
- well-developed links with industry
- good electronic and motor vehicle facilities

Weaknesses

- inaccurate retention and achievement data
- declining retention rates on several courses
- poor achievement rates on some courses
- failure of some teachers to consolidate learning in lessons
- the lack of detail in schemes of work

24 The college offers a broad range of craft and technician level courses with clear progression opportunities through to higher education. The general trend of decreasing full-time student numbers and increasing part-time students, and responsiveness to the needs of local industry, has resulted in some curriculum change. A foundation level motor vehicle course has been introduced both as a feeder for, and to

improve retention on, a first diploma course. Specialist training courses are regularly run and the developing provision of work-based assessment further improves industrial links. Franchised programmes have represented a significant element in engineering, although this is now being substantially reduced. There are developing links with schools in some areas and Saturday electronics courses are run to stimulate the interest of both adults and young people. Although industrial liaison committees no longer operate, the engineering centre enjoys close links with a major local telecommunications company as well as with a range of other industrial contacts.

25 Teaching and learning are satisfactory or better. However, several lessons observed lacked structure and teachers failed to check and consolidate students' learning. Most teachers had a good rapport with students. In a lesson on engine compression ignition, an interactive and challenging session was immediately followed by practical work using test equipment which consolidated what students had learned. Practical project work is used to good effect. For example, students in the engineering workshop are developing their machining, fabrication and welding skills through the manufacture of real components in the construction of a small car.

26 Schemes of work lacked detail, a weakness not identified in the self-assessment report. The requirement in the college key skills policy for the identification of key skill opportunities in schemes of work was not observed. The self-assessment report refers to the further development of key skills for work-based trainees and this has been given a particular focus in the motor vehicle and welding areas. Course files are generally well maintained and comprehensive. Assignment briefs and other handouts are of an appropriate standard and have clear grading criteria. The tutorial support for full-time students was considered to be good and there is flexible support for NVQ candidates

Curriculum Areas

on franchised programmes. Some students produce good standards of practical and assignment work. Feedback from teachers was helpful, but spelling mistakes and other grammatical errors were not always corrected.

27 Course management has been hampered by unreliable data. Inspectors have been unable to produce a students' achievements table because of anomalies in the data. Achievement rates on the first and national diploma motor vehicle courses have been at, or significantly above, the national average. There have been poor achievements in the national certificate programmes in electrical/electronic and mechanical engineering. Retention has declined on four courses over a three-year period. Staff have recognised that retention is a problem and have introduced regular checks on attendance and retention. Recent evidence indicates an improvement in retention for the current first diploma in motor vehicles programme.

28 As reflected in the self-assessment report, there are modern specialist facilities to support teaching across the electronic and motor vehicle areas. Computer-based training facilities have been introduced recently, but will need further development to achieve their full potential. The motor vehicle facility is located on an industrial estate some 8 miles from the main college site and contains an impressive range of modern equipment. Many of the general teaching areas are bright and welcoming, although better use could be made of vocationally relevant artwork.

Curriculum Areas

Hospitality and Catering

Grade 3

29 Inspectors observed 12 lessons in hospitality and catering. The self-assessment report was comprehensive and detailed. Inspectors agreed with the main strengths and weaknesses identified in the report.

Key strengths

- well-organised teaching programmes
- good progression routes
- effective workplace assessment for NVQ students
- high level of achievement for NVQ level 3

Weaknesses

- poor retention on GNVQ programmes
- very poor achievement on the GNVQ advanced programme in 1999
- poor level of attendance
- inadequate resources for accommodation studies

30 The college offers courses in hospitality and catering, ranging from foundation to advanced level and including NVQ at levels 1, 2 and 3 in food preparation and service and GNVQ at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels. The college also offers a range of higher education programmes. Programmes are well managed and structured to allow students to progress from one level to another and also to enable them to achieve additional qualifications. Other qualifications include the hotel and catering institutional management professional certificate, wine and spirit educational trust certificate and food hygiene. The introduction of cake decoration and vegetarian and wholefood cookery programmes in 1999 as a response to market needs, has attracted a wider group of students. A GNVQ foundation programme for year 10 pupils is provided in conjunction with a

local community college. Links are firmly established with industry and the college is represented on the local hotel and caterers association.

31 Teachers use a variety of appropriate teaching methods and there is a good balance of practical and theoretical work. They make good use of demonstrations to introduce new processes and to reinforce students' previous learning. Teaching programmes are well organised. Regular meetings of teaching teams review organisation and content. These are recorded and actions taken to address issues when they are identified. Some schemes of work are detailed and set out units and elements, while others are no more than a list of topics. Lesson plans clearly state learning outcomes and teachers explain objectives at the start of lessons and make regular checks on students' learning. Students evaluate their own performance at the end of practical sessions and develop a self-critical approach.

32 Students discuss with teachers when their assessments should take place. Teachers, as stated in the self-assessment report, undertake assessment in the workplace for part-time students. Most students' written work is of a good standard. Teachers provide written responses on their level of achievement and indicate, where appropriate, how their performance may be improved. Some students make good use of IT when producing assignments and classwork. Photographs are taken of students' practical work and used as a means of recording their achievements. Students are regularly informed of their progress.

33 There has been 100% achievement in the NVQ level 3 programme for both 1998 and 1999. Both GNVQ foundation and advanced programmes have shown a decline in recruitment. On the foundation programme retention is poor, although achievement has been good. For the GNVQ advanced programme, both retention and achievement

Curriculum Areas

rates have been poor and are below the national average. In 1999, no students achieved the GNVQ in hospitality and catering. Retention on GNVQ programmes has improved during the current year to 88%. Attendance during the inspection, at 66%, was poor when compared with a national average of 79% for this programme area.

34 Students' practical work is of a good standard. Students are encouraged to enter national competitions, including the Watson and Phillip national cookery competition. On several occasions during the year students undertake a variety of work experience, including work at Buckingham Palace and Windsor Castle. This was recognised in the self-assessment report. The destinations of students are monitored and

well recorded by the college. Of the completing NVQ level 3 students in 1999, 82% gained employment.

35 Teachers possess good industrial experience, up-to-date knowledge and are appropriately qualified. There is a good range of resources in the practical areas, although some are old and do not fully reflect current industrial standards. A learning centre in the department containing computers and learning materials is well used and valued by the students. A good range of books is available in the learning centre, but some are old and out of date. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that resources for accommodation and reception studies are of a poor quality.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GNVQ foundation hospitality and catering	1	Number of starters	30	32	27
		Retention (%)	70	69	58
		Achievement (%)	76	72	75
NVQ catering and hospitality – food preparation and cooking	1	Number of starters	46	59	53
		Retention (%)	57	64	75
		Achievement (%)	77	100	86
NVQ catering and hospitality – food preparation and cooking	2	Number of starters	37	28	22
		Retention (%)	62	79	86
		Achievement (%)	61	100	100
NVQ catering and hospitality – serving food and drink table	2	Number of starters	18	21	*
		Retention (%)	94	95	*
		Achievement (%)	41	100	*
NVQ catering and hospitality – kitchen and larder	3	Number of starters	*	7	12
		Retention (%)	*	100	67
		Achievement (%)	*	100	100
GNVQ hospitality and catering	3	Number of starters	*	27	8
		Retention (%)	*	48	43
		Achievement (%)	*	73	0

Source: ISR

*data unreliable

Curriculum Areas

Health and Social Care

Grade 2

36 Inspectors observed 15 lessons in social care and childcare. Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report, but identified an additional weakness.

Key strengths

- high achievement rates
- effective support for students
- good integration of work experience on all courses
- well-managed provision
- wide range of provision

Weaknesses

- declining retention rates on some courses
- declining achievement on BTEC national diploma in childhood studies
- small range of current textbooks to support research-based learning

37 The college offers a broad range of courses from foundation level to level 4. These include GNVQ foundation, intermediate and advanced diplomas in health and social care, the BTEC national diploma in childhood studies, and the Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education (CACHE) diploma in nursery nursing. A range of short courses is offered in the community to meet the needs of adults and there are higher national certificates in care and early childhood studies. The provision provides clear progression routes for all students.

38 The teaching was satisfactory or better. In the best lessons, students were given a range of challenging vocationally relevant activities. Individual learning was regularly checked. For example, in a GNVQ foundation health and social care lesson, the teacher used a question

and answer session effectively to check learning. A multiple choice question paper was used to ensure that students understood the work. In some less effective lessons, teachers did not provide sufficiently demanding work or check regularly students' understanding of it.

39 Each course has a detailed and informative handbook which students value. A comprehensive induction programme includes tests to determine students' individual ability to cope with the level of study and appropriate support is given. An attempt to determine the best methods of teaching to ensure learning on the foundation health and social care course has led to an improvement in student retention and achievement. Courses are well organised. Teachers monitor the quality of provision by obtaining formal and informal feedback from students and workplace providers. All students receive regular tutorials. These are used to monitor attendance and progress. Tutors negotiate an action plan to be reviewed at the next meeting. Course teams effectively use findings from student evaluation to plan better provision to meet the learning needs of the students.

40 There are good achievement rates on many courses. Of these, 86% have an achievement rate at, or above, the national average for the programme area. In 1999, achievement on the NVQ level 3 in care was significantly above the national average, at 75%. Students' achievements on the GNVQ foundation health and social care course at 90% in 1999 were also significantly above the national average. Students' achievements on GNVQ advanced in health and social care courses have gradually improved to the national average over the last three years. Retention and achievement on the BTEC national diploma in childhood studies has declined to below the national average in 1999. Retention on NVQ level 3 in care has declined over the last three years as demands on staff in the private sector make it difficult for them to find the necessary time to study. Achievement

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on the same course has seen significant improvement over the same period. Some courses have a clearly defined assessment schedule enabling students to manage their time effectively. Assignments take account of students' abilities. Assignment guidance is clear and ensures that students are confident about the work they are asked to complete. As stated in the self-assessment report students make effective use of well-planned work experience in lessons and assignments. Classwork and assignments are fairly assessed. Written feedback from teachers gives clear guidance for improvement.

41 Work placements are effectively co-ordinated by a work placement officer. A comprehensive work placement handbook clearly identifies the role and responsibilities of the workplace supervisor. Students collect

evidence for their assignments and key skills development from the activities they negotiate at placement. They are well supported during the placement. The views of work placement supervisors are sought during the visit of the work placement officer and through formal feedback from each student. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that work placement experience on childcare courses is a strength.

42 There is a range of specialist rooms that are fit for purpose and include a well-equipped room for practical care activities. A learning centre for health and care students has a teaching area, 18 computers and six printers all linked to the Internet. A weakness identified by inspectors was the small range of current textbooks, many of which are dated.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GNVQ foundation health and social care	1	Number of starters	18	20	13
		Retention (%)	78	75	77
		Achievement (%)	57	67	90
GNVQ intermediate health and social care	2	Number of starters	25	23	24
		Retention (%)	84	52	83
		Achievement (%)	76	92	70
GNVQ advanced health and social care	3	Number of starters	20	30	26
		Retention (%)	90	63	50
		Achievement (%)	39	58	69
BTEC national diploma childhood studies	3	Number of starters	16	26	14
		Retention (%)	100	88	66
		Achievement (%)	88	83	77
CACHE diploma in nursery nursing	3	Number of starters	27	33	24
		Retention (%)	100	70	67
		Achievement (%)	85	91	88
NVQ care	3	Number of starters	35	39	18
		Retention (%)	100	96	44
		Achievement (%)	*	*	*

Source: ISR

*data unreliable

Curriculum Areas

Art and Design

Grade 2

43 Inspectors observed 15 lessons and broadly agreed with the main strengths and weaknesses noted in the self-assessment report. They identified an additional weakness.

Key strengths

- effective and challenging teaching
- thorough assessment
- good achievement rates on all full-time courses
- outstanding quality of much student work on diagnostic courses
- good progression of students to higher education courses

Weaknesses

- lack of differentiation in the teaching of level 2 and 3 students
- low retention rates on many full-time courses
- poor student drawing skills on the graphic design course

44 A good range of courses is offered in this area, including GNVQ intermediate and advanced, national diplomas in design, GCE A levels and craft-based part-time courses. Progression opportunities have been increased by the recent addition of higher national diploma courses in interior design and integrated crafts. Unusually, the college runs a two-year GNVQ advanced art and design diagnostic course alongside a similar diploma in general art and design course. The staff recognise the need to rationalise these courses and in line with national policy are phasing out the general art and design course. The focus of the full-time courses is to prepare students for progression to higher education art and design courses. The school has been very successful in

this with 82% of students completing their courses in 1999 progressing to higher education.

45 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that the teaching and learning is of a high standard. Staff support students' work by studio-based one-to-one teaching and regular and thorough assessment. Students comment favourably on the regular support and approachability of the staff. The teaching is challenging and students are increasingly independent in their work. The work is very diverse in its style and range of media. Foundation students were working on the concept of boundaries and their development of this included work in photography, video, painting and theatre design. There is some outstanding students' work on the diagnostic courses. The range of ideas being used is sophisticated and students' work is well researched. Students make good references to contemporary artists and designers and are able to talk intelligently about the context of their work. On the specialist design courses the work is professional and well presented with students developing appropriate skills. In graphic design the work is limited by the students' lack of drawing skills. They are not developing their drawing through regular use of sketchbooks. Because of the small numbers involved on the GNVQ programmes, intermediate and advanced students are taught together. A weakness not identified by the college is the lack of differentiation in the teaching of intermediate and advanced students. The practical work in studios is complemented by organised trips to galleries in places such as St Ives, London, Paris and Prague.

46 All students completing the full-time vocational courses in 1999 gained the qualification. This is a pass rate well above national averages. Retention rates on the pre-degree foundation course and the GNVQ advanced course are also above the national average. However, retention rates on the GNVQ

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intermediate and the interior and graphic design courses were below national averages. The problems of poor retention continues on the current courses with retention on year two of the general art and design course at 54%. The assignments used on full-time courses are well designed. The assessment criteria and common skills are identified on the written briefs. The assessment of students' work is detailed with appropriate written and verbal feedback. The students' written work for contextual studies is of a good standard. A second-year graphic student won the design competition for the livery of a local hospital hopper bus service.

47 The school of art is housed in a purpose-built building. The studios are well managed by the staff and team of technicians. The range of facilities is good. However, the specialist computer graphics machines are few in number and capacity and there is a lack of up-to-date software for design. The library bookstock is dated with a lack of contemporary references. There is no specialist drawing studio and there are few opportunities for large-scale drawing and life drawing. Teachers are well qualified and bring a professional and industrial relevance to their teaching.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GNVQ intermediate art and design	2	Number of starters	15	17	*
		Retention (%)	60	76	*
		Achievement (%)	89	100	*
Pre-degree foundation studies art and design	3	Number of starters	27	26	23
		Retention (%)	89	85	96
		Achievement (%)	100	100	100
BTEC diploma general art and design	3	Number of starters	19	20	21
		Retention (%)	100	100	100
		Achievement (%)	100	*	100
BTEC national diploma graphic design	3	Number of starters	22	21	21
		Retention (%)	95	67	60
		Achievement (%)	90	*	100
BTEC national diploma interior design	3	Number of starters	8	11	12
		Retention (%)	75	73	45
		Achievement (%)	100	100	100
GNVQ advanced art and design	3	Number of starters	13	14	13
		Retention (%)	100	79	77
		Achievement (%)	92	*	*

Source: ISR

*data unreliable

Curriculum Areas

Social Science

Grade 3

48 Inspectors observed 13 lessons in psychology, sociology, counselling and education. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report, but identified additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- a good range of courses
- high-quality teaching on education courses
- well-prepared course materials
- innovative and effective use of IT
- good progression to higher education from the access to higher education course

Weaknesses

- some poor retention and pass rates
- insufficient attention to students' learning needs in some lessons
- learning impaired by noise in some open learning areas
- declining progression to higher education from GCE A level courses
- adverse effect of poor data on course evaluation

49 There is an extensive and developing range of courses in education and counselling which provides good opportunities for students to study at different levels. Courses in psychology and sociology are offered at GCSE and GCE A level and advanced supplementary (AS) and on an access to higher education programme. Courses are generally well managed. Targets are set and monitored for attendance, retention and pass rates, and systematic action is taken to improve quality and standards. Students' opinion is obtained by various means including mid-course surveys. The results have enabled

teachers to make prompt changes to courses. The evaluation of the success of courses is hindered by weaknesses in data on student enrolment, retention and achievement.

50 Attendance has improved since the self-assessment report was produced and at 84% was above the national average. Most teaching is good and is of a high quality on education courses, but there are some weaknesses which were not identified in the self-assessment report. Teachers explain their subjects clearly, and make good use of handouts and other materials to reinforce students' learning. Occasionally, the teacher's exposition lacks clarity, covers too much ground or is too long, and there is too much reliance on students taking notes. When students are required to undertake practical activities, such as obtaining relevant information from books, periodicals or computers, they receive clear directions and effective individual help from teachers. Students benefit from good opportunities to practise their skills and develop their knowledge. In some lessons there is insufficient opportunity for oral work. In lessons on the counselling and education courses, teachers make good use of students' relevant experience at work. In some lessons, teachers give insufficient attention to individuals' learning needs. In a few lessons teachers fail to check adequately that students are learning. Written course materials are well prepared and of high quality. Innovative and effective use is made of computers.

51 Inspectors have been unable to produce a students' achievements table due to anomalies in the data. Overall, the available data indicate that students' retention and achievements are close to national averages. However, inspectors agreed that there have been some poor retention and pass rates. On GCE A level courses, pass rates have declined in sociology to below national averages, but are generally above average in psychology. Students who successfully complete the access to higher education course progress well to higher

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education. Enrolments on GCSE, GCE AS and GCE A level courses have substantially declined in the last three years, but have increased on other courses. The proportion of students successfully completing GCE A level courses in psychology and sociology and proceeding to higher education declined from 49% in 1997 to 28% in 1999. Students achieve a good standard of IT skills on education, sociology and psychology courses. There is work of a good standard in all subjects. Students' written work is carefully marked and promptly returned, and teachers give clear guidance to them on how it might be improved.

52 Inspectors agreed that teachers are well qualified for their work and take part in a good range of relevant staff development and other professional activities. There is a good supply of written course materials, including material obtained from electronic databases. The stock of books and periodicals is adequate, overall. Access to library stock for part-time students is limited. Some weaknesses in accommodation acknowledged by the college have been overcome by the provision of new accommodation for psychology and sociology. Some lessons take place in open learning areas. Learning in some of these areas is impaired by noise from adjacent lessons or from the nearby use of machines such as photocopiers. However, the availability in the learning areas of books and other materials, and of access to computers, benefits students' learning.

Curriculum Areas

Basic Skills

Grade 3

53 Inspectors observed 15 lessons, including courses taught by partners in the community. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. The quality of partnership provision was not addressed in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- good use of vocationally relevant materials
- good understanding of individual needs of students
- good progress of students in basic skills
- good range of basic skills support for students

Weaknesses

- insufficient basic skills courses to meet local needs
- inadequate analysis of students' retention and achievements
- lack of co-ordination of basic skills provision
- poor student attendance in some lessons
- inadequate staff development

54 There is a good range of basic skills support for students across many parts of the college. Basic skills provision includes part-time literacy and numeracy courses, eight of which are taught by partner organisations in the community around Torbay, literacy and numeracy lessons that are part of full-time or part-time vocational or academic courses and individually arranged support for students which is either given in lessons or in the English and mathematics learning centre.

55 The co-ordination of basic skills support is underdeveloped. Courses and support are co-ordinated by the recently appointed learning support manager. There are insufficient basic skills courses to meet local need. A forum linked to the Torbay Lifelong Learning Partnership has begun to provide a framework for discussions about this. A similar forum for staff within the college is being set up to co-ordinate work internally.

56 Most teachers have a good understanding of the individual learning needs of students in college-based programmes, based on initial assessment. There is less evidence of early assessment of need in the community provision. Most full-time further education students are assessed at the start of their course to identify literacy and numeracy support needs. A record of individual support is kept and reviewed regularly by teachers and students. On some entry level and level 1 courses specific literacy and numeracy lessons are built into the timetable. Teachers make good use of vocationally relevant materials. An exercise in costing a meal for a large group was used with a class of catering students to practise a range of numeracy skills including estimation, use of calculators and conversion of weights. Another tutor used data about the weight of babies with a group of health and social care students to explain and develop an understanding of data handling techniques. In both cases, students were able to see the relevance of the skills to their interests.

57 Most students make good progress and improve their basic skills. They are entered for a suitable qualification, frequently as an addition to their main qualification, if they have reached the appropriate level of attainment. There is no college policy, however, to ensure that there is a consistent approach to this by teachers in all lessons. Students value the support they receive in developing literacy and numeracy and are

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clear about the impact it has had on their studies and life outside college.

58 The analysis of students' retention and achievements in basic skills provision and on courses where basic skills support has been provided is inadequate. Managers have not compared the adequacy of basic skills provision across the college and the provision made by partners. Students' attendance and retention is poor on some courses.

59 Many of the staff involved in teaching basic skills in the college are also involved in teaching in other areas of the college. Inspectors agreed that this makes it easier for students to seek support when necessary. Both the college and partner organisations are well supported by volunteers particularly on part-time adult basic education courses. Although 24 staff and several volunteers have received training to qualify them to teach basic skills, inspectors agreed that there are insufficient trained staff. There are inadequate systems for ensuring staff development and the sharing of good practice. Basic skills lessons are generally taught in rooms that are fit for the purpose. There is a well-equipped resource room with access to computers. This room can become very busy and distracting if students drop in to use equipment when group sessions are under way. In one observed lesson, a student was seeking learning support from a tutor who was teaching a basic skills class in the room. Most of the community venues provide a welcoming and appropriate learning environment for adults.

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 3

60 Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the detailed self-assessment report. Some of the weaknesses noted by the college have been addressed. Inspectors identified some additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- effective impartial guidance for full-time students
- good induction programme
- effective initial basic skills assessment of full-time students
- good range of support services on main college site
- good tutorial system for full-time students

Weaknesses

- insufficient monitoring of learning support
- inadequate assessment of learning support needs of part-time students
- inadequate support for students on part-time courses and in franchised provision
- insufficient range of enrichment activities for students

61 Support for students is the responsibility of the student support manager. This is a new post created in August 1999. The provision was previously managed through two different faculties. The new appointment has improved the co-ordination of services that provide support for students.

62 The college has developed strong links with some local schools and community organisations. Familiarisation courses enable students in year 11 to have a valuable introduction to further education courses.

The college works closely with the Royal National Institute for the Blind to identify the learning support needs of students with visual impairment. A special service is used effectively to provide handouts in Braille to help students to attend a range of courses.

63 Impartial pre-entry information and advice is provided to full-time students. There is an effective system for monitoring students' progress through the admissions process. The college has a productive relationship with Cornwall and Devon Careers Service. Careers advisers give individual guidance interviews and there is good careers guidance for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. There is a good range of careers facilities and services at the main college site. The college has gained the Investors in Careers Award.

64 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the college induction programme is effective for students on full-time courses. The induction programme is planned to take account of the needs of different groups of students. Students who wish to transfer courses may book an appointment with a guidance tutor. All students who are considering leaving the college are encouraged to see a guidance tutor. These interviews help the college to form a view about why students leave the college and are an important part of the strategy to improve retention.

65 An initial assessment programme identifies the learning support needs of most full-time students. The English and mathematics learning centre provides an effective service for learning support which is well regarded by students and staff. Students receive support individually or in small groups. For example, students on NVQ courses use the centre on a weekly basis for help with spelling. This helps them to cope with the written requirements of their course. There is good support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The introduction of foundation courses has provided an effective entry level for some students.

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However, there is insufficient monitoring of learning support to ensure that the support needs of all students are met. The assessment of the learning support needs of part-time students is inadequate. In 1998-99, fewer than 1% of part-time students were assessed for basic skills support.

66 There are well-managed systems for planning and recording tutorial provision. A tutors' handbook contains clear guidelines on what should be included in the tutorials. Tutors plan an annual programme that is adapted to meet the needs of each group. More than 60% of tutorial time is spent supporting individual students and appropriate records are kept. Tutors ensure that students are aware of the range of college services. Inspectors' observations of tutorials confirmed the judgement in the self-assessment report that there is good provision for full-time students. However, although some part-time students do receive tutorial support the overall provision for these students is inadequate.

67 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that there is a good range of support services for students on the main college site. A professionally qualified counsellor provides a responsive counselling service. Improvements have been made to the management of the access funds and financial advice and support is accessible and well publicised. Pre-school provision for three to five year olds has been extended to meet increased demands from students for childcare places. Students speak positively about the range of services available. However, there is insufficient support for students on part-time courses and in franchised provision.

68 There is a narrow range of enrichment activities for students, a small programme of events and few college clubs. The students association is poorly supported by the students and its executive has experienced difficulties in attracting new members.

General Resources

Grade 3

69 The self-assessment report presents a detailed picture of the college's resources. The action plan addresses the weaknesses identified in the report. The report makes no reference to the quality of resources in franchised provision but inspectors considered that these resources were satisfactory.

Key strengths

- improvements to the quality of accommodation since the last inspection
- good access to modern computers for most students
- accommodation strategy effectively related to curriculum developments
- good-quality learning centres in most curriculum areas
- attractive and well-resourced nursery

Weaknesses

- a minority of poor-quality accommodation
- underdeveloped learning materials in some areas
- low utilisation of much accommodation
- poor access for students with restricted mobility in a few areas

70 The college has made good progress in improving its accommodation. Plans to create an attractive campus with a coherent set of buildings are progressing well. Old and unsuitable accommodation present at the last inspection has been taken out of use. The plans for developing the accommodation are clearly linked to creating accommodation that can be used more flexibly. A new six-floor building has been added to the site since the last inspection. The design of this building and the changes to existing accommodation locate resources for

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teaching and learning close to students and teachers. The resources are also more accessible for students to learn on their own and in their own time.

71 General classroom accommodation is satisfactory, although the lack of overhead projector screens and window blinds affected teachers' ability to make good use of visual aids in some lessons. Inspectors identified weaknesses in specialist resources in a few areas. Several accommodation issues remain, all of which are identified in the self-assessment report. Despite removing a lot of accommodation, college surveys reveal that there is still much accommodation which is underused. Some of this is linked to the reduction in student numbers on the main site. Surveys of staff views indicate dissatisfaction with some college services such as maintenance and reprographics. The college has responded to these concerns, many of which were related to the absence of key staff. There is considerable traffic movement around the site. Signs to direct traffic and pedestrians are not always clear. Plans to address this are well advanced.

72 The college has improved the quality and range of social facilities for students since the last inspection. They are now generally good. The main college reception area is well designed and offers easy access to staff and information. Catering outlets are spread across the main site and offer a good range of reasonably priced options for students. Basic facilities such as toilets are satisfactory, but some need redecoration. Toilet and catering facilities at some franchised provision in horticulture are less than satisfactory.

73 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that access to high-quality learning resources, including computer-based materials, is not uniformly good across all areas of the college. The college has invested heavily in modern computers over the last two years.

Nearly all computers provide students with free access to the Internet. Some students in art and care reported difficulty in finding available computers at peak times. Teachers have good access to computers. A small team of staff helps teachers to create their own materials to support students' learning and put them on the college's intranet. There are examples of high-quality materials, but many staff have yet to develop materials and staffing problems in the support team have delayed the process. Some paper-based learning resources are of poor quality. There are still some old books in the learning centres. Students sometimes have difficulty finding a quiet space in which to study.

74 Inspectors agreed with the college that access for people with restricted mobility continues to be a difficulty in some buildings including parts of the art and catering buildings. However, physical access has improved since the last inspection and around 80% of the floor area of the site is accessible. The external site is not an easy environment for students with restricted mobility. There are uneven road and pavement surfaces and movement between buildings involves steep slopes in some cases. While each building has a toilet for students with physical disabilities, reaching some of them can involve considerable travel.

75 The nursery is attractive and well equipped, as the self-assessment report identifies. It now provides 70 places for children over the age of three years. The college sports hall provides basic sports facilities. Students can use other sporting facilities off site.

Cross-college Provision

Quality Assurance

Grade 3

76 Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements about quality assurance in the self-assessment report. The college had made progress in addressing the weaknesses identified in the report. Inspectors also agreed with the college that unreliable management information systems data have made it difficult to assess the impact of the quality assurance arrangements.

Key strengths

- thorough, well-managed self-assessment process
- coherent and clearly documented arrangements for quality assurance
- well-established and effective internal and external verification
- good arrangements to gather and consider students' views

Weaknesses

- slow impact of quality assurance arrangements on retention and achievement
- absence of reliable data to underpin quality assurance arrangements
- poor quality assurance procedures in some franchised provision
- incomplete implementation of staff appraisals

77 The college's second self-assessment report is detailed and thorough and the process is well managed. Inspectors agreed with many of the college's judgements. Lesson observation plays an important part in the self-assessment process. The college requires all full-time and substantial part-time lecturers to be observed during the academic year. As part of this year's self-assessment process, 239 lessons were observed. Inspectors graded 61% of lessons observed during the inspection as good or

outstanding compared with 69% of lessons graded by the college. Action plans are a required element of self-assessment. Progress on actions has been monitored effectively.

78 All quality assurance policies and procedures are available in the college curriculum and quality policies handbook and on the college intranet. They are accessible to all staff and the use of the intranet has helped to raise staff awareness of the college quality assurance framework. The framework covers all aspects of provision. Service standards are in place in most areas and are systematically and effectively monitored. The quality assurance manager has operational responsibility for quality assurance arrangements across the college, reporting to the deputy principal. An internal auditor monitors compliance with the college's quality assurance systems. A 'quality' panel chaired by the deputy principal and reporting to the academic board is responsible for promoting and maintaining quality assurance arrangements. The panel's membership includes representatives from teaching and support areas, and students. It is a useful forum for discussion, development and review.

79 Course reviews make an important contribution to the college's quality assurance arrangements. A formal review meeting is held by each course at the end of the academic year to review performance targets and to produce the course action plan and targets for the following year. Course teams hold meetings twice a term to review progress made on the action plan. Attendance, achievement and retention targets are aggregated at curriculum centre level. Senior managers monitor targets at termly curriculum reviews. Detailed outcomes from reviews are recorded consistently across the college and have a strong emphasis on retention and achievement. However, the unreliability of student data in the college makes it difficult to analyse trends and make comparison with national benchmarking data produced by the FEFC.

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80 Inspectors agreed with the college that its quality assurance arrangements have been slow to bring about improvements in student retention rates across the college. Retention trends for levels 1, 2 and 3 have shown little improvement since the last inspection and are generally below the national averages for general further education colleges. The college has developed a range of strategies to improve retention and achievement. These include the introduction of guidance tutors, the participation in Further Education Development Agency (FEDA) effective practice networks and the introduction of individualised reviews and action-planning. Early data for 2000 show some improvement in retention in some areas. Achievements have shown an improvement. Examination results in 1999, showed that 26 out of 40 courses inspected achieved results above national averages.

81 Internal verification operates effectively across the college. Assessment and verification practices are monitored by the college's internal verification co-ordinator. Lead internal verifiers in each faculty meet regularly. They contribute to the development of consistent standards and practices across the college. Inspectors agreed with the college that procedures are thorough.

82 Inspectors agreed with the college that there is poor application of quality assurance procedures in some franchised provision. The impact of this is acknowledged in the self-assessment report. Inspectors noted significant inconsistencies in record-keeping, the quality of annual reviews and the number of visits made by college staff. The quality of teaching and learning was satisfactory to good. Inspectors observed no lessons that were unsatisfactory or poor.

83 Teaching and support staff value the opportunities provided for professional development. Staff development priorities are linked to the strategic aims of the college and the identified needs of individuals. The college operates a two-year cycle of appraisal. The

system covers all full-time and substantial part-time teaching and support staff. At the time of the inspection, some staff appraisals were incomplete.

84 There are effective processes for gathering the views of students, employers, parents and staff. Students complete three questionnaires each year. Results of these surveys are published by the quality panel, and result in changes to provision. There are two forums that meet termly with the college executive, one for further education students and one for higher education students. Students are also represented at course team meetings and reviews. The college's charter is clearly written and is monitored by the quality panel and updated each year. Complaints are dealt with effectively and promptly. The college regained the Investors in People award in 1999.

Governance

Grade 4

85 Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths in the self-assessment report, but considered that these were outweighed by significant weaknesses, which were not identified by the college.

Key strengths

- governors' commitment to the college
- involvement of governors in reviewing the direction of the college in the light of recent and current difficulties

Weaknesses

- poor compliance with the instrument and articles of governance
- insufficiently rigorous consideration of the college's performance by the board
- unsatisfactory formal monitoring of college finances between August and December 1999

Cross-college Provision

- little awareness of good practice in governance
- weaknesses in important aspects of corporation clerking
- unsystematic approach to the induction and training of governors

86 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is weak. The corporation does not substantially conduct its business in accordance with the instrument and articles of government. It also does not substantially fulfil its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC.

87 Governors have not been sufficiently purposeful in ensuring the financial health of the college. There have been instances when the operation of the corporation has not complied with the financial memorandum. The finance and management committee has not been effective in discharging its duties. The committee, which normally meets monthly, did not meet in November and December 1999. It did not receive monthly management accounts for September, October and November 1999 and the December 1999 management accounts were not received until February 2000. The corporation did not receive the 1998-99 statutory accounts until February 2000. The college was without an active, full-time director of finance from May 1998 to January 2000, which has restricted financial input to key strategic decisions. The new director of finance has improved the financial reporting to the corporation. The finance and management committee now receives regular management accounts.

88 Inspectors and auditors agreed with the self-assessment report that governors are strongly committed to the college. They regularly support college events and activities. A system has recently been introduced to allocate each governor to one cross-college area and one curriculum area. Governors have been

constructively involved in reviewing the direction of the college in the light of the recent and current difficulties which it faces.

89 The transition to the corporation's new membership in line with the statutory modifications to the instrument of government has been poorly managed. The corporation has re-determined its membership three times between October 1999 and April 2000 resulting in a number of new members. Four vacancies remain. The influx of new members, coupled with the resignation or retirement of experienced members, has resulted in a lack of continuity. Although members bring a range of useful experience and knowledge to the college, the corporation has lacked sufficient financial expertise. Induction and training for new governors is insufficiently thorough. There is a lack of awareness of good practice in governance.

90 The work of the corporation is assisted by the code of conduct that takes account of the Nolan committee's recommendations. A 'whistleblowing' procedure has recently been introduced. The corporation meets at least twice a term and minutes of meetings are made available in the college library. There are weaknesses in important aspects of clerking. Corporation papers are not always produced and distributed promptly. Minutes do not provide a clear record of corporation business. The recording of discussion, decisions, proposed action, and follow up of agreed action is often poor. Inspectors found little evidence that governors challenge managers' recommendations, when appropriate, or discuss with sufficient rigour the college's financial and academic performance. They have not been persistent in insisting that appropriate information be made available to them. The college's agreements with franchise partners form a significant part of the college's provision. Inspectors judged that governors have insufficient oversight of the financial and academic performance of the college's franchised provision.

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91 Although there is an appropriate range of committees, the operation of the committees does not comply with all the requirements of the instrument and articles of government and Council Circular 98/15, *Audit Code of Practice*. The internal audit service has indicated that significant weaknesses existed within the college's internal control systems. The audit committee has not evaluated the internal auditor's performance or made an annual report to the corporation.

92 Governors have played an appropriate role in strategic planning. However, they do not systematically and rigorously monitor the college's progress in meeting its objectives. The corporation completed an evaluation of its own effectiveness as part of the self-assessment process. Members have produced an action plan to address issues, but it includes few performance indicators against which performance can be measured.

Management

Grade 3

93 Inspectors and auditors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report. They did not agree that financial management is a strength and judged that the significance of weaknesses relating to franchising had been underestimated.

Key strengths

- wide range of actions to improve retention and achievement
- consultative strategic planning process
- effective monitoring of operational plans
- effective curriculum management
- good external links

Weaknesses

- failure to achieve funding targets

- unreliable management information data
- background of unsatisfactory financial management
- unsatisfactory management of some franchised provision and over-reliance on franchise arrangements
- insufficient monitoring of equal opportunities

94 Since the last inspection, the number of full-time students has fallen and the college has continued to be heavily reliant on income from franchise contracts. In 1998-99, the college was 13% below its FEFC funding target and forecasts that it will be significantly below target in 1999-2000. The college is working closely with the FEFC in implementing a recovery plan to secure its future. Planned measures include management restructuring, withdrawal from franchise contracts by 2001-02, and re-negotiation of the college's funding agreement with the FEFC. These are appropriate measures, based on considered assumptions about student numbers.

95 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is weak. The college was without an active full-time finance director from May 1998 until January 2000 following difficulties in making a permanent appointment. As a result, the effective implementation of a new financial accounting system was delayed and accounts were not produced between August 1999 and January 2000, resulting in unsatisfactory financial monitoring. Since January 2000, the backlog of work in the finance department has been cleared and financial reporting has improved. Senior managers and governors receive a comprehensive financial report each month. Budget holders receive clear reports and expenditure is effectively controlled. The internal auditors' annual report for 1998-99

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identified significant weaknesses in internal control, several of which are now being addressed.

96 Following wide consultation with staff, the college produced a five-year strategic plan in 1999. Operational plans for teaching and support teams are produced in a clear standard format, with objectives cross-referenced to strategic objectives. Monitoring of progress against operational objectives is regular and effective. Staff are aware of the strong emphasis in the strategic plan on improving retention and achievement. Operational plans contain many measures intended to achieve this key objective. For example, course teams have improved links with parents, introduced review meetings between individual students and their subject teachers and improved attendance monitoring.

97 Curriculum management is generally effective. Communication within teaching teams is good. A consistent approach to course management is achieved through standard course management files. Course teams are involved in setting targets for retention, achievement and attendance. Poorly performing courses are identified and action plans for improvement are required. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment judgement that there is some lack of clarity relating to the management roles of staff with cross-college responsibilities.

98 Good external liaison has raised the profile of the college in the local community. Senior managers are active in local forums which address education, training and regeneration issues. For example, the principal is a member of the Devon and Torbay Lifelong Learning Partnership and the Single Regeneration Budget Management Group. In the past the college did not enjoy good relations with local schools with sixth forms. There is still strong competition, but improved liaison by senior managers and marketing staff has resulted in a wider and more effective range of links. The college has

carried out useful local research, for example, on attitudes towards travel to college. The college has a high-quality website. These initiatives have not yet reversed the fall in enrolments.

99 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment judgement that there are weaknesses in the management of some franchised provision. Links between partners and curriculum areas have recently been strengthened, but there are still some weaknesses. The college does not have sufficiently clear retention and achievement data for some partners. In accordance with FEFC guidance, college policy is to concentrate on local partnerships. Nevertheless, there continues to be substantial provision with one partner outside the South West. In 1998-99, 27% of college income from the FEFC was derived from franchise arrangements. In 1999-2000, this will fall to 17%.

100 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment judgement that the management information system is unreliable and incomplete. Staff lack confidence in the system and feel burdened by frequent requests to supply and check data. Plans to improve the system have progressed slowly. The college was unable to provide inspectors with accurate data on students' achievements for many courses ending in 1997 and 1998.

101 The college has an appropriate range of policies and procedures. Although the college has had an equal opportunities policy for many years, the self-assessment report acknowledges that the college has done little to monitor equal opportunities. The equal opportunities committee had not met for two years prior to September 1999. Since September the committee has met twice and there has been one training session for senior managers.

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Conclusions

102 The thorough self-assessment report provided a useful basis for planning and conducting the inspection. Useful information was set out in a clear introduction. Strengths and weaknesses were clearly identified for each area with supporting evidence. Action plans to address the weaknesses were included in each area. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the report. They found some additional weaknesses, some of which were significant. Franchised provision had not been adequately dealt with in the report. The college's inability to produce reliable data on students' achievements meant that inspectors were not able to produce retention and achievement tables for three curriculum areas inspected. Inspectors agreed with seven of the eight curriculum area grades, but awarded a lower grade in one area. They agreed with four of the cross-college grades, but considered the grade in one area to be overgenerous.

103 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 (May 2000)

<i>Age</i>	<i>%</i>
Under 16	1
16-18 years	17
19-24 years	14
25+ years	68
Not known	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (May 2000)

<i>Level of study</i>	<i>%</i>
Level 1 (foundation)	42
Level 2 (intermediate)	28
Level 3 (advanced)	22
Level 4/5 (higher)	4
Non-schedule 2	4
Total	100

Source: college data

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

<i>Programme area</i>	<i>Full time</i>	<i>Part time</i>	<i>Total provision %</i>
Science	420	3,286	26
Agriculture	39	85	1
Construction	159	403	4
Engineering	184	918	8
Business	342	1,716	14
Hotel and catering	243	1,535	12
Health and community care	346	1,720	14
Art and design	307	244	4
Humanities	258	1,530	13
Basic education	120	429	4
Total	2,418	11,866	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 29% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (May 2000)

	<i>Perm- anent</i>	<i>Fixed term</i>	<i>Casual</i>	<i>Total</i>
Direct learning contact	246	57	0	303
Supporting direct learning contact	68	2	0	70
Other support	79	2	8	89
Total	393	61	8	462

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1997	1998	1999
Income	£13,435,000	£15,418,000	£15,248,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	£14.16	£14.05	£16.20
Payroll as a proportion of income	79%	64%	60%
Achievement of funding target	94%	100%	89%
Diversity of income	33%	35%	33%
Operating surplus	-£2,887,000	-£148,000	£311,000

Sources: Income – Council Circulars 98/43 (1997), 00/10 (1998), college (1999)

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

Payroll – Council Circulars 98/43 (1997), 00/10 (1998), college (1999)

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

Diversity of income – Council Circulars 98/43 (1997), 00/10 (1998), college (1999)

Operating surplus – Council Circulars 98/43 (1997), 00/10 (1998), college (1999)

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