

St Austell 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.

*Cheylesmore House
Quinton Road
Coventry CV1 2WT
Telephone 024 7686 3000
Fax 024 7686 3100
Website www.fefc.ac.uk*

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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

St Austell College

South West Region

Inspected November 1999

St Austell College is a medium-sized general further education college which serves mid and east Cornwall. It also has extensive franchised provision throughout England. The self-assessment process involved contributions from governors and from staff at all levels. Staff from every substantial curriculum and cross-college area produced a report which contributed to the college's overall assessment, but the college's franchise partners were not involved. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the report, but identified some significant weaknesses not identified by the college. Although lesson observations formed part of the self-assessment process, weaknesses in teaching identified by inspectors were not always recognised in the college's self-assessment report. Some judgements and grades relating to students' achievements were not based on reliable data.

The college offers a wide range of academic and vocational courses. A substantial number of short courses are provided at centres throughout the country, as part of the college's franchised provision. Six of the programme areas funded by the FEFC were inspected, including courses offered at franchise centres.

Courses generally met the needs of school-leavers, although there are gaps in the provision at foundation level. Students receive good tutorial support. The lesson observation grades awarded by inspectors fell below the national average for colleges inspected in 1998-99. There were fewer outstanding and good lessons than were found in the previous inspection in 1996. For some courses there are poor retention rates, and some have deteriorated steadily since 1996. The management structure is clear. On many vocational courses and GCE A level courses, the achievements of students who complete their studies are consistently good. There is effective support for students wishing to go on to higher education or employment. The college has strong links with a wide range of external organisations. Accommodation is well maintained and efficiently used. The college should: improve the quality of some teaching; address declining and low retention and pass rates in some subjects; continue to develop ways of sharing good practice between sites; improve learning support; assess more accurately the quality of teaching and learning; develop quality assurance further; address unsatisfactory aspects of its franchised provision; and make improvements in governance and management.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Science	2	Support for students	2
Engineering	3	General resources	2
Business	2	Quality assurance	3
Art and design	2	Governance	3
Geography, history, psychology and sociology	3	Management	4
Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	3		

The College and its Mission

1 St Austell College was formed in 1993 from the merger of Mid-Cornwall College of Further Education and St Austell Sixth Form College. The college operates on four sites in St Austell, and at a site in Saltash, 33 miles away near the Cornwall and Devon border. The Saltash centre is surrounded by 11 to 18 schools, and faces competition from Plymouth College of Further Education, 3 miles away. The St Austell centre is the post-16 partner institution for five 11 to 16 schools and one special school. There are secondary schools with sixth forms in Bodmin, Camelford, Newquay, Launceston, Bude, Callington and Liskeard.

2 Mid and east Cornwall is a rural district with a population of approximately 250,000. In March 1999, the European Union designated Cornwall an objective 1 area from 2000 to 2006. Most companies in the area are small to medium-sized enterprises, employing fewer than 50 people. The majority of people are employed in the service and leisure industries. Cornwall is a pilot area for the Educational Maintenance Allowance.

3 Whilst the number of the college's full-time 16 to 19 year old students has remained stable since the last inspection, with 2,433 students enrolled in 1998-99 compared with 2,394 in 1995-96, significant growth has occurred on part-time programmes for students over 19 with 17,506 students enrolled in 1998-99 (including franchise students) compared with 6,386 students in 1995-96.

4 The college, through its management centre, has entered into franchised provision with a large number of organisations to offer courses on locations away from the main college sites. During 1998-99, the college enrolled 159 full-time and 12,683 part-time students in franchised provision. Of these, 43 full-time and 8,158 part-time students came from outside its local area. In 1998-99, the college had agreements with 63 contracted partner

companies, located across the country from the north east and Yorkshire to the Midlands, the home counties and London. The income generated was £965,000. Franchised provision covered programmes in a wide range of subjects, including early years, horse care, information technology (IT), food hygiene, health and safety, care, fork-lift truck operations, plant operations, outdoor pursuits, sailing, diving, first aid at work, meat and poultry processing, management studies, youth leadership, metal arc welding, construction skills and adult basic education. Most franchised courses lead to nationally recognised qualifications.

5 The majority of the college's full-time students come from mid and east Cornwall where some 72% of pupils in year 11 remain in education after leaving school. The nearest further education colleges are Plymouth College of Further Education, 3 miles from Saltash, and Truro College and Cornwall College at Redruth, 16 and 26 miles, respectively, to the west. The college has strong relationships with other providers of education in the county, most notably through its involvement with Cornwall College, and the local training and enterprise council (TEC) with whom it has arrangements to promote New Deal, modern apprenticeships and national traineeships. The college has formal partnership arrangements with both Exeter and Plymouth universities. There is access course provision at both St Austell and Saltash. The college was the first in the further education sector to gain the Investor in Careers award and was re-accredited in March 1999.

6 In July 1999 the college employed 396 full-time equivalent staff, of whom 359 teach or directly support learning. The college offers a wide range of courses in the 10 programme areas funded by the FEFC. Most courses are provided at foundation, intermediate and advanced level and a few at higher level. The college's mission states that the college's aim is to 'provide high-quality education and training based on the individual needs of our students'.

Context

The Inspection

7 The college was inspected during the week commencing 1 November 1999. Franchised provision was inspected during the previous week. Inspectors had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and studied information about the college held by other directorates of the FEFC. The college's data on students' achievements for 1999 were checked by inspectors against primary sources, for example, class registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies. Data for 1997 and 1998 were taken from the FEFC's individualised student record (ISR). The college was notified of the sample of work to be inspected approximately two months before the inspection. The inspection was carried out by 11 inspectors and an auditor working for a total of 50 days in the college. Four inspectors also spent 12 days inspecting franchised provision. Inspectors observed 81 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, 58% were judged to be good or outstanding and 7% were rated as less than satisfactory. This is a less favourable profile than the average figure of 65% and 6%, respectively, for all colleges inspected in 1998-99. The profile is lower than at the last inspection. Few lessons observed by inspectors were outstanding.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	0	10	7	0	0	17
GNVQ	0	3	4	2	0	9
NVQ	0	7	5	0	0	12
Higher education access	2	3	3	0	0	8
Other vocational	3	8	4	0	0	15
Other	2	9	5	4	0	20
Total (No)	7	40	28	6	0	81
Total (%)	9	49	35	7	0	100
National average, for 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*

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 (%)
St Austell College	9.9	81
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

Science

Grade 2

10 Inspectors observed 12 lessons covering all general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) science subjects, general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) human biology, first and national diplomas in sports science, and the access to higher education provision in sports science and environmental science. Inspectors broadly agreed with the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- much good teaching and learning
- consistently high pass rates in GCE A level science subjects
- wide range of modular GCE A level science subjects
- imaginative and relevant assignments, especially in sports science
- well-planned and effectively managed courses
- good support provided by laboratory technicians

Weaknesses

- poor achievements on GCSE science courses
- low retention on many courses
- little use of IT

11 There is a good range of courses which includes GCSE, GCE A level, GCE advanced supplementary (AS) courses, first and national diplomas in sports science, and access to higher education courses in environmental science and sports science. The college offers students field courses and industrial visits to complement their college work. Much thought goes into the planning of individual courses. Subject teachers meet regularly to review their courses and to

discuss students' progress. Examination results are analysed. Teachers compare GCE A level results with predictions based on students' qualifications on entry, but little use is made of this information. Most courses are effectively managed, but there is little formal discussion about the overall management of the science provision.

12 Inspectors agreed with the college that the quality of teaching is good. Schemes of work are clear and detailed. Projects and supporting resources are well organised. Most teachers use an appropriate variety of methods. They introduce lessons effectively, summarise the main points at the end and give students useful feedback on their performance. They are skilled in questioning students to ascertain their knowledge and ensure that they are understanding the work. In an environmental science lesson, students assessed the impact on the environment of using natural, instead of artificial, Christmas trees. They participated enthusiastically and discussed the issue articulately. Teachers managed the discussion well and used students' contributions effectively. Practical work is closely linked to theory. Often teachers set students imaginative and vocationally relevant assignments. In a national diploma in sports science lesson students studied a range of diets for athletes. As part of their research, they compiled a diary of their own food intake for one day and presented their findings to the rest of the group. The research aided the students' understanding of the work which they carried out enthusiastically and efficiently. Most teachers use technical language appropriately. However, some do not explain key terms to students and this makes the subject difficult for students to understand.

13 The quality of most students' written and practical work is good. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that students' achievements in GCE A level biology, human biology, environmental science, geology and physics are good and have been above the

Curriculum Areas

national average for the last three years. GCE A level chemistry pass rates, which were below the national average in 1997 and 1998, have improved in 1999 to 87% which is well above the national average. In 1999, the pass rate on the access to higher education environmental science course was above the national average. All of the students who completed the first diploma in sports science, and the national diploma in sports science in 1999, were successful. On GCSE science courses, students' retention and achievement rates are poorer. The college acknowledges that retention rates were low for many courses in 1997 and 1998, and has taken action to remedy this. The rates of retention have improved in 1999, and most courses now have satisfactory retention. There is good progression of science students to higher education.

14 Inspectors agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report that teachers are well qualified and experienced. Lessons are effectively serviced by efficient technical support staff. Laboratories are well organised. General scientific equipment is fit for its purpose and sufficient in quantity. The chemistry laboratory has been refurbished and provides a modern working environment. The other science laboratories, although old, are serviceable. A well-equipped fitness studio provides a realistic work setting for sports science students. There is a suitable range of texts and journals for science subjects and some up-to-date videos in the college library. Insufficient use is made of IT. This limits the variety of practical work that can be carried out. The college acknowledges that IT is not yet fully integrated with the curriculum.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GCSE sciences	2	Number of starters	77	62	88
		Retention (%)	57	67	74
		Achievement (%)	75	70	43
GCE A level biology	3	Number of starters	66	58	39
		Retention (%)	68	60	92
		Achievement (%)	100	83	97
GCE A level human biology	3	Number of starters	38	47	22
		Retention (%)	66	64	64
		Achievement (%)	92	75	85
GCE A level chemistry	3	Number of starters	40	28	27
		Retention (%)	58	71	89
		Achievement (%)	74	74	87
GCE A level physics	3	Number of starters	53	36	33
		Retention (%)	64	78	73
		Achievement (%)	81	85	96
Access to higher education (environmental science)	3	Number of starters	28	15	19
		Retention (%)	66	87	74
		Achievement (%)	92	*	86

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

*data not available

Curriculum Areas

Engineering

Grade 3

15 Inspectors observed 14 lessons. They agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses in the college's self-assessment, but considered that insufficient emphasis was given to teaching and learning.

Key strengths

- effective course management
- imaginative and stimulating projects on general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) courses
- productive links with schools
- high standard of students' work on the GNVQ intermediate course

Weaknesses

- the small range of engineering courses and learning activities at foundation level
- some uninspiring teaching
- poor pass and retention rates on a few courses
- inadequate specialist resources for electronic engineering

16 The college offers full-time and part-time engineering courses in general engineering, motor vehicle and mechanical engineering. Most courses are at level 2. There are few opportunities for members of the local community to gain a vocational qualification at foundation level. Courses which either fail to attract sufficient applicants or have low pass rates are replaced with courses for alternative qualifications. Short courses for industry are run by the college's management centre. Course managers rarely meet to share good practice about these courses and to discuss curriculum design, and have little contact with franchise providers. Effective links with local schools allow pupils to come to the college to gain experience in practical engineering.

17 Courses are well managed. Most course files are well maintained. Course teams meet termly to review the progress of their students, and annually to carry out course reviews. There has been insufficient analysis of teaching and learning. Inspectors found that some of the data used by course teams did not match the ISR data. The self-assessment report contained few comments on the quality of teaching and learning.

18 Of the lessons observed by inspectors, half were judged to be good, which is below the national average of 60% for this curriculum area. Teachers have schemes of work for their subjects. Most practical lessons are effectively managed. Due attention is given to safety. In the most successful lessons, teachers use a variety of appropriate teaching methods. For example, teachers on GNVQ courses have developed stimulating projects which require the full involvement of students in tasks which help them to learn effectively. In the best theory lessons, teachers check the progress of students through effective questioning, and reinforce their learning by practical demonstrations. For example, in a welding lesson, the topic of electrode coatings was supported by a practical demonstration of arc welding using different welding rods and other materials. Students clearly enjoyed this lively lesson, and their questions and answers demonstrated a good understanding of the subject. In a number of lessons, teachers talked too much, made poor use of questioning techniques, failed to use teaching aids when it would have been appropriate to do so, and did not ensure that students were learning. In these lessons, many members of the class became inattentive.

19 The standard of most students' work is satisfactory, and some is good. Most students' portfolios are well presented. GNVQ students have produced some outstanding work. For example, they have constructed two operational robots and two functional go-carts. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that

Curriculum Areas

retention and pass rates on the GNVQ courses are well above national averages. Students' achievements on the GNVQ intermediate course are outstanding. However, over the past two years, pass rates on the City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) repair and service of motor vehicles course at level 2 have been poor. Student retention on the national vocational qualification (NVQ) level 2 course in welding is low, and pass rates have declined to 40% in 1999.

20 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that the accommodation used for electronic engineering is poor. The electronics workshop is too small for the number of students that use it and unsuitable for some

practical tasks. The motor vehicle workshop at Beech Lane provides a realistic work environment for students, but it is untidy and there is insufficient technician support. There is an appropriate range of computer-controlled tools. Some of the manual machine tools, although fit for purpose, are dated. There are no large-scale display facilities to assist the teaching of computer-aided design. Some specialist rooms lack sufficient IT equipment to enable teachers to integrate students' development of IT key skills with vocational work. There is an adequate stock of relevant engineering text books. Teachers are generally qualified in their subjects and many hold assessor and verifier qualifications.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
C&G repair and service of motor vehicles	1	Number of starters	14	11	35
		Retention (%)	71	82	77
		Achievement (%)	*	56	88+
C&G repair and service of motor vehicles	2	Number of starters	-	25	23
		Retention (%)	-	59	78
		Achievement (%)	-	*	17+
NVQ engineering manufacture	2	Number of starters	24	*	23
		Retention (%)	*	*	74
		Achievement (%)	*	*	76
NVQ joining materials by welding	2	Number of starters	22	*	14
		Retention (%)	18	*	36
		Achievement (%)	*	*	40
GNVQ intermediate engineering	2	Number of starters	30	15	18
		Retention (%)	77	87	89
		Achievement (%)	100	85	100
GNVQ advanced engineering	3	Number of starters	-	29	14
		Retention (%)	-	76	79
		Achievement (%)	-	68	89+

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

*data unreliable

-course not running

+amended data

Curriculum Areas

Business

Grade 2

21 Inspectors observed 18 lessons, including three taught by the college's franchise partners. Inspectors broadly agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- relevant and lively practical teaching
- well-planned and well-managed courses
- strong liaison with employers
- good achievement rates on many courses
- thorough assessment of students' work
- good-quality learning centres and real work environments

Weaknesses

- little participation by students in a few lessons
- poor retention rates on a minority of courses
- good teaching practice not disseminated between sites

22 Inspectors agreed with the college self-assessment that it offers a broad range of vocational, management and professional courses. Students can enter without formal qualifications or can undertake higher level courses. There are well-established links with employers and substantial provision in the workplace. The college has a large programme of short courses operated in collaboration with other organisations away from the main college sites across England. Most of the college's business provision is well planned. Responsibilities for managing courses are generally clear. Academic and general vocational courses are in one faculty; administration and secretarial skills are in another. Offsite provision is managed by the

management centre at St Austell. There are insufficient opportunities for staff to meet and share good practice across the St Austell and Saltash sites, and across the country. Teachers employed by franchise partners are unable to contribute to course meetings as many work some distance from the college and are unable to attend. The college's self-assessment report omitted this weakness.

23 The quality of most teaching is good. In the best lessons, teachers used imaginative methods to provide a variety of appropriate and lively activities and make effective use of resources. For example, in one practical lesson, the teacher gave the students a demanding administrative task to complete within a limited time. In another, NVQ level 1 students were given a rigorous key skills exercise which they tackled with enthusiasm. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities participated fully in their lessons. There was good linking of theory to practice in a public services lesson when video was skilfully used to stimulate discussion about leadership and personality disorders. The use of well-directed questions gave all students the opportunity to express their views. A minority of lessons were poorly planned and lacked appropriate variety. The teachers talked too much, and the students were allowed to lose interest. In other lessons, students were given undemanding tasks which did not extend their knowledge. The teacher made few checks to find out whether learning had taken place.

24 The college's strong links with employers benefit students and enrich the curriculum. Guest speakers regularly visit level 3 courses to share their business experience. Well-prepared work experience is an important element in many courses. For example, the armed forces provide students on the national diploma in public services with practical outdoor experience. High-quality real work environments have also been developed in the college.

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25 Examination results are consistently well above the national average in GCE A level business and accounting, although retention has often been low in business studies. In 1998 and 1999, national diploma in public services students achieved a pass rate of 100%, although course numbers have declined from 17 in 1998 to 11 in 1999. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that pass and retention rates for the NVQ level 2 administration and the medical secretaries' course are significantly better than those in the national benchmarking data published by the FEFC. High pass rates are also regularly achieved in single subject secretarial examinations. GNVQ advanced business enrolment, retention and pass rates have fluctuated widely from year to year. Good results were achieved in 1997 and 1998, but no students passed from one of the groups which completed in 1999. However, the college has analysed the reasons for this and the programme area course review includes appropriate action for improvement. Many students go on to higher education or employment.

26 Teachers are well qualified and many have recent industrial experience. The self-assessment report identified the need to extend some staff's experience of new learning technologies and to improve the teaching skills of others. Specialist equipment and facilities are continually being updated and renewed. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that students have good access to IT with up-to-date business software. Teachers encourage the students to use the Internet to carry out research.

Curriculum Areas

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
NVQ administration (full time)	2	Number of starters	55	88	42
		Retention (%)	85	82	81
		Achievement (%)	88	86	82
Wordprocessing	2	Number of starters	124	49	132
		Retention (%)	68	98	77
		Achievement (%)	98	89	90
Integrated business technology (part time)	2	Number of starters	98	114	117
		Retention (%)	98	99	100
		Achievement (%)	76	58	56
NVQ administration (full time)	3	Number of starters	39	57	21
		Retention (%)	72	89	80
		Achievement (%)	71	87	86
Association of Medical Secretaries, Practice Managers, Administrators and Receptionists medical secretaries (full time and part time)	3	Number of starters	11	29	25
		Retention (%)	100	100	100
		Achievement (%)	91	87	88
GCE A level business studies (two year, full time)	3	Number of starters	66	72	46
		Retention (%)	59	61	69
		Achievement (%)	95	86	88
GNVQ advanced business	3	Number of starters	41	30	23
		Retention (%)	71	80	52
		Achievement (%)	76	88	75
National diploma in public services (full time)	3	Number of starters	17	17	11
		Retention (%)	65	90	82
		Achievement (%)	71	100	100

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

Curriculum Areas

Art and Design

Grade 2

27 Inspectors observed 13 lessons. Inspectors generally agreed with the college's evaluation of strengths in the self-assessment report, but considered that its assessment of teaching and learning was overgenerous.

Key strengths

- well-planned courses
- the wide range of teaching methods
- good resources
- staff with a broad range of technical expertise
- above average pass rates on many courses
- effective integration of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities

Weaknesses

- lack of clearly identified assessment criteria in many assignments
- insufficient rigour in internal verification
- unsatisfactory retention on some courses

28 The college provides full-time and part-time courses covering most aspects of art and design. The range of specialist activities is a major attraction for students. Students can choose to study subjects over one, two or three years. Full-time provision includes GCE A level and GNVQ intermediate and advanced level courses, and a pre-degree foundation course which can also be studied part time. In addition, there are part-time day and evening courses, including a range of C&G certificates. These part-time courses are popular and provide a flexible method of study for adults. There are good opportunities for students to progress within the college. Valuable links have been established with local schools whose pupils are able to taste a broad range of art and design subjects before joining the college. Teachers are

particularly successful in providing learning opportunities for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Extensive use is made of visits to galleries and exhibitions and places of interest to deepen and sustain students' knowledge and interest in their subject. Students are expected to undertake thorough research as a basis for their work.

29 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that courses are well planned. Much thought is given to course design. There are appropriate schemes of work. Most projects take some weeks to complete. Teachers do not always communicate to students an appropriate sense of urgency. Some project briefs are poorly designed. They do not include specific grading criteria, and are not broken down into stages to encourage students to plan and manage their time effectively. The self-assessment report did not acknowledge that there is some poor internal verification. There is a lack of guidance for students on assessment methods. Some students do not understand fully how they will be assessed.

30 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the wide range of appropriate methods used in teaching is a strength. The majority of teaching is good or satisfactory. There is a sense of purpose and professionalism about much of the work. Teachers manage students' learning effectively. Supporting materials are informative and mostly of good quality. Students work co-operatively and effectively as individuals and as members of a team. In many lessons there was a productive balance between students learning on their own and being guided by a teacher. Teachers ensure that students develop the skills, knowledge, understanding and critical faculties which are essential to their studies. In a few lessons, teachers did not manage students effectively and failed to involve all of them in productive work. Lessons observed as part of the self-assessment process were graded significantly higher than the profile of grades awarded by inspectors.

Curriculum Areas

31 The college identified high pass rates in many subjects as a strength. Inspectors agreed with this judgement. There have been consistently good results in GNVQ intermediate and advanced courses for the past three years, including 100% pass rates on the intermediate course in 1997 and on the advanced course in 1999. Students' achievements in GCE A level art techniques and practice have also been above the national average for three years. However, retention is poor in some subjects. Retention rates on the GCE A level design course have been below the national average for the last three years. Practical work is often good. Selections from this work are displayed throughout the college. Many students speak confidently and articulately about their work. The majority of students progress to further education within the college or to higher education courses.

32 Teachers are well qualified and have relevant industrial experience. Many are practitioners in the field of art and design. They bring professional expertise and enthusiasm to their teaching. Specialist equipment and accommodation are of a good standard, as noted in the self-assessment report. This ensures that students are well prepared for professional work or progression to higher education.

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
C&G 7900 fashion (one-year course)	1	Number of starters	*	7	8
		Retention (%)	*	83	75
		Achievement (%)	*	+	100
GNVQ intermediate art and design	2	Number of starters	37	22	28
		Retention (%)	81	100	85
		Achievement (%)	100	82	90
GNVQ advanced art and design	3	Number of starters	16	14	12
		Retention (%)	75	71	58
		Achievement (%)	89	90	100
GCE A level design (graphics two-year course)	3	Number of starters	36	24	35
		Retention (%)	61	63	68
		Achievement (%)	77	93	87
GCE A level art techniques and practice (two-year course)	3	Number of starters	40	28	32
		Retention (%)	63	68	69
		Achievement (%)	95	89	100

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

*course not running

+data not available

Curriculum Areas

Geography, History, Psychology and Sociology

Grade 3

33 Inspectors observed 11 lessons. They agreed with some of the strengths in the college's self-assessment report and noted some additional ones. They concluded that the report did not give sufficient weight to some poor retention and pass rates.

Key strengths

- the range of flexible learning opportunities
- well-planned courses
- effective use of high-quality learning resources in some subjects
- good results in some two-year GCE A level subjects and in access courses

Weaknesses

- below average retention rates on many courses
- failure of some teachers to provide sufficiently demanding work for students
- lack of rigour in monitoring students' progress on one-year GCSE and GCE A level courses
- insufficient use of IT

34 The college offers a wide range of courses in response to the needs of students who wish to participate in further education. The majority of provision is at intermediate and advanced level. Flexible arrangements allow students to follow courses full time at GCSE, GCE A/AS level over one or two years, or attend part time during the day or evening, or study by distance learning. Adult students follow access to higher education courses on the main campus or in centres in the community. A large number of adults have benefited from the opportunities for progression offered by these courses. Student numbers in some GCSE and GCE A level subjects have

declined in recent years and the college is seeking ways of promoting these courses more widely in the community.

35 Most courses are carefully planned and managed, as the self-assessment report indicates. The college assessed the quality of teaching as good, but inspectors considered that the college had been overgenerous in its grading of teaching and learning. Of the 11 lessons observed by inspectors, six had strengths which outweighed weaknesses. This profile is below the national profile for the programme area. Most teachers use a variety of appropriate teaching methods in order to stimulate students' interest. They give clear and well-structured explanations of topics. They co-ordinate their teaching well and make good use of teaching aids. In the best lessons, discussion between teachers and students was lively and well managed. For example, in one lesson the teacher used a newspaper article about a 60-year-old mother to draw out students' own prejudices. This led to an examination of the difficulty of remaining objective while studying social phenomena. Some teaching is dull and lacks momentum and rigour. In some lessons, the purpose of activities was not made clear. Students were given insufficient opportunities to join in discussion when it would have been appropriate to do so and teachers did not sustain students' interest.

36 Achievements on the GCE A level geography, history and sociology courses have been consistently above national average for further education colleges for the past three years. Students often achieve high grades. In 1998, 88% of sociology students and 63% of history students achieved grades A to C. Retention rates on GCE A level sociology and psychology courses have been below the national average for the last three years. Retention rates have deteriorated from 1997 to 1999, from 60% to 52% on the GCE A level sociology course, compared with a national average in 1999 of 68%. Only 57% of GCE A

Curriculum Areas

level psychology students completed their studies in 1999, compared with a national average of 69%. The college's self-assessment offers only partial analysis of why retention rates on some courses are unsatisfactory. There is insufficient use of data to set specific targets for individual students. Measures taken to reduce the numbers of students who withdraw from courses include closer monitoring of attendance. Progression to higher education from the GCE A level and access courses is good.

37 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that teachers are well qualified and knowledgeable about their subjects. The quality of most paper-based learning materials is high.

Teachers of history and psychology have produced good-quality teaching packs and workbooks which contain activities, exercises and suggestions for further reading and research. Lessons take place in dedicated classrooms, most of which are suitable for purpose. The library is adequately stocked with books, videos and journals. It keeps a good selection of up-to-date newspaper cuttings. As acknowledged in the self-assessment report, the quality of students' learning experience is impaired by the lack of integration of IT with the curriculum. The college is taking steps to remedy this weakness.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in geography, history, psychology and sociology, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GCSE sociology	2	Number of starters	37	24	17
		Retention (%)	62	59	*
		Achievement (%)	62	46	*
GCE A level history (two-year course)	3	Number of starters	73	69	50
		Retention (%)	71	67	88
		Achievement (%)	100	91	90
GCE A level psychology	3	Number of starters	62	59	88
		Retention (%)	47	61	57
		Achievement (%)	67	53	68
GCE A level sociology (two-year course)	3	Number of starters	48	47	25
		Retention (%)	60	53	52
		Achievement (%)	90	100	92
Access to social science	3	Number of starters	45	35	35
		Retention (%)	69	71	83
		Achievement (%)	71	60	76
GCE A level history (one-year course)	3	Number of starters	19	24	17
		Retention (%)	95	96	82
		Achievement (%)	33	39	44

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

*data unreliable

Curriculum Areas

Provision for Students with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities

Grade 3

38 Thirteen lessons were observed. The inspection covered college-based courses and courses taught as part of the college's franchised provision. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report, although they considered that some weaknesses in teaching were not recognised.

Key strengths

- opportunities for students to experience a variety of activities
- creative use of practical activities to support learning
- students' increased confidence and competence
- good achievements in communication skills
- well-resourced accommodation

Weaknesses

- failure of some teaching to meet students' needs
- ineffective monitoring and recording of students' progress
- failure to provide sufficiently demanding work for some of the most able students
- an over emphasis on external accreditation for students
- inappropriate programmes for visually impaired students

39 Inspectors agreed with the college, that it makes provision for students with a wide range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Students include young people and adults with emotional and behavioural difficulties, language disorders, sensory impairments and moderate to

severe learning difficulties. Programmes for college-based students are designed to enable students to improve their standard of basic education, develop independent living skills and prepare for the world of work. Students can choose from a range of craft and creative activities and vocational options. The college's franchised provision in Plymouth provides students with individual learning opportunities primarily in basic skills. Students with learning difficulties study alongside students on basic education courses.

40 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that teachers know the students well and are generally aware of their needs. However, insufficient thought has been given to prioritising what students need to learn. Learning programmes do not clearly identify the skills individual students need to develop to reach their individual overall goals, nor do they identify interim objectives against which progress can be monitored. Planning and recording tend to concentrate on the content covered rather than the learning achieved. Teachers judge students' achievements in the context of the skills and competences they need to learn to meet the requirements of nationally recognised qualifications. This hinders recognition of what individual students are achieving overall. Records of students' progress are often just lists of general activities undertaken in lessons, with no record of what the individual has learnt. College staff work closely with specialist agencies to ensure that the needs of students are met. Insufficient understanding by some college staff of the needs of visually impaired students means that some of these students' learning needs are not being addressed.

41 In the best lessons, teachers provide numerous opportunities for students to learn through practical activities. For example, students with severe learning difficulties learning about the use of battery power were able to try batteries in torches, cassette players

Curriculum Areas

and a remote control car. They learnt that batteries could power light, movement and sound. By the end of the lesson they knew how to change a battery and choose the right size. In another lesson, on life in Victorian times, students were able to try on Victorian clothing and compare it with their own. In some less successful lessons, teachers taught all the students together using the same teaching materials and making little attempt to differentiate the work to meet the needs of students of different abilities. Insufficient demands were made on some of the more able students who found the tasks they were set uninteresting and irrelevant to their lives and aims. The self-assessment report did not identify these weaknesses in teaching and learning.

42 Students with learning difficulties develop confidence and competence as they learn to cope with the college environment. Most students make steady progress and develop good independent living and communication skills. Few students at the Saltash site progress to further education or training. Some students move aimlessly from course to course without progress being planned or achieved.

43 The specialist accommodation for students at St Austell is excellent. The multiskills workshops are well equipped. IT facilities are good with hardware and software that meet the needs of students with visual impairment and poor literacy. Other teaching areas, including those for the franchised provision, are bright and enlivened by displays of students' work. This strength was omitted from the self-assessment report. Teachers and support staff work hard to provide students with a supportive working environment. However, there are insufficient opportunities for staff on the Saltash and St Austell sites to meet, share good practice and develop common standards.

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 2

44 Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses in support for students which were identified in the college's self-assessment report. They considered, however, that the college understated one key weakness in relation to learning support.

Key strengths

- strong and productive school links
- the good quality of pre-entry guidance for students
- well-structured, supportive tutorial provision
- comprehensive careers education and guidance
- effective support for students with disabilities
- well-managed student services provision

Weaknesses

- underdeveloped learning support service
- few opportunities for accreditation of students' prior learning
- unco-ordinated work experience arrangements

45 Guidance for students on entry to courses is good. Prospective students benefit from a wide range of information and guidance which helps them to make informed choices about the learning opportunities open to them. Publicity materials take account of the needs of different customer groups. Good written detail about courses is supplemented by an attractive college video.

46 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that school liaison activities are a particular strength. Local schools appreciate the high quality of advice and guidance provided for young people. College staff attend a wide range of careers events,

presentations and parents evenings. A vocational pathways programme allows pupils to pursue vocational options at the college during years 10 and 11. This has helped them to make informed decisions about further education.

47 One hundred community-based 'taster' sessions were offered to adults last year in conjunction with various agencies, including tenants associations and Citizens' Advice Bureaux. Careers advisers, senior tutors, student services staff and an adult guidance worker provide a comprehensive guidance service. The college offers a psychometric testing service to encourage more people to take up new learning opportunities. The college and its franchise partners do not systematically use accreditation of prior learning to recognise students' prior achievements and experiences. This weakness was recognised in the self-assessment report.

48 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that there is a good tutorial system. Senior tutors are pivotal to the development, review and effective operation of the system. There is a clear policy and a well-planned programme of tutorial activities. Regular action-planning and reviews are used to guide students' progress. The programme is sufficiently flexible to meet individual needs, and to reflect the differing demands of a range of qualifications. GCE A level students benefit from a programme of study comprising lectures from tutors and guest speakers that leads to general studies GCE A level for those who wish to sit the examination.

49 The college is in a pilot area for the new education maintenance allowance. Eligible students receive their allowance conditional upon satisfactory attendance. This has prompted the college to tighten its absence monitoring procedures. Two attendance officers have been appointed. They record and follow-up unauthorised absences promptly. It is too early to tell whether this is having a significant impact on attendance rates.

Cross-college Provision

50 Inspectors judged that the college overestimated the quality of its learning support. There is little contact between learning support staff at St Austell and Saltash, which limits the sharing of good practice. Students are given a diagnostic assessment early in their course to ascertain their support needs. Support is predominantly through attendance at learning support centres. This method has proved to be unattractive to some students. The take-up rate by those diagnosed as needing help was less than 40% in 1998-89. Emerging figures for 1999-2000 indicate little improvement on this. There is no overall assessment of the effectiveness of learning support, and this has hampered its further development.

51 Students with sensory impairments and disabilities are effectively integrated with the life of the college. Strong links with local schools ease transition for students with physical disabilities. Students who use wheelchairs are able to gain access to most of the provision. In some areas, for example beauty therapy, special equipment is made available. One student who has cerebral palsy is provided with a transcription service. Very good support for hearing-impaired students is provided through the county audiology service.

52 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that students benefit from a comprehensive careers education programme. A careers and progression handbook outlines the modular framework, and provides information for students on planning progression. The college has a good relationship with Cornwall and Devon Careers. There is a clear partnership agreement containing targets which are reviewed annually. Careers advisers provide an efficient guidance service for students. The college careers information officer effectively supports students through their chosen career modules. This help is greatly valued by students. The college has begun to review its provision of work experience for students. New documentation has been produced and is now in

use. The college has identified as weaknesses, health and safety monitoring of work placements and the lack of a co-ordinated approach to securing them.

53 There is a dedicated student services team. The senior tutor role is well conceived and implemented securing consistency of practice across faculties without imposing unnecessary uniformity. The team is well managed by the head of student services, with regular meetings and clear communications. The whole team is self-critical, and this has helped to promote a responsive and effective service to students.

General Resources

Grade 2

54 Inspectors agreed with most aspects of the college's assessment of its general resources, but considered that some weaknesses relating to IT and the libraries had not been clearly identified.

Key strengths

- well-maintained buildings and grounds
- good progress with accommodation strategy
- extensive programme of accommodation improvements
- efficient space utilisation
- good refectories and cafeterias

Weaknesses

- slow development of a coherent strategy for learning technology
- insufficient availability of IT in some areas
- inadequate performing arts accommodation
- a few buildings in poor condition

Cross-college Provision

55 The college estate is varied and disparate. It is being effectively developed and improved. The accommodation strategy is clear, well substantiated and linked to the strategic plan. Saltash College, 33 miles from St Austell, is the most diverse site. It has a collection of permanent and temporary, recent and older buildings. In St Austell, much of the provision at Trevarthian Road is in buildings dating from the 1960s and 1970s. The site at Polkyth is of the poorest quality and the smallest. It accommodates some performing arts classes. Nearby Sedgemoor is the best-quality site. It includes new high-quality accommodation for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and for catering and hospitality. Other recent major developments include a new art block and a cafeteria and common room at Trevarthian Road, and the large learning centre at Sedgemoor.

56 There has been much effective refurbishment and redecoration. Buildings are well maintained. Grounds are attractive. The estate is kept clean. Many teaching rooms are in good decorative order, appropriately equipped and brightened by students' work and other displays. A few teaching rooms are furnished to a more basic level and are too small for their current use. The college is in the top third of the sector for efficient utilisation of its space. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that performing arts courses are poorly accommodated.

57 Good progress has been made in improving access for people with disabilities, for whom approximately 80% of the accommodation is accessible. Most of the inaccessible accommodation comprises offices or general teaching rooms. The college has links with the Cornwall Educational Audiology Unit, with which it shares the Sedgemoor site, and provides a specialist room for hearing-impaired students. There is image-enhancing software on computers for partially sighted people at all main college sites. These strengths were recognised in the self-assessment report.

58 In St Austell, the faculty of personal and leisure services has recently taken over the catering facilities, which are operated by students, supplemented by employees. This has resulted in improved facilities, keener pricing and increased levels of business. All three main sites have good-quality refectories and cafeterias. The self-assessment report acknowledges these strengths. Circulation areas such as entrance lobbies have been adapted as small social areas, with dispensing machines for refreshments. Cafeteria and snack bar facilities are heavily used as social areas throughout the day. In dry weather, students make good use of pleasant external seating areas at Sedgemoor and Trevarthian Road. Good progress has been made in improving staff working and social accommodation.

59 A library at Trevarthian Road serves the St Austell sites. Saltash College has its own library. Both provide appropriate environments for study. Links between library staff and teachers in curriculum areas are not systematic. Stocks are better in some curriculum areas than others. A particular strength of the St Austell library is the large number of newspaper cuttings held for some curriculum areas. Students commented that it is usually easy to find a quiet study space. The libraries are effectively managed, and library staff produced a detailed self-assessment report of their own. Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that libraries are not adequately supported by IT. The CD-ROM playback facilities at St Austell library are unreliable. The Saltash library is not on the college network or the Internet. Until a year ago, the college lacked a strategy for IT and learning resources. This has not helped faculties, libraries and learning centres to co-ordinate their development. This weakness in planning and developing learning resources was not identified in the self-assessment report.

60 The college has invested heavily in IT. It is close to its aim of ensuring that all computers are sufficiently up to date to run appropriate modern software packages. The

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communications infrastructure is being updated. However, much of this investment is recent. Students in some curriculum areas, for example, mathematics and engineering, have not been making sufficient use of IT. The three well-equipped learning centres are well used, principally for IT courses, by a wide range of clients, including part-time adult students. The relatively late start made by the college in developing IT to support learning across the curriculum is acknowledged in the self-assessment report.

61 Students are offered a good range of extra-curricular activities. The college does not have its own indoor sporting facilities. However, use of indoor facilities, including racket games and swimming, is available at low or no cost to students by arrangement with the local council's leisure centre. A good programme of team games is provided and the college participates in local, regional and national competitions.

Quality Assurance

Grade 3

62 Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. However, the college significantly overestimated the quality of teaching and learning, and understated some weaknesses, such as poor retention.

Key strengths

- detailed and well-managed quality assurance systems
- well-organised programme of lesson observations
- comprehensive college charters and complaints procedure
- the systematic collection and analysis of students' views on the college
- effective appraisal and staff development
- productive links on quality assurance with a partner college

Weaknesses

- overgenerous assessments of the quality of teaching and learning
- lack of impact of quality assurance on declining retention rates
- inadequate monitoring of some aspects of franchised provision
- lack of understanding of target-setting by some course teams
- some poor-quality course reviews and associated action plans

63 There is a high level of commitment from governors and staff to monitoring and improving the quality of the college's work. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that quality assurance systems are well managed and supported by detailed documentation. Governors have an effective committee that sets targets for academic quality and monitors their

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achievement. Managers and staff gather evidence and form judgements on teaching and learning and students' achievements. However, inspectors judged that the college's quality assurance systems are not effectively implemented across all curriculum areas. College data show a trend of declining retention rates for the three years to 1998. Whilst college data show an improvement in some subjects in 1999, college performance, when compared with national benchmarking data published by the FEFC, shows that incremental improvement has not been achieved on a significant number of courses during recent years.

64 Courses are reviewed annually by course teams using standard procedures and documentation. These reviews are monitored by heads of faculty and the curriculum management team. Courses which cause concern may be selected for a detailed course audit. Many course reviews are completed carefully and thoroughly, but some are insufficiently analytical, with unclear judgements about students' performance and weak action plans. Each team is required to set retention and achievement targets for its course. Often teams have to refine data generated centrally by the college before they can use it. Some staff are unclear about whether targets should cover the whole or part of a course. Course reviews do not yet cover all part-time courses.

65 Inspectors agreed that the college has extensive lesson observation systems for college-based courses and franchised courses. However, staff are not yet adept at synthesising strengths and weaknesses into an overall grade for each lesson. This leads to an unrealistic view of the quality of teaching and learning which does not help the college to identify weaknesses which need to be addressed. The internal assessment of teaching and learning produced an overgenerous assessment of the quality of this central aspect of the college's work. Of the lessons observed by inspectors in the college, 58% were judged to be good or outstanding, compared with the college's assessment of 88%.

66 There are few curriculum links between franchise providers and specialist staff in the college. Franchise partners did not produce their own self-assessment reports and played little part in the college's self-assessment process. There are regular unannounced visits to selected providers which include lesson observations. Students' views are collected. Data regarding students' achievements are analysed and reported to senior managers. Teachers on franchised adult basic education courses have not yet been assessed by observers who have a good understanding and knowledge of this work.

67 Students' views are collected through questionnaires and analysed systematically. The results, along with the outcomes of course reviews and lesson observations, inform the quality assurance and self-assessment committee of the academic board, which has responsibility for oversight of quality assurance in the college. The group effectively monitors actions resulting from this accumulated evidence.

68 In some areas, internal verifiers work closely together and share good practice. In others, criteria and standards are less well defined. Weaknesses in internal verification were noted in the self-assessment report. The college has appointed a lead verifier to raise the standard of internal verification across the college. Joint training and inspections of each other's provision have been undertaken with another further education college. The processes adopted follow closely those of the FEFC inspectorate.

69 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that the college charter is comprehensive. Standards are set for many aspects of the college's work. There is a customised charter for franchised provision. The complaints procedure is clear. Complaints are responded to within the time specified. Complainants are kept informed about the progress of their complaint. Standards of service for support areas are well developed in

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most areas. Many support staff have been reviewing the quality of their work for some years. A few areas, such as management administration, are still working towards setting standards for their work.

70 Staff are appraised annually by their line manager. For teachers, this appraisal includes discussion of aspects of their teaching noted in lesson observations. Appraisals help to identify staff development needs. Staff value the staff development opportunities offered.

Governance

Grade 3

71 Inspectors and auditors agreed with some of the judgements in the self-assessment report, but identified additional significant weaknesses which were not identified by the college. They were unable to agree with the college's self-assessment of its governance.

Key strengths

- commitment to tackling important issues facing the college
- good oversight of full-time students' achievements
- good range of skills and professional expertise

Weaknesses

- key aspects of the follow-up to the report by Professor Newby
- important aspects of corporation clerking
- inadequate oversight of franchised provision

72 Governors have a good range of skills and professional expertise including knowledge of finance, business and education. In the last few years, there have been several new governors. Corporation and committee meetings are well attended. There are standing orders, a code of

conduct and a register of interests. Governors have demonstrated considerable commitment to tackling important issues during a difficult period for the college. However, inspectors and auditors identified significant weaknesses in the operation of the board's business. 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 its financial memorandum with the FEFC.

73 In June 1998, a highly critical report by Professor Howard Newby on the handling by the college of a serious allegation was published. The report was commissioned by the FEFC in response to a complaint to the secretary of state. It concerned matters which have taken up a considerable amount of the time of the principal and the governing body since shortly after incorporation in 1993. Governors were asked to approve and monitor an action plan to be produced by the principal in response to the report.

74 The corporation's handling of the important issues arising from the report has relied too much on informal processes and has been unsatisfactory in some key respects. A governors' working group was established to oversee action arising from the report. The group has reported regularly to the board but its reports have consisted largely of slide presentations. No formal record has been kept of the working group's meetings. Positive action has been taken, including the establishment of new grievance and disciplinary procedures and training for managers and governors. However, there were significant weaknesses in the way in which the main issues identified in the report were addressed. The principal's action plan did not specifically address the relationship between the principal and governors, one of the key action points in the Newby report.

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75 There has been poor clerking advice to the corporation on some key issues. Revisions to the instrument and articles of government have not been properly implemented. The agreed membership includes too many business members and the local authorities and community groups from which the college should seek nominations have not been identified. Governors have not agreed a transition plan setting out the dates and actions required to establish the revised governing body. Although there is an appropriate range of committees, some have incomplete terms of reference. Prior to June 1999, the search committee did not have any terms of reference. The centrally held record of corporation business is incomplete and inspectors had difficulty obtaining copies of key documents. The self-assessment report did not identify these weaknesses.

76 Governors have not maintained adequate oversight of franchised provision. Although they receive regular reports on franchised activity including details of student retention and achievement, and have been diligent in requesting regular reports, they have not ensured that the college is acting in line with the FEFC's guidance and policies on franchising and local priorities. This is particularly important as financial forecasts approved by governors include a high reliance on income from franchise contracts.

77 A useful induction process for newly appointed governors has been established and a detailed governors' handbook has been produced. Members of the corporation attend regular training events with senior staff and external consultants on topics like the financial responsibilities of governors. Sometimes briefings on key issues take place during meetings of the corporation. In this way, governors are kept up to date with many issues and developments in further education.

78 Governors maintain a good oversight of full-time students' achievements through the curriculum standards committee. The audit committee effectively monitors the plans and reports of the internal and external auditors. The corporation does not yet formally monitor the implementation of the college's equal opportunities policy.

79 As the self-assessment report indicated, communications with staff and students in general are improving. Governors join staff meetings and individual governors have recently linked with particular faculties and cross-college areas in which they had an interest. Staff welcome this development. A group of governors has met periodically with the students' guilds at both sites. Although governors have completed two self-assessment exercises under the new framework, they have not yet established agreed criteria for the monitoring and evaluation of their own performance. In 1998, the corporation established a set of performance indicators and six strategic objectives to address a number of key issues over a two-year period. However, many of the objectives and the performance indicators do not have clear targets against which progress can be effectively measured.

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Management

Grade 4

80 Inspectors agreed with some of the judgements set out in the detailed self-assessment of management. However, they considered that the college had omitted some significant weaknesses. Inspectors were unable to agree with the college's self-assessment of its management.

Key strengths

- clear management structure
- effective development of course costing mechanisms
- the wide range of external links

Weaknesses

- continued involvement in substantial franchised activity at distant locations contrary to FEFC guidance and lack of a clear strategy for reducing the college's dependency on this franchising
- unsatisfactory contractual arrangements for franchised provision
- weak financial management
- actions taken by the principal adversely affecting relations with the governors
- insufficient links between the St Austell and Saltash centres

81 The continued involvement of the college in substantial and widespread franchise arrangements outside the college's area is contrary to FEFC guidance. In 1998-99, over 12,000 students were enrolled on franchised courses. Of these, over 8,000 were on short courses as far afield as the North East, Yorkshire, the Home Counties and London. The college is reducing the overall quantity of franchised provision and the proportion which takes place at distant locations. However, distant provision remains substantial. Although

staff at the college's management centre have worked hard to improve administrative checks, inspectors identified significant weaknesses in the college's compliance with FEFC guidance and in its contractual arrangements for franchised provision.

82 The college has not met the FEFC's requirement to consult with local providers before franchising provision out of its area. A typical arrangement involves the college contracting with a training organisation to provide training expressed in funding units. The training organisation then contracts with employers to deliver training to their employees, sometimes using a self-employed trainer approved by the college. Employers for whom training is arranged are often unaware of any link with St Austell College until after they have contracted with the training organisation. These arrangements limit the degree of control the college can exercise over its franchised courses, a key factor in the college's funding agreement with the FEFC. Inspectors and auditors considered that these arrangements give rise to concerns about the eligibility for funding of some franchised provision. These concerns have been referred to the relevant FEFC officers for further scrutiny. Management centre staff visit franchise centres but tutors teaching on franchised courses do not have links with the relevant curriculum staff in the college.

83 Some actions taken by the principal, particularly with regard to matters relating to the Newby report, have adversely affected relations with the corporation. The principal's action plan in response to the Newby report was a brief document which lacked clear milestones and outcomes and did not address all the issues identified in the report. In other respects, the executive team works well with the corporation. Action has been taken to improve grievance and disciplinary procedures, and training for managers and governors as recommended in the Newby report.

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84 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is weak. The college's financial forecasting has been unreliable. Budget out-turn figures have often been worse than predicted. The college has experienced significant financial difficulties. There were signs of improvement in 1998-99 but the college's financial recovery remains susceptible to changes which affect full-cost courses and franchised provision. This makes it difficult to form realistic assumptions about future income. Financial reports are prepared on a monthly basis. They do not provide managers and governors with sufficient detail about franchised and full-cost courses and the information provided is not readily reconcilable with franchise course information provided for the curriculum standards committee. The executive team monitors the financial position through the year. However, in 1998-99 the last two months' results and year-end out-turn position for 1998-99 were not properly considered. The college has established detailed financial regulations and procedures which are subject to regular update. There is a well-established system of budget preparation. Budget reporting procedures are clear, and there is a monthly timetable for the production of financial information for management, budget holders and governors.

85 The management structure is clear. Managers and teaching staff are efficiently deployed. Managers are given appropriate authority to make decisions and they are supported in the decisions they take. The effective development of course costing has contributed to more efficient use of staff and resources. It also helps governors to assess the financial contribution of each faculty when faculty business plans are presented to them.

86 There are insufficient links between the St Austell and Saltash centres. The college has taken some action to address this. For example, Saltash has been designated a faculty and its

head and senior tutor now attend weekly meetings at St Austell. Some managers at Saltash are involved in cross-site committees and working parties. However, there is little sharing of good practice between curriculum teams. For example, new beauty therapy provision at St Austell was developed with little consultation at course team level. The principal's visits to the Saltash site are infrequent and he has not addressed staff there on some key matters affecting the future of the college.

87 Inspectors agreed with the college that staff are involved in the strategic planning process. The academic board monitors progress made against the college's annual operating statement and a detailed report is produced. Faculty operating plans are generally consistent with strategic objectives, but the links are not explicit and action plans are not costed. Operational planning for support areas is less well developed. Inspectors found the quality of some data on students' achievements to be poor. The college was not able to provide reliable statistical information on students' retention rates and students' achievements for some subjects and courses.

88 The college has effective links with a wide range of external organisations and community projects. Relationships and contracts with the TEC are effectively managed in partnership with Cornwall College. There is a good range of marketing activity at St Austell. Marketing is not so well resourced and less effective at Saltash.

89 The college has a wide range of policies which are set out in a comprehensive staff handbook. New policies have been introduced for inclusive learning, curriculum 2000 and the environment. The equal opportunities policy is supported by a detailed code of practice, guidelines on harassment, and a complaints procedure. The college has recently carried out a detailed audit of equal opportunities.

Cross-college Provision

Conclusions

90 The self-assessment report produced by the college contained much detailed information which was used as a basis for planning and carrying out the inspection. Inspectors considered that the college made some realistic and self-critical evaluations. However, some sections were not sufficiently comprehensive. Action plans did not establish priorities. Proposed improvements were sometimes expressed as intentions, rather than measurable objectives. The college placed insufficient emphasis on weaknesses in students' achievements and in teaching and learning. Inspectors found significant weaknesses in governance and management which were not identified in the self-assessment report. Inspectors agreed with four of the curriculum grades and two of the cross-college grades awarded by the college. In all other curriculum and cross-college areas inspectors considered the grade awarded by the college to be overgenerous.

91 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 1999)

<i>Age</i>	<i>%</i>
Under 16	3
16-18 years	25
19-24 years	13
25+ years	58
Not known	1
Total	10

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (October 1999)

<i>Level of study</i>	<i>%</i>
Level 1 (foundation)	19
Level 2 (intermediate)	29
Level 3 (advanced)	26
Level 4/5 (higher)	2
Non-schedule 2	24
Total	100

Source: college data

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

<i>Programme area</i>	<i>Full time</i>	<i>Part time</i>	<i>Total provision %</i>
Science	294	547	10
Agriculture	50	4	1
Construction	109	209	4
Engineering	150	373	6
Business	246	890	13
Hotel and catering	178	777	11
Health and community care	436	1,677	25
Art and design	266	581	10
Humanities	467	859	15
Basic education	61	361	5
Total	2,257	6,278	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 11% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (July 1999)

	<i>Perm- anent</i>	<i>Fixed term</i>	<i>Casual</i>	<i>Total</i>
Direct learning contact	135	109	11	255
Supporting direct learning contact	73	31	0	104
Other support	24	10	3	37
Total	232	150	14	396

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1997	1998	1999
Income	£12,975,000	£13,045,000	£14,453,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	£17.53	£15.84	£16.20*
Payroll as a proportion of income	63%	64%	59%
Achievement of funding target	156%	100%	103%
Diversity of income	17%	19%	24%
Operating surplus	-£1,372,000	-£410,000	£419,000

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

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

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

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

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

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

*provisional data

Students' achievements data

Level	Retention and pass	Students aged 16 to 18			Students aged 19 or over		
		1996	1997	1998	1996	1997	1998
1	Number of starters	819	963	790	1,246	1,456	3,421
	Retention (%)	83	75	76	92	85	49
	Achievement (%)	90	87	74	92	91	79
2	Number of starters	1,274	1,499	1,199	1,449	1,740	2,164
	Retention (%)	77	73	77	90	83	82
	Achievement (%)	88	83	76	83	86	68
3	Number of starters	1,402	2,010	2,086	910	1,128	1,226
	Retention (%)	90	67	70	91	82	81
	Achievement (%)	86	88	80	85	84	69
4 or 5	Number of starters	15	17	0	97	73	117
	Retention (%)	73	82	n/a	96	81	86
	Achievement (%)	40	20	n/a	71	93	39
Short courses	Number of starters	2,338	2,166	2,927	10,637	16,540	17,148
	Retention (%)	96	99	97	100	100	100
	Achievement (%)	96	97	78	98	99	80
Unknown/unclassified	Number of starters	1,061	1,477	1,008	2,490	5,900	2,826
	Retention (%)	74	72	66	95	79	95
	Achievement (%)	86	95	40	90	97	27

Source: ISR

n/a not applicable

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