



National Star College of Further Education

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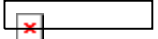
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Basic information about the college



Name of college: The National Star College of Further Education

Type of college Residential/day, independent and specialist

Principal: Mrs Helen Sexton

Address of college Ullenwood, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire GL3 9QU

Telephone number: 01242 527631

Fax number: 01242 222234

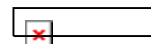
Chair of governors: Dr Keith Anderson CBE

Charity reference number: 220 239

Name of reporting inspector: Mrs Christine Steadman HMI

Dates of inspection: 4-7 February 2002

Part A: Summary



Information about the college

National Star College opened in 1967 to meet the needs of young people from across the United Kingdom with a range of physical disabilities. During 1998, the college extended its provision for students with acquired brain injuries. They currently admit students with a wide and increasingly complex range of physical disabilities. In some cases, students have associated learning, mental health, medical, emotional and behavioural difficulties.

The college is located on a rural site in the Cotswolds, close to the town of Cheltenham. The 35-acre campus includes a range of specialist facilities, which have been purpose built or adapted to meet the needs of the students. These include teaching areas, therapy provision and leisure facilities. Residential provision is also provided on-site. Some supported and semi-independent provision is available in Cheltenham and Gloucester. A small number of students reside in independent accommodation provided through a local housing association. Students who live off-site are transported to and from the college in vehicles adapted for adults with disabilities.

The college has grown by 16% over the last two years and now has 146 residential and nine day students. The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) funds most students for 36-week placements. The college offers a graduated response to independent living. Over half of the students experience high levels of support on-site. Most progress to various supported and independent living environments in the local community during their time at the college.

Educational provision includes a range of pre-vocational and vocational courses at entry, foundation, intermediate and advanced level. Additionally, individual programmes are designed, which include therapy, literacy and numeracy, key skills, personal development, learning support and care.

The college is a company limited by guarantee with charitable status. It has eight trustees and directors. They are also governors of the college. In the mission statement for the college, the learner has a central focus. It states that the college aims to "enable students to prepare for the best that adult life can offer through cost effective, innovative programmes of education, training and independence".

How effective is the college?

Achievements are good for the majority of students, with most able to progress by at least one level during their time at the college. Some students' progress to advanced level and transfer to further or higher education provision successfully. For a small number of students on the entry level skills for life course, progress is less than satisfactory. Teaching is good or better in the majority of pre-vocational areas and there is outstanding teaching in all vocational areas. Some teaching on the entry level skills for life course is unsatisfactory. Accommodation and specialist facilities are very good, with an appropriate range of purpose-built provision. Residential provision is generally good and promotes independence. Progress in personal development is good and is improving. Pre-entry and initial assessment are good and inform individual planning in all areas of the college. Some on-course assessment is too general and is not co-ordinated with other planning. The wide range of courses and activities across the extended curriculum effectively meets the students' needs. There is very good access to the local community. The development of independent living skills is good.

Key strengths

- effective preparation for adult life
- high standards of care and support
- effective development of independence and autonomy
- appropriate wide range of educational provision
- some exceptional teaching in vocational areas
- stimulating and attractive learning environments
- very good progression by most students.

What should be improved?

- communication systems for some students
- some educational and residential accommodation
- the complex paper-based recording
- some teaching on courses for students with severe and complex physical disabilities and learning difficulties.

Further aspects of provision requiring improvement are identified in sections on individual subjects and courses in the full report.

Quality of provision in curriculum and occupational areas

The table below shows overall judgements about provision in subjects and courses that were inspected. Judgements are based primarily on the quality of teaching, training and learning and how well students achieve. All courses were inspected. Inspectors make overall judgements on curriculum areas and on the effectiveness of leadership and management in the range: outstanding (grade1), good (2), satisfactory (3), unsatisfactory (4), very weak (5).

| Area | Overall judgements about provision and comment |
|--|---|
| Business studies and information technology | Outstanding. Retention and achievement rates are excellent. Teaching is very effective. Lessons are well planned and meet the individual needs of students. Resources are very good. Very effective curriculum management. There are excellent opportunities for students to make progress. |
| Creative and performing arts, health and social care and sports and recreation | Outstanding. Provision is excellent and very well managed. The quality of teaching is very good with systematic assessment of individual need used effectively as the basis for realistic target setting. Well-qualified staff work collaboratively to meet the additional needs of students. Some resources are insufficient for the size of the groups. |
| Literacy and numeracy | Satisfactory. The majority of teaching is good and involves the effective use of a wide range of learning resources, including information and communications technology (ICT). There is insufficient co-ordination of literacy and numeracy across the curriculum. Access to literacy and numeracy is inadequate for some students. |
| Skills for life | Unsatisfactory. The programme gives an appropriate focus to preparation for future living, but the teaching was unsatisfactory in half the lessons observed. An appropriate focus on preparation for independent living. Assessment and recording of the progress of students with learning difficulties is poor. Recent changes in course leadership have resulted in improved management of this area of learning. |
| Skills for working life | Good. The curriculum is well designed and meets the needs of students effectively with good levels of progression. Most teaching is good with some very good. Some unsatisfactory resources. Co-ordination of large staff group constrains course development. |

How well is the college led and managed?

Leadership and management are good. Since the last inspection, the college has expanded its range of courses and has developed the provision on-site and at off-site residential accommodation. It has responded effectively to the growing complexity of need in the student population. Achievement is very good for the majority of students, with many progressing to levels higher than anticipated on entry. Provision for students on the entry level skills for life course is less than satisfactory, however. The strategic planning progress is rigorous and communicated effectively. Operational management is good, with effective and rigorous quality assurance procedures. The self-assessment process is comprehensive and covers all aspects of provision. Staff morale is good. Governors and trustees are very effective in their oversight of the provision. Financial management is good. The college provides good value for money.

To what extent is the provision of the college educationally and socially inclusive?

The college takes students from all areas of the United Kingdom and from wide and diverse backgrounds. It admits students experiencing complex physical and learning difficulties. Whilst the complexity of need has increased since the last inspection, the college has identified these trends appropriately and is developing provision to ensure that all students can have access to learning. The provision of assistive and adaptive aids is not well developed for some individual students.

Communication with students is good. Guidance documents ensure that students are well informed

and share in the decision-making procedures of the college. Students are well represented on college committees. The college has a good gender balance within both the student body and among staff. The college currently employs two members of staff from minority ethnic groups. There are 15 students from minority ethnic groups, some 10% of the college's population. Issues relating to ethnicity, sexual health and equal opportunities are well addressed in the newly revised personal development programme. However, the college does not prepare students effectively for the management of such issues in adult life. Issues relating to cultural diversity are not well promoted in the college. However, the use of volunteers from European countries, North and South America and Japan is successful, with students sharing in specifically organised cultural evenings in a residential house. The two members of staff with physical disabilities are effective role models for students. Relationships with the local community are mutually beneficial and give students very good opportunities to live and work with adults from other environments.

How well are students and trainees guided and supported?

Students are well supported in education, learning support, personal development and therapy. Residential provision is good and supports the acquisition of skills for independent living across the extended curriculum. Efficient procedures are in place to ensure that prospective and new students are made welcome and that their individual needs are professionally assessed. Staff are well informed of what support is required and plan interventions effectively, taking account of individual need.

Personal support for students is good and is improving. Key workers from residential houses work with personal tutors to support students in the achievement of targets which focus on independent and social, personal and communication skills. The college has developed excellent links with local providers and agencies giving students very effective access to groups and facilities in the local area. Students are well consulted and take an active part in the decision-making procedures of the college.

Students' view of the college

Students' views about the college were taken into account and a summary of their main comments is presented below:

What students like about the college

- very supportive and caring staff
- being treated as an adult
- individual key-workers and personal tutors
- their involvement in decision making
- facilities on the site.

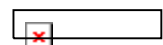
What they feel could be improved

- the numbers of care staff
- night lighting on campus
- timing of transport to and from college
- the quality of some food
- the frequency of regular staff/student meetings.

Other information

The college has two months to prepare an action plan in response to the report. It must show the action the college will take to bring about improvements in response to issues raised in the report. The governors must agree the plan and send copies of it to the LSC and the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED).

Part B: The college as a whole



Summary of grades awarded to teaching and learning by inspectors

| Aspect & learner type | Graded good or better (grades 1 to 3) % | Graded satisfactory (grade 4) % | Graded less than satisfactory (grades 5 to 7) % |
|----------------------------------|--|--|--|
| Teaching - all age groups | 80% | 10% | 10% |
| Learning - all age groups | 73% | 17% | 10% |

Key: The range of grades includes: Excellent (Grade 1), Very Good (Grade 2), Good (Grade 3),

Satisfactory (Grade 4), Unsatisfactory (Grade 5), Poor (Grade 6) and Very Poor (Grade 7).

Achievement and standards

1. Students' retention and achievement rates are high and have improved significantly in recent years. Standards are monitored across the extended curriculum and are consistently high for a wide range of students. For example, in 2000/01, 86% of students achieved full awards at level 1, 89% at level 2 and 75% at level 3. The majority of students make at least the progress expected of them during their time at the college and many exceed initial expectations. Suitably challenging learning goals are set and met for most students. Some 46% of students progress from the skills for life course to the entry level skills for working life course and 57% progress from entry level courses to vocational courses at levels 1 and 2. Students are well prepared for life beyond the college. Effective transition planning gives students good support with 66% of leavers moving on to further or higher education. Some 62% move successfully into independent living arrangements.

2. Constructive and purposeful links with the local community and other education and training providers are well established and support students' achievements. For example, students start a level 4 award in information technology (IT) at the National Star College through video-conferencing links and then progress to complete the award through attendance at the local higher education colleges.

3. Students reach an appropriate level in key skills and many gain external accreditation in communication, application of number and IT. The wider key skills of problem solving, working with others and improving one's own learning and performance are also developed, although accreditation for these skills is not yet available at the college. Most students develop skills of evaluation through research, experimentation and exploration and can apply these skills to their field of study.

4. The college's mission statement, aims and values are well communicated and promote the development of lifelong learning. Residential provision and the personal development programme very effectively promote independent living skills.

Quality of teaching, training and learning

5. Teaching is generally good, with 90% of lessons judged to be at least satisfactory, and 80% good or better. Some teaching on vocational courses is outstanding with all teaching good or better. Teachers in vocational and pre-vocational courses show knowledge, competence and skill in working with students with physical disabilities and associated learning difficulties. The college recognises that the teaching of students with severe learning difficulties and those with behavioural difficulties is less successful. Appropriate college-wide training for the management of challenging behaviours has begun; however, the teaching of students with severe learning difficulties is unsatisfactory.

6. Where teaching is most effective, it is individually planned and takes account of specific learning needs. In most lessons, teachers use initial baseline and on-going assessment to set individual targets for students. The most effective teachers use information from an analysis of students' learning styles and their personal development needs to plan programmes. However, very few teachers effectively share individual targets with students at the beginning of lessons. Most reviews of progress at the end of lessons are completed as a group activity. This does not allow students the opportunity to evaluate their own progress. However, progress is reviewed every term and summatively at the end of the year. The recent introduction of personal development tutors ensures that students have designated time to discuss their progress and identify emergent issues.

7. Teachers use a range of effective methods to ensure that students can access information and activities in the majority of lessons. Some teaching does not make effective use of signs and symbols to clarify meaning and to enhance communication for students, however. In a small number of lessons, teachers use work sheets too much. Most lessons are interesting and maintain the motivation and involvement of students for long periods of time. In the majority of vocational

curriculum areas, students are very effectively challenged and achieve beyond initial expectations.

8. Students enjoy their courses and develop very good inter-personal relationships with other students, support staff, volunteers and teachers. Generally, they can describe confidently the progress they have made. The majority of students are successful in acquiring independent study skills. They are effective communicators and request support when necessary. Students value the adult response to their learning across the extended curriculum. Most students live very full lives, taking every opportunity to acquire knowledge and skills in academic, extra-curricular and social activities.

9. Most staff are well qualified and experienced to meet the demands of programmes and the wide and complex range of students. An effective appraisal process is in place. Where a need for development is identified, the management seeks to enhance the skills of staff. There are effective induction programmes for new staff. The college is committed to the development of staff skills. An effective programme is in place to train all residential staff to National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) level 2 and appropriate staff to level 3 and to ensure all teaching staff have achieved a minimum teaching qualification. Staff working in literacy and numeracy have had suitable training. All college managers receive management development training. Sick leave and staff absence are effectively monitored.

10. Specialist equipment and materials are appropriate to need and relate to specific requirements identified in individual learning plans and provider contracts. The senior management team track students and their individual provision and respond appropriately when issues for action are identified. The college acknowledges the need to update and improve certain resources and classroom-based facilities. Specific cross-college committees have been set up to review site lighting, signage and access. A capital development plan identifies what needs to be done in preparation for future legislation.

11. The development of the open learning centre is a positive move, although there is no central library and careers facility. There are some examples of insufficient resources as a result of student growth on some courses. The college has introduced a well-managed rolling replacement programme to address some of these issues.

12. The college is very effective in promoting a safe and healthy environment. Individual risk assessments have been completed for all students. The college is responsive to students' needs. For example, in response to European Union directives and comments from students, a capital plan has been devised to improve transport facilities.

13. Some of the residential provision requires refurbishment to meet the requirements of the new care standards. The college has effective plans to restructure and refurbish residential accommodation to bring all up to the quality of the best. Staff and students are consulted and involved in planning for these developments.

14. Initial and pre-entry assessment are under review by the college. The current pilot is comprehensive and includes the wider aspects of the learner's complex needs. The initial assessment is collaborative and involves staff from the care, therapy, residential and education teams. The totality of a student's needs is accurately identified by this collaborative approach.

15. Staff and students work together to develop individual goals for learning, with planned reviews at least every six weeks. However, not all areas design specific individual targets for each session. Students are fully involved in monitoring their own development and are well informed about how they are progressing. Achievements towards learning goals are recorded and, where appropriate, accredited. The very effective recording of learning goals in residences, therapy, support and education are not always communicated succinctly across the extended curriculum.

16. Regular reviews and evaluation of students' progress meet course requirements. Written and verbal feedback inform students of their progress and support future learning on most courses. However, in some areas, there is insufficient feedback to help learners improve their literacy and

numeracy skills.

17. Senior managers analyse college performance and identify clearly programmes and areas for development. However, financial and staffing restraints sometimes delay implementation of changes necessary. Assessment, verification and moderation procedures meet the requirements of awarding bodies effectively. Annual review procedures and half-termly progress reviews are well communicated to advocates, parents and the relevant agencies.

18. Students have access to a wide range of programmes across the extended curriculum and in the local community. Most courses enable students to build on what they have already achieved and experienced and to move on to advanced courses. The recently implemented revised curriculum is well planned and managed effectively. It provides a coherent progression route for students. However, information about the revised curriculum is not well disseminated to all staff.

19. The curriculum and programmes of work are socially inclusive. Individual programmes of work, care and support enable students to move on to further and higher education. A significant number of students make a successful transition to independent living on leaving the college. A few areas of the college require structural development to ensure that barriers to access are removed.

20. Significant and purposeful liaison with local communities and national agencies is a major strength. These links give students excellent opportunities to broaden their experiences, meet students from other colleges and contribute to activities with able-bodied adults. Students' progress is enhanced through a wide range of enrichment activities provided at weekends, in the evening and in the holidays. The curriculum in vocational areas is firmly embedded within the workplace and the local community. The new move to personal development targets and the inclusion of literacy and numeracy within the residences supports the integration of learning across the curriculum.

21. Students receive effective guidance both in the college and residential provision. Individual arrangements are thoughtfully planned from pre-entry assessment to transitional planning and transfer to future placements. The team that supports students includes teachers, nurses and therapists, residential and learning support facilitators and volunteers. This multi-disciplinary focus continues throughout the students' placements. Support provided by the learning support team is good. The regular monitoring and advice on mobility and learning needs for individual students helps teachers in their planning for individual students.

22. Careers education and guidance are available for all students through the purposeful links with the local careers service and full-time transition co-ordinator. The college has been awarded the Investors in Students' Careers award. Most students have the opportunity to experience work placements through their course. However, information relating to career choices is less satisfactory; access to relevant software and literature is unsatisfactory, although, in contrast, access to careers information on the Internet is good.

23. Guidance materials for prospective and new students are being developed to replace current documents, which are not always suitable for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. There is an appropriate focus on independent living and employment. Most students attend regularly and are punctual. Late attendance at lessons is appropriately challenged. Data on students' attendance and punctuality are monitored, but not yet routinely analysed. Staff have high expectations of students.

24. The senior management team has recently implemented a rigorous student-tracking programme, which has identified some mismatch between student provision and agreed needs. This has resulted in the appointment of a further ten care and support staff.

25. Personal support of students is of paramount importance to the college. A recent development of personal development planning has been well received by staff and students. It is well managed by the recently appointed director of programmes. Students appreciate the close liaison of key workers and personal tutors. Some duplication of paperwork and activity is unacceptable and

requires attention.

26. The residential provision which offers students the opportunity to live in a range of supported and semi-independent houses is well structured and monitored. Independent accommodation is appropriately organised for students where necessary. Care planning is satisfactory for the daily monitoring of students' needs. However, the co-ordination of care and education planning is less well developed. The recent introduction of education activities in the residences helps provision to be more cohesive.

27. Students are well consulted. The college encourages their participation actively and responds with empathy to suggestions and recommendations. Links with local health and social services are very good. Such links enable, where appropriate, transfer of students into independent living arrangements after leaving the college. Very good social, academic and cultural links are in place with local colleges and community providers.

Leadership and management

28. Leadership and management are good. The college has a clear direction. Strategic and operational plans are detailed, containing challenging targets which are reviewed regularly. The strategic planning process is rigorous and involves consultation with staff through whole college development days. The new college management structure is well balanced and effectively separates the two functions of corporate and curriculum management.

29. The majority of staff fully understand and support the aims and values of the college. The college's mission statement places the student at the heart of its activities. Challenging targets for student retention and achievements are set and met for the college as a whole. However, these are not translated into targets for individual teams or programme areas.

30. Quality assurance systems are robust and are fully informed by the views of students and stakeholders. Student representation is very effectively incorporated throughout all college processes. The college actively responds to students' feedback bringing about improvements in the quality of their college experience. There are regular observations of teaching, with effective feedback to staff. The college recognises that, until recently, these have not been sufficiently rigorous and have resulted in the awarding of grades that are sometimes optimistic. A new, more rigorous system with an appropriate focus on both teaching and learning is currently under development.

31. Procedures for self-assessment are well established. The current self-assessment is thorough and honest. The report produced prior to inspection was clear and very comprehensive. Teams of staff self-assessed their own areas of work. In most instances, inspectors agreed with the judgements made by the college. In a minority, the report was not sufficiently self-critical.

32. The new principal and chief executive and senior management team have instigated and implemented significant improvements in the last year. The director of curriculum leads curriculum management effectively. Curriculum co-ordinators take a growing responsibility for the monitoring and review of their departments. Revised curriculum arrangements are currently being implemented. A review is planned to evaluate their impact. Co-ordination and communication between staff teams are not fully effective. Course review and evaluation are underdeveloped.

33. The structure of the corporate management team ensures that administration procedures and estates management are effective. The development of a human resource strategy rightly focuses on the diverse needs of a large and complex staff group. Financial management and priorities are appropriately identified and reviewed by the resources committee of the governing body. The production of a ten-year capital development plan to upgrade and extend facilities and resources meets the needs of the emerging new client group.

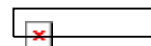
34. A well-established staff appraisal process is in place. The college is committed to developing staff skills and expertise. Staff development aims are clearly linked to the strategic plan. However,

the impact of appraisal on the quality of provision is not formally measured and individual staff development targets are not monitored.

35. The explicit aims and values on equality of opportunity, outlined in the college's policy, are clearly understood and implemented by staff and students. The policy for equal opportunities, produced in 1998, has not been regularly reviewed or updated and does not take account of relevant forthcoming legislation. Several of the college's policies are in urgent need of review. Systems for appeals and complaints are well documented and implemented effectively. Unacceptable behaviour, such as bullying or harassment, is not tolerated. There are examples of swift college-wide action being taken to respond to and eradicate such issues.

36. An experienced governing body with a wealth of knowledge and expertise, supports the senior management team effectively in the management and development of the college. Appropriate systems are in place for governors to evaluate the work of the college and to monitor the strategic development plans. The trustees appropriately fulfil their duty under charity law.

Part C: Curriculum and occupational areas



Business studies and information technology

Overall provision in this area is **outstanding (grade 1)**

Strengths

- excellent retention and achievement
- very effective individual planning
- high quality assignment work
- excellent progression routes
- good curriculum management.

Weaknesses

- some inappropriate use of specialist language

- some inappropriate room layouts.

Scope of provision

37. Provision for business studies is offered at entry level and at General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) foundation, intermediate and advanced level. Courses for IT are offered in City and Guilds London Institute 7261 in business and office technology at certificate, diploma and advanced levels. Additionally, courses are offered for Oxford, Cambridge and RSA (OCR) examination, Computer Literacy and Information Technology (CLAIT) and basic start IT courses at entry level. IT key skills are available up to level 3. Links to higher education are available as a modular unit for multi-media systems. The college is part of a local group of colleges giving students access to a good range of further courses in the area. All students have access to external work placements.

Achievement and standards

38. Retention and pass rates are excellent. In business studies, 86% of students gained a full award in Pitman word processing and four gained a full award in a modern applications course. In IT, six students gained the full City and Guilds certificate with the remaining 12 continuing their studies into the second year. Three students gained the full diploma award and two are continuing their studies. Three students completed the CLAIT course and one is continuing with further modules. All nine students on the higher education module successfully completed the module. The four students piloting the assistive and adaptive award completed the course successfully. Key skills are assessed and recorded through the main course programmes. Students on all courses demonstrate knowledge and skill at the highest level for all course requirements. Students are encouraged to work as independently as possible through research activity and the effective use of a wide range of multi-media materials and assistive and adaptive devices, which facilitate student access to a wide range of equipment. Assignments are effectively evaluated by the students. Students make excellent progression through the course levels within the college. Some then progress to provision in local colleges of further and higher education.

Quality of education and training

39. Teachers plan lessons effectively and take account of students' individual learning styles and specific needs. Individual and challenging subject targets are set for all students in addition to the targets in individual learning plans. They are regularly reviewed and set appropriately high expectations for students. Support staff and teachers work well as a team. They ensure that appropriate resources are accessible for the students and ensure that independent learning is possible for them. The students are highly motivated and enjoy their lessons. They successfully participate in class discussions and group learning activities.

40. Students' work is regularly displayed in classrooms, conveying a real sense of ownership and pride. Teaching, support and technical staff are all well experienced and hold a wide range of relevant qualifications. Students are appropriately encouraged to use the wide range of web-based media available. For example, students on business studies courses are expected to use the Internet for much of their individual research. The use of syllabus codes and module numbers adds an unnecessary barrier to learning for many students.

41. There are excellent ICT facilities with a range of assistive and adaptive devices available for students. These include mousetraps, tracker balls and enlarged keyboards, which allow students to work with a high degree of autonomy. Excellent use is made of data projectors in lessons. Video conferencing facilities are well used and effectively enable students to participate in linked courses at the local college of higher education. Students use a number of dedicated ICT rooms as well as a purpose-built open learning area. Some inappropriate room layout impedes students' movement

around the classroom.

42. Students' work is of a consistently high standard. Work is reviewed regularly by the tutor who uses student module assessment record tracking forms to give appropriate feedback. Students are familiar with the assessment processes and respond well to advice and guidance. They were able to identify successfully specific targets for the next stage in their assignments. Twice-weekly contact with personal tutors is very effective. Feedback to students is very good and enables an effective and prompt response to issues raised. The IT department was awarded a grade A by the external verifier from the examination board it uses.

43. There are excellent progression opportunities in both IT and business studies. Students can progress from entry level to higher education from both departments. The well-established links with the college of higher education offers students access to level 4 course modules via video conferencing facilities. This gives students relevant enrichment opportunities and is good preparation for transition to higher education. There are appropriate and effective work placements, enabling students to practice the skills acquired on their course and to gain confidence in their own abilities.

Leadership and management

44. There is very good curriculum management in business and IT. A clear sense of purpose is effectively shared within the staff team. College policies and procedures are coherently applied and implemented. The regular team meetings are appropriately minuted and provide a good source of information for the support and teaching staff. External links with business and other education providers are good. For example, the IT section is involved in trialling Blue Tooth wireless technology in conjunction with Gloucestershire College of Arts and Technology (GLOSCAT) and British Education, Communication and Technologies Agency (BECTA).

Creative and performing arts, health and social care and sports and recreation

Provision in this area is **outstanding (grade 1)**

Strengths

- very good levels of achievement
- outstanding teaching in all areas
- excellent support and guidance for students
- very good local and national links.

Weaknesses

- some inappropriate accommodation

- lack of access to music in accredited performing arts courses.

Scope of provision

45. The college provides GNVQ art and design courses at foundation and intermediate level, City and Guilds first steps in ceramics and 9321 in photography, and a range of entry level creative skills courses. Option classes are offered in art, photography, pottery and craft. All courses take place in purpose-built workshops for art, design, pottery and photography.

46. The performing arts provision covering dance and drama includes GNVQ foundation and intermediate courses, GCSE drama and access to the national diploma in performing arts. This level 3 course is taken at the local college of further education with support from staff at National Star. Optional leisure courses are available at entry level for dance, music and drama. All courses are presented in the purpose-built Star theatre or in the college gym.

47. Health and social care offers courses in GNVQ at foundation and intermediate level. Optional studies at entry level include courses in preliminary cooking, food preparation, the St Johns Ambulance award and the young lifesaver award.

48. The provision for sports and recreation includes the community sports leader award, the City and Guilds progression award at levels 1 and 2 and the recreational managers' award at level 2. Leisure activities include fitness programmes, weightlifting, rifle-shooting, boccia, wheelchair basketball, swimming, archery and funrobics. The Duke of Edinburgh's award is also available as a leisure activity. A wide range of purpose-built facilities, including a gym, fitness room, swimming pool and projectile alley, are available on the college site.

Achievements and standards

49. Retention and achievement on the majority of vocational courses have been very good over the last three years. Achievements in GNVQ art and design courses are excellent. Some 30% of the students received distinctions in 2000/01. In performing arts, achievements are outstanding with 60% of students gaining A to C grades in GCSE and 100% pass rate at GNVQ and in the first diploma in performing arts. The level 3 Business and Technology Council (BTEC) course linked with the local college is very effective. Students reach good standards of achievement on a range of modules. In sports and recreation, a 100% pass rate was achieved on all courses. There are a small number of students gaining full awards in health and social care.

Quality of education and training

50. Teaching is excellent with 100% good or better in all vocational areas. Schemes of work and lessons are carefully planned and successfully meet individual need. Staff use project-based activities effectively to generate enthusiasm and motivation across all vocational areas. For example, in art and design, a residential visit to Spain enabled the study of the work of Gaudi and Picasso. Students then built on this experience and produced interesting interpretations of his work. Staff are very successful in designing learning to minimise the impact of the students' complex physical and learning needs. A community group works very effectively together with the students to create integrated dance of a high quality, which is performed both locally and nationally.

51. The standard of work in lessons is generally good. It is particularly effective when individual targets are included in lesson planning, reinforcing the steps made toward individual achievement. A wide range of resources is used. The most effective relate practical experiences to individual learning goals. The majority of students demonstrate a thorough understanding of their vocational subject and are able to translate theory into practice effectively. For example, students learn to use dramatic mood, characterisation and tone in rehearsal of plays and musicals. They then

successfully transfer these skills into high quality performances in college events, local community performances and national theatre activities.

52. Specialist equipment and materials are appropriately used to facilitate learning. The majority of accommodation is well designed and furnished to a high standard. A range of appropriate ICT is available for students in most vocational areas. Where small rooms are used for teaching, accommodation is unsatisfactory. In some areas, students are distracted by the noise from practical activities in adjacent rooms and there is inadequate space for students to move freely. The unacceptable lack of music tuition as part of the performing arts course has been recognised by the college. A member of staff has recently been appointed to fill this gap. In some cases, on courses where recruitment has increased, resources are insufficient to meet the needs of students.

53. Individual and realistic targets are agreed for each student in each vocational area. They take account of other social and independent living targets across the extended curriculum. Feedback to students is good. Effort and achievement are appropriately praised and areas for improvement are outlined to enable further progress.

54. There is excellent inclusion of students' needs and interest. Students' commitment to work is consistently high in all vocational areas. They are motivated and enjoy their programmes. Excellent use is made of community links, work experience and enrichment activities. These are effectively incorporated into planning to meet the performance criteria of the vocational courses. For example, in health and social care, students prepare and cook a meal for a group of elderly people. The experience is used to explore differences in eating habits. In sport and recreation, students combine fitness plans with exercise regimes in preparation for team sports and competitions.

55. A range of well-qualified and committed teaching, support and care staff work together effectively to support students in their endeavours. They meet students' additional needs successfully as well as fulfilling the requirements of the vocational curriculum.

Leadership and management

56. Good management in the vocational areas ensures effective communication and cohesive planning across residential support and education teams. The inclusion of students in the organisation and preparation of activities is excellent. There are good communications at operational level with regular team and planning meetings. The completion of self-assessment procedures is good. All vocational areas monitor and review progress and accurately assess their performance. Evaluation of the impact of courses is less well established. Where it is good, it influences and informs future planning and course delivery.

Literacy and numeracy

Overall provision in this area is **satisfactory (grade 3)**

Strengths

- good teaching
- good use of learning resources, including ICT
- good achievement of learning targets.

Weaknesses

- some inappropriate staff training or qualifications
- insufficient co-ordination of literacy and numeracy across the curriculum
- limited access to literacy and numeracy tuition for some students.

Scope of provision

57. The college provides a range of literacy and numeracy workshops. There are currently 55 students attending weekly sessions. Students on the entry level programmes have regular literacy and numeracy sessions. Timetables are negotiated to support individual learning requirements. Key skills are included as part of the curriculum for students on vocational programmes.

Achievement and standards

58. Students attend regularly and are punctual. Retention rates are good, with only a few students withdrawing from provision early. Students work towards individual learning targets. The majority of students make good progress and develop their personal skills effectively. They increase their self-confidence and are increasingly able to work independently. The college is currently developing a database to record and measure the progress students make against their individual learning targets. In 2000/01, seven students achieved A to G grades and two achieved grade C in GCSE English. Unsatisfactory access to literacy and numeracy tuition restricts achievements for some students, however.

Quality of education and training

59. All teaching was satisfactory and above; 75% was good or better. In the most effective sessions, planning included the preparation of individual learning activities that related closely to students' individual literacy and numeracy targets. The new adult literacy and numeracy core curricula are effectively used in planning. Teachers use a wide range of learning methods to develop students' literacy and numeracy. They take account of the preferred learning styles of individuals and are based on initial baseline assessment. Teaching and planning for key skills are good and appropriately develop skills of problem solving, analysis and observation, as well as literacy and numeracy. Access to key skills for ICT is good.

60. Good use is made of ICT in literacy and numeracy sessions. Computers are available in most classrooms. Some teaching sessions take place in the learning resource centre where the extensive range of computers, relevant software and Internet access supports students in their studies. In literacy and numeracy workshops, students enjoy using software packages to develop their reading and spelling skills. Effective use is also made of specialist equipment, including large computer monitors and mouse stabilising devices. However, the computers and printer in the literacy and numeracy workshop are sometimes unreliable and cause frustration for staff and students.

61. Some staff, including the literacy, numeracy and key skills co-ordinators, are appropriately qualified and experienced. However, other staff do not have any additional specialist qualifications. In response to this identified shortfall, the college has organised training for several members of

staff.

62. Resources are generally good. However, there are some instances when classrooms are too small to allow staff and students, including those who use wheelchairs, to move around comfortably. Some lessons take place in rooms that are not ideally suited to the purpose. For example, a numeracy session, which did not involve the use of computers, was taking place in a computer suite. The college does not yet have a central resource base or library, but plans to develop the open learning centre to include a research facility. In some instances, students are unable to select their own books and resources and have them supplied by teachers. This is unsatisfactory.

63. Students are motivated, enjoy the lessons and take pleasure in their success. Access to workshops for literacy and numeracy is unsatisfactory. These workshops are over subscribed, with access limited to two hours per week. In addition, timetabling arrangements are inflexible and students sometimes have to miss other lessons to attend workshops. Class sizes are generally low and allow time for staff to give individual coaching and tuition. In addition, facilitators provide some high quality learning support, enabling students to maintain their concentration and make the maximum use of their time in class.

Leadership and management

64. Literacy and numeracy workshops are effectively managed with appropriate action planning by the co-ordinator, with support and guidance from senior managers. Literacy and numeracy provision on entry programmes is also well co-ordinated. The new co-ordinator for key skills manages effectively the large group of non-specialist staff who support the teaching of key skills in vocational areas. Good practice in literacy, numeracy and key skills is not well communicated across teams, however.

Skills for life

Overall provision in this area is **unsatisfactory (grade 4)**

Strengths

- effective development of student independence
- recent improvements in course leadership.

Weaknesses

- unsatisfactory teaching
- duplication of course content
- poor assessment and recording of progress

- some unsatisfactory resources.

Scope of provision

65. There are 30 students on the skills for life programme. The course is designed to meet the specific needs of students with severe and complex physical disabilities and learning difficulties. It aims to enable students to take greater control of their lives through the development of independent life and study skills. Students who successfully complete the programme can progress to the pre-vocational skills for working life programme and, where appropriate, on to vocational programmes at levels 1 and 2.

Achievement and standards

66. The programme has a strong focus on improving independence and preparation for life in the community after college. However, students' progress is not sufficiently well monitored. Information relating to achievement is not clear. Recording lacks detail and does not identify incremental achievement of personal development targets. Some more able students are not sufficiently challenged to develop their literacy and numeracy skills.

Quality of education and training

67. The quality of the teaching varied considerably. Half of the lessons observed were unsatisfactory. Where teaching was good, lessons were well planned and took account of individual need. For example, the planning for a lesson on personal development was very thorough and aspects of sexuality and relationships were taught sensitively and effectively. The teaching of independent cooking skills in one of the residential houses was also very successful. In these lessons, teachers responded skilfully to the individual needs of students with complex needs. However, some lessons took little account of students' individual targets. In some instances, students were not appropriately challenged. Some lessons were too long. Some students lost interest and could not maintain concentration.

68. Resources for specialist teaching are good. However, the resources for teaching key skills are insufficient. Some resources are unsatisfactory and restrict access for non-ambulant students. For example, some cupboards in the food studies room are too high and ingredients cannot be reached. The access to one classroom via another is unacceptable, causing unnecessary disruption to lessons.

69. Assessment procedures are not sufficiently rigorous. They do not always take enough account of baseline information. In most lessons, there was an overlap of content between core programmes and option courses. This caused unnecessary duplication of work and uninteresting lessons. There was also confusion amongst some staff about terms used in personal development plans. In some cases, this led to inappropriate literacy and numeracy targets for some students. The marking of students' work was inconsistent.

70. There is an appropriate emphasis on developing independence, communication and social skills within everyday life situations. The personal development programme is partially delivered in the residential houses during the college day. This is appropriate and gives reality to the activities. However, there are some instances where lessons in college cover topics that could be taught more effectively in the residences.

71. The quality of support in teaching sessions is generally good. Staff are well aware of individual students' medical and support needs. However, some new support staff have not received enough guidance on the use of communication aids.

Leadership and management

72. A new co-ordinator has recently been appointed to the skills for life programme. Staff are positive about the new direction and management of the programme. However, there remains an urgent need to review the programme to ensure that the needs of students with more complex learning difficulties are effectively addressed. Regular meetings to plan developments are in place. The self-assessment report for this area does not fully address the areas for development.

Skills for working life

Overall provision in this area is **good (grade 2)**

Strengths

- well-designed curriculum
- very good teaching
- good student progression
- effective enterprise activities.

Weaknesses

- some unsatisfactory resources
- co-ordination of large staff group constrains development.

Scope of provision

73. There are currently 41 students on the skills for working life programme. They are working towards externally accredited awards in vocational skills at entry level. The programme includes a range of vocational and key skills units. Approximately half of the students progress from the skills for life programme on to the skills for working life course.

Achievement and standards

74. Students make good progress towards their learning goals and most achieve accreditation at entry levels 1, 2 and 3. Many progress on to level 1 and 2 vocational programmes, both at the college and in colleges of further education. Activities promote effectively the development of specific skills in addition to providing a good insight into the world of work. This is particularly evident in an enterprise project managed by the business studies department. Students make

satisfactory progress in developing their literacy and numeracy skills, although access to key skills support is insufficient for some students. Generally, students develop greater self-sufficiency, with many moving into more independent living accommodation as their abilities and confidence increase.

Quality of education and training

75. The majority of teaching was good. It was satisfactory or better in 100% of lessons. Some of the teaching provided by specialist teachers within vocational areas and options was excellent. Lesson planning was thorough and individual needs were appropriately identified and addressed effectively. Teachers communicate their enthusiasm for their subject to students.

76. There are sufficient support staff in teaching sessions and tutors are suitably qualified. Opportunities are currently being provided for tutors to undertake additional training in teaching key skills. Some good use is made of specialist facilities, such as the sports centre, theatre and art studio.

77. However, some resources and facilities are less than satisfactory. Some of those shared with the skills for life course do not meet the needs of wheelchair users. Resources for specialist teaching are good. However, there are insufficient resources for the teaching of key skills.

78. Assessment procedures are effective and take account of baseline assessment and previous learning. The review of achievement and progress is well established. Personal tutors regularly discuss individual targets with students. Written and photographic evidence of competence is well presented in display and progress files.

79. The programme provides a good balance of key skills, enterprise and vocational skills with clear progression routes to vocational courses. Students develop the skills of enquiry and research adequately. They successfully use their initiative in a range of new and interesting activities. Most students enjoy the lessons and are inspired to progress to higher level courses.

80. In the majority of lessons, teachers effectively manage support. Students benefit from good levels of individual support in most lessons. However, the college has recognised that further support is needed for some students and has appropriately appointed extra staff. Good guidance is provided for students as they plan progression routes to further independence and vocational courses.

Leadership and management

81. The skills for working life programme is well managed by the co-ordinator. However, co-ordination between the skills for life and skills for working life programmes is underdeveloped. Progression from one to the other is not effective for all students. The co-ordination of the large number of staff contributing to this course constrains course development. Many tutors work in several cross-college teams and have competing demands on their time. They are not always able to attend course meetings.

