



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE



Office for Standards
in Education

Strode College

CONTENTS

[Basic information about the college](#)

[Part A: Summary](#)

[Information about the college](#)

[How effective is the college?](#)

[Quality of provision in curriculum and occupational areas](#)

[How well is the college led and managed?](#)

[To what extent is the college educationally and socially inclusive?](#)

[How well are students and trainees guided and supported?](#)

[Students' views of the college](#)

[Other information](#)

[Part B: The college as a whole](#)

[Summary of grades awarded to teaching and learning by inspectors](#)

[Achievement and standards](#)

[Quality of education and training](#)

[Leadership and management](#)

[Part C: Curriculum and occupational areas](#)

[Science](#)

[Business](#)

[Information and communications technology](#)

[Health and social care, and counselling](#)

[Visual and performing arts and media](#)

[Humanities](#)

[English, communication, and English as a foreign language](#)

[Literacy and numeracy](#)

[Part D: College data](#)

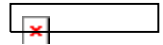
[Table 1: Enrolments by level of study and age](#)

[Table 2: Enrolments by curriculum area and age](#)

[Table 3: Retention and achievement](#)

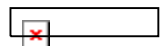
[Table 4: Quality of teaching observed during the inspection by level](#)

Basic information about the college

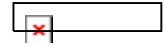


Name of college:	Strode College
Type of college:	Tertiary
Principal:	Mr Ian Bennett
Address of college:	Church Road Somerset BA16 0AB
Telephone number:	01458 844400
Fax number:	01458 844411
Chair of governors:	Dr Les Botting
Unique reference number:	130806
Name of reporting inspector:	Angela Cross-Durrant HMI
Dates of inspection:	31 March-4 April 2003

Part A: Summary



Information about the college

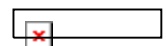


Strode College is situated in central Somerset. It is built on a community campus, which it shares with a school for pupils aged 11 to 16. The college serves a wide, mainly rural, area. Some students travel more than 50 miles a day to attend the college. It opened as a tertiary college in 1973. The college has doubled its size since 1997 and is one of the largest employers in the area. In 1999, it achieved accredited status from the former Further Education Funding Council.

Unemployment in the area is 2%. Around 70% of all companies in Street and the surrounding towns employ between one and four members of staff. The key industries include education, health and social care, manufacturing, quarrying, wholesale and retail activities. The proportion of students in Somerset remaining in full-time education is high, at 71%.

The college offers a wide variety of courses in 12 of the 14 Learning and Skills Council (LSC) areas of learning. The college attracts students from areas across the county. The number of courses at level 1 and level 2 is small. Since the last inspection, the college has expanded significantly its provision, both for students aged 16 to 18 and for adult learners. There is work-based provision in administration, engineering, hairdressing, hospitality and catering, and health and social care. However, except in hairdressing, where provision is good and increasing and attracts around 35 trainees, the number of trainees on each programme is very small. The college runs successful programmes in nine prisons throughout the south west of England. Some 22% of residents in the areas of Frome, Glastonbury, Shepton Mallet, Street and Wells have been identified as having poor literacy and numeracy skills and the college plans to expand its provision for adult students. In its mission statement, the college aims to 'provide high standards of education within an inclusive and supportive environment'.

How effective is the college?



The quality of the college's provision and the standards its students reach are good. Inspectors judged the provision in science, English, communication and English as a foreign language (EFL), and humanities to be outstanding. The provision in business, information and communications technology (ICT), health and social care, and counselling, and visual and performing arts and media was good, and in literacy and numeracy, it was satisfactory.

Key strengths

- effective leadership and management
- wide range of provision at level 3
- good enrichment programme for students

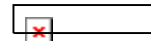
- high retention and pass rates on level 3 courses
- much good teaching in lessons for students on level 3 courses
- sensitive individual support for students
- effective monitoring of students' progress
- improved teaching accommodation in some areas since the last inspection.

What should be improved

- the objectivity and thoroughness of lesson observations
- the means for measuring students' performance against their General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) points scores
- methods and materials for teaching students of differing abilities
- teaching in lessons for adults and for students aged 16 to 18 on level 1 and 2 courses
- pass rates on level 2 courses
- the narrow range of provision at levels 1 and 2.

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

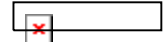
Quality of provision in curriculum and occupational areas



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. Not all subjects and courses were inspected. Inspectors make overall judgements on curriculum areas and on the effectiveness of leadership and management in the range: Outstanding (grade 1), Good (2), Satisfactory (3), Unsatisfactory (4), Very Poor (5).

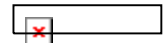
Area	Overall judgements about provision, and comment
Science	Outstanding. The retention and pass rates on most courses are very high and some pass rates are outstanding. Teaching is good. Students are well supported and their progress is monitored carefully. Some physics and chemistry laboratories are too small for the size of classes being taught in them.
Business	Good. Pass and retention rates on full-time level 3 courses are high. Teaching to help students prepare for examinations is good. Support for students is good. There is some poor teaching accommodation and equipment for students on business courses. Teachers sometimes fail to meet the differing learning needs of students and make insufficient use of current business topics in lessons.
Information and communications technology	Good. There is much good teaching. The standard of students' work is high, and retention and pass rates are high on most courses. Students' progress is monitored carefully. There are too few full-time courses at level 2. Students make insufficient use of computer-based learning materials.
Health and social care, and counselling	Good. Teaching is good, particularly on level 2 courses. Retention and pass rates are high on most courses. Curriculum leadership is good. Teachers have not devised materials or teaching methods to meet the different learning needs of students. There are no courses at level 1 in childcare.
Visual and performing arts and media	Good. Pass rates are high and there is much good teaching. Support for students is good. Retention rates are low on some courses. Teachers do not pay sufficient attention to the range of different learning needs of students. There is some unsatisfactory teaching accommodation.
Humanities	Outstanding. Much of the teaching is very good and most pass rates are consistently high. Students develop good skills of communication, analysis and evaluation. Support for students is thorough and sensitive. There is some poor teaching accommodation.
English, communication, and English as a foreign language	Outstanding. Teaching and pass rates on some level 3 courses are outstanding. Students' work is of a high standard. Their progress is monitored thoroughly. Guidance given to GCSE students is unsatisfactory.
Literacy and numeracy	Satisfactory. Teaching is good in practical numeracy lessons. Some pass rates on entry level literacy and numeracy courses are high. Effective use is made of individual learning plans for students. Teaching in some literacy lessons fails to meet the different learning needs of students. Some teaching accommodation is unsatisfactory and some learning resources for students at locations in the community are poor.

How well is the college led and managed?



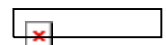
Leadership and management are good. Governors and senior managers provide good strategic direction for the college. Management of most curriculum areas is good and financial management is good. Arrangements for staff appraisal and staff development are effective. Since the last inspection, the college has increased significantly its courses for full-time students aged 16 to 18 and for adults. The college has developed some good joint provision with local schools. Communication is good. The college has sustained high pass and retention rates on General Certificate of Education Advanced Subsidiary (GCE AS) and Advanced level (GCE A-level) courses. The college's management information system is increasingly effective. Though there is a well-established quality assurance system, which includes the observation of lessons by college staff, the process for grading lessons is insufficiently thorough or objective. The grades awarded by the college to its lessons are unrealistically high. This shortcoming has misled managers and teachers about the quality of teaching and learning. The college does not yet have the means of measuring students' performance at GCE AS and A level against their GCSE scores, though it has recently begun to subscribe to a system that will enable it to do so. The college provides value for money.

To what extent is the college educationally and socially inclusive?



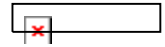
The college's response to educational and social inclusion is good. The college has clear equal opportunities and disability statements and a race equality policy. The college is fulfilling its obligations regarding the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA) 2001. The college monitors students' performance by gender, age and ethnic origin. It has run several awareness-raising events for staff on issues associated with students with disabilities. The college's publicity materials are produced in print, large print, Braille and on audiotape. The college works with a number of partners to increase access to further education (FE) for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. There is an active students' association, through which students are able to make their views known. While there is a wide range of provision for full-time students at level 3, the provision at levels 1 and 2 is small. There are too few courses at levels 2 and 3 for adults to enable them to progress from level 1, and there is little work-based learning provision.

How well are students and trainees guided and supported?



Guidance, enrolment and induction arrangements for full-time students are good. However, there is insufficient guidance for some part-time students. The college provides comprehensive and sensitive personal support for full-time students, but some adult students are unaware of the support available. Students' learning support needs are assessed soon after they join the college and most students identified as needing support attend the college's 'Backup' learning support centre. Those with specific learning and/or sensory or physical disabilities are assisted well in lessons. The college provides an extensive range of support services for students, including information on drug abuse, contraception and general health and welfare. Careers education and guidance for students are good.

Students' views of the college



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

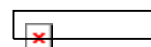
What students like about the college

- friendly, relaxed and purposeful atmosphere
- good subject and personal support
- the computing facilities on the main campus
- enthusiastic and knowledgeable teachers
- facilities in the learning resource centre and the Backup support centre.

What they feel could be improved

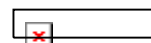
- poor teaching accommodation in some areas
- the relevance of key skills lessons
- availability of specialist texts
- long lessons in which they have difficulty concentrating
- space for car parking.

Other information

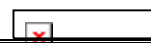


The college inspection report will normally be published 12 working weeks after the formal feedback of the inspection findings to the college. Once published, the college has two months in which to prepare its post-inspection action plan and submit it to the local LSC. The college's action plan must show what action the college will take to bring about improvements in response to issues raised in the report. The governors should agree it before it is submitted to the local LSC. The local LSC is responsible for ensuring that, where inspectors have judged there to be unsatisfactory or poor provision in a curriculum area or in leadership and management, the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) receives the college's post-inspection action plan within the stipulated two months.

Part B: The college as a whole



Summary of grades awarded to teaching and learning by inspectors

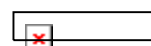


Aspect & learner type	Graded good or better (Grades 1 to 3) %	Graded satisfactory (Grade 4) %	Graded less than satisfactory (Grades 5 to 7) %
Teaching 16-18	73	23	4
19+ and WBL*	52	45	3
Learning 16-18	72	24	4
19+ and WBL*	69	28	3

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).

* work-based learning

Achievement and standards



1. Inspectors used data on students' achievements drawn from individualised student record (ISR) returns for 2000 and 2001, collected by the LSC, and the college's own data on retention and pass rates for 2002, which they found to be reliable. The overall data show that pass rates for the three years 2000 to 2002 have generally improved to near, or above, the national average for general FE and tertiary colleges. Retention rates have remained consistently above the average. In 2002,

remained above the national average. However, for the three years 2000 to 2002, the overall pass rates both for students aged 16 to 18 and adults on level 2 courses have remained mostly below the national average. For example, in 2002, the pass rate for students aged 16 to 18 fell to 62%, seven percentage points below the national average. The overall pass rates for students aged 16 to 18 on level 3 courses have been significantly above the national average for the three years 2000 to 2002. For example, in 2002, the pass rate was 14 percentage points above the average for general FE and tertiary colleges. Over the same period, pass rates for adults on level 3 courses have also remained above the national average.

2. Student retention rates provided by the college for 2002 show a small decline on courses at levels 1 and 2, but an improvement for those at level 3. On level 1 courses, although retention rates for students aged 16 to 18 and for adults have fallen each year from 2000 to 2002, they have remained above, or at, the national average. Over the same period, retention rates for students aged 16 to 18 and for adults on level 2 courses have remained just above the national average. On level 3 courses, retention rates for students aged 16 to 18 are high. Retention rates for adults on level 3 courses are also above the national average. Overall attendance in lessons during the inspection was 83%, compared with the national average for general FE and tertiary colleges of 76%. The average rate of students' attendance on level 3 courses is better than on lower level courses. The college recognises this weakness and has plans to improve the way students' attendance is monitored.

3. In 2002, 1,055 students aged 16 to 18 undertook key skills tests in application of number, communications and IT. However, only 78 of them completed their portfolios successfully. Retention rates have remained above the national averages. In 2002, pass rates in key skills for students aged 16 to 18 fell to 53% but remained above the national average. The pass rate for adult students was very low, at only 11%.

16 to 18 year olds

4. Most students entering the college arrive with very good GCSE achievements. Pass rates on GCE AS and GCE A-level courses have been very high for the three years 2000 to 2002, when compared with the national average for general FE and tertiary colleges. In many GCE A-level subjects, the pass rate is almost 20 percentage points above the national average. A high proportion of students on many courses achieve grades A and B. There are good achievements by students on national diploma courses, and pass rates on courses running for more than 24 weeks are generally good. However, pass rates on other level 3 courses are often low. The pass rates on General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) advanced courses fell, from 93% in 2000, to 56% in 2002 (when the qualification changed to AVCE), which is 14 percentage points below the previous national average for GNVQ courses. Pass rates on National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) level 3 courses fell to 65% in 2002, close to the national average. The college has used the former GCE A-level data relating to courses that changed in 2000 in order to measure students' grades for the new GCE AS and A-level subjects compared with their GCSE scores. The method is flawed, because the data used are now redundant, and it is not possible to judge the extent to which the college has helped students to improve their achievements. The college is reviewing its approach and is also testing a system for measuring how well students on vocational courses achieve in comparison with their previous attainment.

5. Retention rates are generally well above the national average on level 3 courses. In particular, in 2002, on GCE AS and A-level courses they were 86% and 98%, respectively. The only decline in retention rates is on national diploma courses, where the retention rate, at 71%, is just below the national average.

6. Pass rates for students on level 2 courses are generally below the national average. In 2001, the pass rates were at the national average, in 2000 they were ten percentage points below that average and in 2002 they were seven percentage points below the national average. On GCSE courses, for the three years 2000 to 2002, the proportion of students achieving grades A to C grade has remained just below the national average. In 2002, pass rates on GNVQ intermediate courses fell to below the national average. Pass rates on NVQ programmes have been high, but in 2002 they fell to the national average. The pass rates on other courses that run for 24 weeks or longer are

generally high. Retention rates on level 2 courses are generally at, or above, the national average. Very few students take courses at foundation level. However, in 2002, pass and retention rates on NVQ level 1 courses were high.

7. Many students aged 16 to 18 on level 3 courses display good study skills. Generally, students demonstrate good research skills and are confident and articulate. They have the ability to concentrate in lessons and work either on their own or in small groups. In humanities and English, students can apply their knowledge, think critically and analyse accurately complex topics. ICT students develop good information technology (IT) skills. Many visual, performing arts and media students develop good practical skills and are able to evaluate their work. Most students' attainment is at, or above, the level required for the stage reached in their studies. However, on some courses, the standard of students' work is poor and there is insufficient attention paid to developing their learning skills. Teachers do not always enable students to develop competences in thinking for themselves, to learn from each other, or to develop appropriate note-making skills. The progress made by some students on NVQ health and social care courses is too slow.

8. Since August 1998, 151 trainees started foundation or advanced modern apprenticeship programmes in engineering, business administration, customer services, hospitality, hairdressing, and health and care. The number of trainees in these areas is small, except in hairdressing, where 62 students have enrolled and 27 students are still on the courses. At the time of the inspection, 50 trainees were working towards an NVQ, most at level 2. Overall, retention rates for most of the provision are satisfactory. Pass rates are mostly satisfactory, but some trainees on foundation level courses make slow progress, do not complete the requirements for the qualification in the agreed time and remain in training after the expected end of their course. Since August 2000, of the 22 foundation trainees who have left or completed their training, only 5 have achieved the full framework. Some 41 are still in training. On the advanced level programme, although there are few trainees, some pass rates are low, at around 35%.

Adult learners

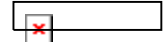
9. Pass rates for adults on GCE AS and A-level courses generally are high. In particular, in 2002, the average pass rate on GCE A-level courses was 88%. The majority of adult students study on a range of other level 3 courses that run for 24 weeks or longer, and the pass rates are generally above the national average. The average pass rates on GNVQ and national diploma and certificate courses for adults have remained 13 percentage points below the national average for the three years 2000 to 2002. Pass rates on NVQ level 3 courses have fallen. In 2000, the average pass rate on these courses was 71%, in 2001 it was 56% and in 2002 it was 40%: 20 percentage points below the national average. Retention rates are above the national average on most level 3 courses but in 2002, on GCE AS courses, they were well below the national average.

10. Pass rates on GCSE courses are generally high. In 2002, 70% of students achieved grades A to C, 26 percentage points above the average. However, pass rates on NVQ level 2 courses fell, from 87% in 2000, to 64% in 2001, and in 2002 were below the national average. Pass rates on other courses that are 24 weeks or longer have remained around the average. Retention rates are generally at, or above, the national average. Retention rates on GCSE courses were good, at 81%, in 2002: 10% above the national average. Pass rates on NVQ level 1 courses are very high, but student numbers are very low. On other level 1 courses that are 24 weeks or longer, pass rates have remained at the national average. Retention rates are generally at, or above, the national average. The majority of the qualifications taken by adult students are short courses at level 1. The pass and retention rates on these courses are consistently high.

11. The standard of students' work varies significantly across the courses. Many students develop confidence and make good progress. For example, in English, students develop good investigative writing skills, can recognise key aspects of complex concepts and are able to work with others and on their own. In humanities, students are able to answer questions from the teacher fluently and confidently and develop good analytical skills. Many successfully progress to higher education (HE) courses. In business, many students demonstrate a good understanding of business concepts in both their written work and during lessons. In ICT, students are able to apply their knowledge and skills competently to technically complex computer applications. In visual and performing arts and

media, students competently evaluate their own work. On some courses, for example, in ICT, students' research skills are not always fully developed. In humanities, students' note-making skills are insufficiently developed. Students on NVQ courses in health and social care are not able to complete their work for assessment in the required time.

Quality of education and training



12. Teaching, learning and attainment were graded by inspectors in 125 lessons. Teaching overall was good or better in 68% of lessons, satisfactory in 28% and less than satisfactory in only 4%. However, there is variation between the quality of teaching of full-time students aged 16 to 18 and of adults. The quality of teaching in lessons on level 3 courses is much higher than in lessons on level 1 and level 2 courses. Teaching was good or better in 78% of lessons on level 3 courses and in 50% of lessons on both level 1 and level 2 courses.

13. Most lessons for full-time students aged 16 to 18 are well prepared and teachers are knowledgeable about the subjects they teach. Students are well motivated and work conscientiously in most lessons. They are often able to help each other; critically analyse each other's work and share ideas willingly. They are able to work well on their own, in pairs, groups, or as part of the whole class. In some lessons, teachers use an appropriate range of activities to engage students' interest. Many teachers are able to organise and manage group and whole class discussion well, and help students to summarise key points arising out of debates. Teachers give good assistance to individual students in practical lessons. In the better lessons, teachers give clear explanations of concepts and theories and, where appropriate, ensure students discuss and understand the implications of putting the theory into practice. In some curriculum areas, additional subject workshops are run to help students with their studies.

14. In the less successful lessons, teachers do not always ask suitably challenging questions of students or expect sufficiently thorough answers from them. Many classes contain students of differing abilities. However, teachers have failed to devise learning materials that allow the less able students to work at a slower pace, and/or the more able to work at an appropriately high level. Teachers fail to check that all students have understood an aspect or theme of a lesson before moving on to another. Some teachers frequently make students copy from the board and do not help them develop note-making skills. Teachers often give solutions to issues or answers to questions too readily, denying students the opportunity to persevere and learn the solutions themselves. Not all teachers give a clear introduction to their lessons.

15. Teaching was good or better in only 50% of lessons for adults, compared with 73% of lessons for students aged 16 to 18. In the better lessons, students are able to begin work promptly and work competently alone or in groups. Teachers take care to enable students to develop their self-confidence. In other lessons for adults, teachers do not adapt their teaching methods to meet the different learning needs of students. There are insufficient learning materials for lessons for adults held in some of the venues around the locality. Teachers do not use ICT sufficiently in lessons, and students' IT skills are sometimes underdeveloped. Some teachers take too long to introduce a new topic. In some lessons, instructions to students are unclear and students do not fully understand what they are being asked to do.

16. Teachers are well qualified in the subjects they teach and almost all have a teaching qualification. An appropriate number of teachers are qualified as assessors or internal verifiers. Technical and administrative support are effective. There is a good staff development programme, though some staff lack recent experience of industry and commerce.

17. Much of the college's accommodation on its main campus is very good. The college has a new sports hall and fitness centre. Teaching rooms in many curriculum areas are well equipped and suitably furnished. Some have interactive whiteboards. Most of the areas of the college are

accessible to students with restricted mobility and the college has a strategy of continuing improvement in the facilities for students with physical disabilities. Some lessons take place in temporary buildings. Some of these huts are drab and of poor quality. Their inadequate facilities and resources inhibit the range of teaching and learning activities that can be undertaken during lessons. The studio accommodation for some art and design students is small and performing arts students do not have appropriate changing areas. Some music rooms do not have adequate soundproofing. The noise from the music rooms interferes with lessons in adjacent rooms and halls. Sometimes, the noise in practical performance lessons interferes with work in the music rooms. Some accommodation used for teaching adults at venues in the community is unsatisfactory.

18. Many curriculum areas have developed their own learning resources areas, which are well managed and available to all students, as required. They provide a pleasant environment in which to learn, and have sufficient study spaces and quiet areas. The range of books, journals and CD-ROMs in most subjects is adequate. The college has recently established a computerised on-line library search facility, but this has yet to be fully utilised by students.

19. IT facilities are very good. The college has a good ratio of one computer to four full-time equivalent students. Access to the Internet is good. A wide range of specialist software packages can be accessed from designated computers. There is a good range of equipment and facilities to support students with sensory or physical impairment. However, teachers have yet to devise suitable differing learning materials for students in classes where students differ widely in ability.

20. There are effective means of assessing full-time students' additional learning needs. The results of the assessments are used to devise individual action plans for students. Some teachers use the results to plan lessons appropriately, for example, in some literacy and numeracy lessons. However, in other areas, teachers do not use the findings appropriately in order to plan lessons to meet the different learning needs of students in their classes.

21. In most curriculum areas, teachers mark students' work thoroughly and return it to them in accordance with the standards in the college's charter. They provide detailed and constructive feedback to students in order to help them improve their performance. Most of the assignments devised for students are well structured and suitably demanding. Teachers and tutors record students' performance carefully; these records are reviewed during individual tutorials. In some curriculum areas, teachers do not take sufficient advantage of opportunities to assess students' key skills through their normal coursework. The internal verification procedures for checking teachers' marking of students' work are very good and most assessment meets the requirements of the awarding bodies. Parents and guardians of full-time students are kept well informed of progress and receive regular reports.

22. The college offers courses in 12 of the 14 LSC funded learning areas, from entry level to level 4. There are no courses in construction or land-based studies. At the time of the inspection, 91% of the full-time students were aged 16 to 18, and 86% of these were enrolled on level 3 courses. Most students studying at level 3 are on GCE AS and A-level courses. The majority of advanced level students have achieved very good grades in their GCSE examinations prior to enrolling at the college. The college offers 47 GCE AS and 37 GCE A-level courses. Students are encouraged to combine vocational courses with GCE AS subjects and, at the time of the inspection, 130 students were combining courses in this way. Overall, 52% of students progress from the college to HE. Of the students on GCE A-level courses, 81% progress to HE.

23. There are few courses at levels 1 and 2. The opportunities for students to enter the college on level 1 courses and progress steadily to level 3 are restricted, though the college has plans to improve the situation. Where progression from one level to the next is available, many students choose to stay on at the college. The range of enrichment activities for students is good. These include study for additional qualifications, timetabled non-examined courses, sporting activities and creative writing. There are good opportunities for students to go on relevant trips or field studies and, for example, in 2002, biology students visited the Bahamas. Students on some vocational courses undertake real or simulated work experience as part of their programmes. However, in some areas, for example, in business, there is no work experience available for students. The college offers work-based learning programmes for students aged 16 to 18, mainly in hairdressing, engineering and

business administration. At the time of the inspection, 50 students were on modern apprenticeship courses, 41 of whom were on foundation level programmes and 9 on advanced level programmes. The college does not plan to increase this provision unless there is demand for it.

24. In 2002, the college changed its approach to developing students' key skills. All students are now required to achieve a qualification in IT and the majority of full-time students follow the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) course at level 2 and level 3. In general, students' key skills are taught and assessed as part of their main study programmes. Students on level 3 courses, who have not achieved a grade C or higher in their English and mathematics GCSE, may take the examination again. Students unable to cope with GCSE study can pursue relevant key skills qualifications instead. Students' skills in working with others are developed as part of the tutorial programme and they can gain the relevant accredited key skills qualification.

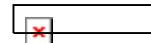
25. The college has expanded the range of courses it offers to adults and there has been a 20% increase in enrolments since 1997. Courses for adults are run on the main campus, in prisons, community locations and through franchised arrangements with other providers. The college has developed a good working relationship with some employers in the area. For example, provision in hairdressing is expanding, there is a range of very good links with local employers and the college trains staff at twenty hairdressing salons. However, over 70% of local businesses are very small and opportunities for the college to engage further in workforce development are restricted. The college has developed a good relationship with local schools. At the time of the inspection, 180 pupils aged 14 to 16 attended the college for part of their education and training. Courses that pupils are engaged in include GCSE health and social care, and NVQ level 1 hairdressing, sports and recreation, and engineering operations. Gifted pupils from the schools attend the college to study the first year of an advanced level programme, usually at GCE AS. The college has also worked with partners to set up a full-time unit at the college for five students with visual and/or hearing impairment, and a unit in Glastonbury for students with profound learning difficulties.

26. The college provides comprehensive and sensitive support for students. The information provided for potential students before they enrol is clear, and the college provides information in print, in Braille, on audiotape and in large print. There are clear procedures for admissions staff and tutors to follow, and potential students and their parents or guardians appreciate the efficiency with which their applications are processed. The induction programme for full-time students is thorough. However, there is insufficient initial guidance and induction for some part-time students. For example, in some areas, adult students do not have a structured introductory visit to the library. In humanities, in particular, adults are inadequately advised, assessed and supported, and retention rates are low on some evening courses. Students attending part-time literacy and numeracy lessons have no knowledge of the range of support that is available.

27. All full-time students undertake an initial assessment of their literacy and numeracy skills. The results are used to identify students' levels of ability in these key skills and to identify any additional learning support students may need. Additional help with learning is provided in the college's Backup learning support centre. At the time of the inspection, 361 students had been identified as needing additional learning support, and 77% of these were receiving help. Some 18% of full-time students were receiving specific support because of learning difficulties and/or disabilities and many of these are assisted in lessons by specialist tutors. Learning support tutors maintain good records of students' progress. The college also provides an extensive range of personal support services for students, for example, related to general health and welfare, drug abuse and sexual health. Students are well informed about the services.

28. The college's tutorial system has been developed steadily since the last inspection. The system and supporting guidelines are clear and procedures are implemented consistently. There is a clear tutorial scheme of work for tutors to follow, which includes topics on personal and social issues. Careers education and guidance for students are effective and the college has established a close working partnership with the Connexions service. Students taking GCE A-level subjects complete a careers planning unit, which contributes to their achieving the level 2 key skill of problem solving.

Leadership and management



29. Leadership and management are good. Governors and senior managers provide strong strategic direction for the college. Governors are involved fully in the development of the college's strategic plan and targets for improvement, and monitor the progress of the college in meeting targets and strategic aims and objectives. The corporation monitors quality and standards. The process for monitoring these aspects of the college's work includes governors receiving reports from senior managers and the academic board, and their involvement in the evaluation of the college's self-assessment report. Governors have begun recently to visit individual curriculum areas and attend quality review meetings. The results of the visits are reported to the full corporation.

30. The college has expanded considerably its provision of prison education and has recently achieved a beacon award for developing students' communication skills in the prisons it serves. Approximately 180 pupils, aged 14 to 16, from local schools attend a range of courses at the college. The college also offers GCE AS courses in science, drama and music for gifted pupils from local schools. It has identified the need to develop more formal links with local employers in order to involve them in aspects of its vocational courses. However, the links with the industry for hairdressing students are excellent. Since the last inspection, in 1998, the college has increased enrolments on courses for full-time students aged 16 to 18 by 31%, and on courses for adults by 20%. The expansion in provision has been mainly in courses at level 3. Enrolments on level 1 and level 2 courses remain less than 20% of the college's provision. Governors and senior managers acknowledge the need to develop a wider range of courses for students at level 1 and level 2 if it is to fulfil its role as a tertiary college.

31. The executive management team, which consists of the principal and three deputy principals, works well together and provides consistent leadership to managers across the college. Communication is good. There is an effective management handbook for all managers. The management of courses is generally good. It is particularly good in humanities, English, communications and EFL, and health and social care. Regular team meetings, in the majority of curriculum areas, lead to effective review of course performance, particularly at level 3. However, in business and ICT, teachers on some of the courses have not met regularly enough. There is some successful sharing of good practice among teachers in a number of teams, particularly in science and ICT, but not in humanities or visual and performing arts and media.

32. The college has a well-established quality assurance system. During course reviews, teachers analyse retention rates and data on student's achievements. In most cases, teachers devise appropriate action plans and set realistic targets for improving students' pass, retention and attendance rates. Internal verification to check the quality and consistency of teachers' marking of students' work is generally thorough.

33. The college's self-assessment report follows the format of the Common Inspection Framework. Though the report contains details on most key areas, there is insufficient detail about teaching, training and learning, and some key weaknesses in teaching have been overlooked. The college has established a programme for observing lessons. However, the process used for grading lessons is insufficiently thorough or objective. The grades awarded by the college are significantly higher than those awarded by inspectors and, on the evidence observed by inspectors, unrealistically high. The outcomes of lesson observations have not been used systematically to devise staff development activities for improving the quality of teaching. The unrealistically high grades awarded by the college for lessons have misled the college about the quality of its teaching and learning. The college has acknowledged that its grading system is deficient. In order to try to improve the system for grading, the college has recently appointed advanced practitioners who will increasingly observe lessons. The difference in the quality of teaching on courses at different levels has not been identified during the college's own lesson observation activity, and action plans arising from the college's self-assessment do not contain appropriate means for improving teaching on level 1 and level 2 courses.

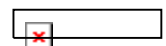
34. The college has sustained pass and retention rates on GCE AS and A-level courses that are well above the national average for general FE and tertiary colleges. However, for the three years 2000 to 2002, pass rates on level 2 courses have been close to the national average. In 2002, pass rates on some vocational courses fell to well below the national average. The college does not have an up-to-date system in place to judge students' performance in GCE AS and A-level examinations against their GCSE results. Most full-time students on GCE A-level courses have achieved high points scores in their GCSE examinations prior to enrolling at the college. Until 2002, teachers used performance measures based on GCE A-level grades achieved by students before the introduction of GCE AS and new GCE A-level qualifications. Therefore, the college's measurement of students' performance is flawed. The college has recently begun to subscribe to a system that enables its members to use the new GCE AS and A-level national data.

35. Appraisal and staff development arrangements are effective. The principal appraises the three deputy principals and is appraised by the chair of governors. All other staff are appraised by their managers. The college has effective arrangements for the induction of new teachers. It is accredited as an Investor in People.

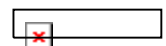
36. Equality of opportunity is practised well in the college. The college has produced a race equality policy with appropriate action plans and is making good progress in implementing it. Students' performance in relation to race, gender and age is monitored carefully and reported to governors. The college has responded appropriately to SENDA 2001. There is an equal opportunities action group, which is chaired by a deputy principal. Its members develop appropriate policies and oversee activities designed to promote equality. The group reports its activities annually to governors. There are almost twice as many full-time female students as male students at the college. The college has investigated the gender imbalance and has plans to improve it.

37. The college's management information system is increasingly effective in enabling managers to monitor students' pass rates, attendance and retention rates. Financial management is good. The college runs many courses with small numbers of students on them in an attempt to offer a wide range of courses to the local rural community. It analyses carefully local need, group size and viability of small groups against financial restraints in order to achieve appropriate value for money. Overall, the college provides value for money.

Part C: Curriculum and occupational areas



Science



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

Strengths

- outstanding pass rates for some GCE A-level subjects

- much very good teaching of biology

- good subject support for students
- very high retention rates on most GCE A-level courses.

Weaknesses

- some laboratories too small for the size of classes using them.

Scope of provision

38. The college offers GCE AS and A-level courses in biology, chemistry, environmental protection and conservation, geology, human biology and physics. There is also a one-year GCE A-level course in human biology, which runs in the evening. Students taking GCE A-level courses in biology and geography can take a one-year 'fast track' course in environmental protection and conservation. The access to HE course includes science modules at level 2 and level 3. There are also science modules in the 'new start' return to study course, the national diploma in sports science and Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE) health and social care programmes. Virtually all courses are offered at level 3 and designed for full-time students aged 16 to 18. At the time of the inspection, there were 222 students on GCE AS courses, 123 on GCE A-level courses, and 17 on an access to HE science programme. A group of Year 11 pupils from local schools attend the college to study level 3 modules in science for public understanding.

Achievement and standards

39. Pass rates on GCE A-level science courses have remained consistently well above the national averages for general FE and tertiary colleges in the three years 2000 to 2002. In 2002, pass rates were 100% for GCE A-level biology, chemistry, environmental protection and conservation, and geology. In 2002, most pass rates for GCE AS subjects were also well above national averages but the geology pass rate was at the national average and for environmental protection and conservation, the rate fell to a little below the national average. The proportion of students achieving grades A and B in science subjects is often well above the national average. For the three years 2000 to 2002, retention rates have been consistently above the national average.

40. Students arrive punctually for lessons and the attendance rate is good, at 87%. Students make good progress in most lessons, though in a few lessons students' attainment is not as high as might be expected. They carry out practical work competently and safely. Most of them have a good knowledge of their subjects. The standard of their formal coursework is generally good. Many students progress to science-related courses at university.

A sample of retention and pass rates in science, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
GCE A-level biology	3	No. of starts	51	58	27
		% retention	88	86	100
		% pass rate	98	98	100
GCE A-level chemistry	3	No. of starts	40	37	20

		% retention	93	92	100
		% pass rate	100	97	90
GCE A-level environmental protection and conservation	3	No. of starts	*	12	12
		% retention	*	92	100
		% pass rate	*	91	100
GCE AS chemistry	3	No. of starts	**	35	49
		% retention	**	89	88
		% pass rate	**	77	81
GCE AS human biology	3	No. of starts	15	*	49
		% retention	80	*	73
		% pass rate	67	*	75
GCE AS physics	3	No. of starts	**	24	34
		% retention	**	92	88
		% pass rate	**	73	90

Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

* data unreliable

** course did not run

Quality of education and training

41. Much of the teaching is good and some teaching in biology is excellent. In the successful lessons, teachers plan carefully and organise practical activities well. Students on biology and geology courses are able to undertake useful fieldwork activities to enhance their learning. Technicians work effectively with teachers in the laboratories and provide good additional support for students. Risk assessment procedures are thorough. In a lesson on dissection, the teacher introduced the topic clearly and during the practical dissection was able to help students relate theory to practice. The teacher effectively developed students' enthusiasm and expertise in investigative and observational techniques. The teacher maintained students' interest throughout the lesson by using effective individual and group work, class discussion and skilful questioning to check students' understanding. In a physics lesson, the teacher made good use of interactive whiteboards to illustrate both scattering of particles and projectile motion. However, the board could not readily be seen by all members of the class and some students had to get up and stand at another position in order to see the illustration, and then return to their seats. In the few weaker lessons, teachers do not give students sufficient opportunities to propose arguments to support a hypothesis.

42. Teaching and support staff are well qualified and experienced. Four teachers are examiners and share their valuable understanding of examination requirements with other teachers and with students. The physics and chemistry laboratories are inadequate for some learning activities. Some are too small for the size of groups being taught in them. The science materials on the college's intranet are not yet well developed, and at the time of the inspection had only been operable for one week.

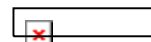
43. Students undergo an initial assessment of their skills when they join the college and most of those identified as needing additional help receive it. There are also additional science workshops available for those who need to attend them. Teachers set homework for students regularly. It is marked promptly and teachers give students helpful comments. Students' progress is monitored carefully. Regular assessments are used to plan well-structured individual reviews with students and devise appropriate individual action plans. Students also evaluate their own progress. They value the informal support provided by their teachers. Part-time evening students are unaware of the range

of academic and pastoral support to which they are entitled. Information about such support is not formally included in their induction to the college.

Leadership and management

44. Course management is mostly good. The managers and their teams work well together. Appraisals take place regularly and teachers' identified training needs are met through appropriate staff development activities. New teachers are supported well. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report, but considered that there was insufficient attention paid in it to the quality of teaching and some weaknesses were overlooked. The teaching observation grades awarded by the college are significantly higher than those awarded by inspectors. The means used by teachers to measure students' GCE AS and A-level grades against their GCSE achievements is ineffective because the data used for GCE AS and A-level courses are out of date.

Business



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

Strengths

- high retention rates on full-time level 3 courses
- high pass rates on full-time level 3 courses
- effective teaching to help students to prepare for examinations
- good individual support for students
- the high proportion of students on level 3 accounting courses progressing to level 4.

Weaknesses

- failure of some teaching to meet the differing needs of students
- insufficient use of up-to-date business topics in lessons

- poor teaching accommodation and equipment for some business students.

Scope of provision

45. The college offers GCE AS and A-level and AVCE courses. There are also GCE AS economics and GCE AS and A-level accounting courses. The vast majority of those enrolled on these courses are full-time students aged 16 to 18. There is part-time NVQ provision in administration at levels 2 and 3. A few work-based learners are enrolled on these courses. The college also offers text and word processing short courses, a part-time certificate in management course for adults, and evening courses in book-keeping and computerised accounts. Over 70 adults are working towards Association of Accounting Technicians (AAT) qualifications at all three levels. There is a total of 196 enrolments on full-time business courses and 385 part-time enrolments. The college previously ran a GNVQ intermediate course in business, but no students were recruited in September 2003.

Achievement and standards

46. Pass rates on most level 3 courses were above the national average in 2001 and 2002. Some AAT students failed to complete adequate portfolios to meet the NVQ requirements. Retention rates are above the national average on many courses. The proportion of AAT students who progress from level 3 to level 4 study is particularly good, at 54%, which is above the national average.

47. Most students' work demonstrates a standard at or above that expected for their level of study. The quality of students' work is good. Many students demonstrate a good understanding of business concepts and theories and apply them appropriately both in their written work and during lessons.

A sample of retention and pass rates in business, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
Practical book keeping (short)	1	No. of starts	15	22	14
		% retention	93	82	93
		% pass rate	71	78	92
NVQ accounts	2	No. of starts	34	27	15
		% retention	76	*	*
		% pass rate	88	*	*
GNVQ advanced business (AVCE business from 2002)	3	No. of starts	23	20	18
		% retention	70	95	89
		% pass rate	93	100	100
GCE AS business studies	3	No. of starts	8	55	61
		% retention	88	93	89
		% pass rate	86	98	98
GCE A-level business studies	3	No. of starts	46	51	39
		% retention	96	80	97
		% pass rate	93	100	100
NVQ accounts	3	No. of starts	29	33	30
		% retention	93	*	*

		% pass rate	67	*	*
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Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

* course did not run

Quality of education and training

48. Teaching is generally well planned and competent, and teachers cover the subject content of the syllabus well. Many teachers are adept at helping students to understand business topics and at assisting students to apply new knowledge appropriately. They give help patiently to individual students in the classroom. Students are prepared well for examinations and assessments. Teachers pay ample attention to helping students to develop examination techniques. They use a variety of appropriate teaching methods and give constructive feedback to students during lessons. In the effective lessons, students develop appropriate skills. For example, in a certificate in management lesson, students were asked to draw up risk assessments. They demonstrated interviewing skills, the ability to work in groups, good time management and effective presentation skills.

49. In the poorer lessons, teachers fail to extend the learning of the more able students or provide alternative strategies and materials to meet the needs of those who need more help than the rest of their classmates. Some lessons demand no involvement from students and provide little opportunity for them to apply new knowledge and test hypotheses. In a significant minority of lessons, teachers did not check adequately that students had understood the topic under discussion. While teachers refer to current principles and practice to enable students to discuss topical issues, many of the written examples used were out of date. Full-time students undertake a variety of study visits, but the purpose of and findings from the visits are seldom used in assignment work for students. The college runs a short business awareness programme for full-time students, which is supported by local businesses, but students do not have the opportunity to gain work experience as part of their course.

50. Many teaching rooms are well furnished and equipped, and allow teachers to organise a variety of learning activities. Most students have access to high-quality IT facilities in the college's 'M block', though general teaching classrooms do not have computers for use during lessons. A significant number of lessons, particularly for adults, take place in temporary classrooms that have only basic equipment and which provide an inflexible and drab learning environment for students. Other learning resources are good. The department runs support workshops to help students with their studies. Staff are well qualified, but few have recent business experience.

51. The criteria used in vocational courses for assessing students' work are detailed and comprehensive, and include the facility to assess students' key skills. Students on GCE AS and A-level courses are prepared well for their examinations, and teachers use examination criteria when marking students' work, which is returned swiftly to students. However, teachers' comments on students' work are often brief and give little detailed guidance to help students to improve their performance. The arrangements for students' induction and initial assessment for full-time students are good. Additional support and study needs are met and students' progress is monitored by tutors. Tutors review individual learning targets for students regularly, update them each term and set new targets to help drive students' achievements forward.

52. Students on business courses are able to study additional topics and subjects to enhance their learning, for example, e-business, IT and law. The college offers a good range of enrichment activities, but few business students participate in them. Part-time students who are in employment can study courses at a variety of levels and at times to accommodate their employers' requirements.

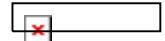
53. Individual support for students is very good. Tutorials are held regularly and attendance at them is good. During tutorials, students are required to assess their own progress. Some students do this well, but guidance to students on how to produce action plans arising from the exercise is insufficiently clear and sometimes the plans are inadequate for addressing the learning problems that have been identified. Students' attendance is monitored carefully, and parents are kept informed

of students' progress and attendance. Part-time students have the opportunity of individual tutorial support and those who seek it benefit from the advice and guidance they receive. Tutors maintain contact with part-time students through e-mail.

Leadership and management

54. Subject and course management are satisfactory. Line management responsibilities are clear and there is good communication between staff and managers. There is no routine contact between subject teachers in different departments, though the heads of respective departments meet in management meetings. Course reviews are held regularly and teachers set targets for improvement. However, the results of lesson observations are not available to staff to consider when conducting their course reviews. The business department has been slow to tackle the issue of industrial updating for teachers.

Information and communications technology



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

Strengths

- high retention and pass rates on most courses
- much good teaching
- high standard of students' work
- effective use of improvement targets for students
- comprehensive monitoring of students' progress.

Weaknesses

- not enough full-time level 2 courses for students to progress from level 1
- insufficient use by students of computer-based learning materials.

Scope of provision

55. The college offers a good range of mostly full-time ICT courses from level 1 to level 4. There are GCE AS and A-level courses in computing and ICT, an AVCE and Advanced Subsidiary Vocational Certificate of Education (ASVCE) course, and GNVQ courses at intermediate and foundation levels. The college offers programmes for adults in six centres around Somerset. Most part-time students follow the new computer literacy and information technology (CLAIT), CLAIT plus, or the ECDL courses. The college also offers a higher national certificate and a higher national diploma course in computing. Approximately 200 full-time students and 1,200 part-time students are enrolled on ICT courses. Most full-time students are aged 16 to 18.

Achievement and standards

56. Pass rates on many courses are high. In 2002, the pass rates on the AVCE double award and the GCE AS IT courses were 94% and 93%, respectively. However, the pass rate on the ASVCE IT course was very low, at only 20%. Many full-time students take the ECDL as an extra subject. The pass rate in 2002 was low. Retention rates are generally high. However, the retention rate on the GNVQ intermediate course fell in 2002, to 69%.

57. Generally, students' work is good or very good. For example, full-time students are able to apply their knowledge and skills competently to technically complex computer applications and programming when working on Internet projects. However, some students spend too much time researching individual topics. Some students who are enrolled both on GCE A-level computing and ICT are not coping with the demands of the coursework.

A sample of retention and pass rates in information and communications technology, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
CLAIT (one year)	1	No. of starts	889	222	176
		% retention	94	97	97
		% pass rate	78	72	69
ECDL (one year)	2	No. of starts	*	11	82
		% retention	*	91	87
		% pass rate	*	100	42
GNVQ Intermediate IT	2	No. of starts	14	14	14
		% retention	71	93	69
		% pass rate	70	77	78
GCE AS IT (ICT from 2002)	3	No. of starts	*	42	34
		% retention	*	93	79
		% pass rate	*	82	93
ASVCE in IT	3	No. of starts	**	7	45
		% retention	**	71	73
		% pass rate	**	40	20
GNVQ advanced (AVCE double award from 2002)	3	No. of starts	18	25	33
		% retention	72	84	83
		% pass rate	100	65	94

GCE A-level IT(A2 from 2002)	3	No. of starts	10	24	9
		% retention	100	71	89
		% pass rate	100	100	88

Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

* data unreliable

** course did not run

Quality of education and training

58. Teaching is good in most lessons. Teachers plan their lessons carefully and explain the objectives of the lessons clearly for students. They use appropriate teaching methods and help students to develop good IT skills. Teachers are confident when using hardware and software to demonstrate points or skills to students. Students arrive promptly at their lessons and begin working quickly. When students are identified as making slow progress, teachers set short-term targets to encourage them to catch up with their classmates. Specialist support tutors provide extra help for some students in the classroom. They generally have a good understanding of students' tasks and the IT systems relevant to their studies. However, some support tutors are less knowledgeable and are unable to give appropriate support. Course handbooks for students on vocational courses are clear, attractive and easy to understand. They include the timetable of assignments, staff details, and guidance notes for completing assignments. Assessment and monitoring of students' progress are mostly good. Teachers monitor students' work regularly and maintain detailed records of the grades and marks awarded. Assignments are well designed and deadlines for their completion are realistic. Teachers give regular, useful feedback to students to help them improve their performance.

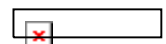
59. Most computing staff have relevant vocational experience, are qualified teachers and keep their IT skills up to date. The accommodation used for teaching IT is good. Rooms are well designed to enable teachers to teach lessons on theory to a whole class as well as running individual practical work lessons. Students have good access to specialist software in the specialist computing rooms, but restricted access to it in the workshops and resource centre. The library has a satisfactory range of modern IT textbooks, but few technical journals or trade newspapers. Interactive CD-ROMs and computer-based learning packages are available, but are not widely used. The intranet for IT staff and students is insufficiently developed.

60. Full-time students have weekly group tutorial meetings. Individual tutorials take place twice a term. The group tutorials are well structured and cover a range of personal and social matters. Students receive additional learning support either in lessons or in timetabled sessions in the college's Backup learning support centre. Students' attendance at these sessions is monitored carefully and reported to their personal tutors.

Leadership and management

61. Management of the courses and of the department is good. There are regular team meetings, which part-time teachers are encouraged to attend. However, course teams do not always meet with their course manager twice a year as planned. Course files are well organised. Experienced teachers and managers observe and grade ICT lessons and tutorials once a year. The grades for observed lessons awarded by the ICT team and used in the self-assessment report are unrealistically high. The self-assessment action plan does not include specific targets for improvement or criteria for success.

Health and social care, and counselling



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

Strengths

- much good teaching, particularly on level 2 courses
- high retention and pass rates on most courses
- well-planned and organised work experience placements for students
- very good teaching accommodation
- well-motivated and confident students
- good curriculum leadership.

Weaknesses

- inappropriate enrolment of some students on the GNVQ foundation level course in health and social care
- insufficient provision in childcare at level 1
- lack of materials and teaching methods for students with differing abilities.

Scope of provision

62. There is a wide range of health and social care, childcare and counselling courses. The vast majority of the courses run during the day and there are some evening classes. Although there are a few courses leading to NVQs, these are not yet well established and they attract low numbers of students. There is a range of short courses in first aid. Approximately 500 students aged 16 to 18, and 800 aged 19 and over, are enrolled on the courses. Most full-time and level 3 counselling courses include some work experience for students in order to enable them to develop skills in the workplace and to make connections between theory and practice. The college has well-established

and effective links with several local high schools and provides pre-vocational courses for students aged 14 to 16.

Achievement and standards

63. The pass rates on most courses at levels 2 and 3 are high. Retention rates are also high on most courses. Students on some counselling courses do not complete their qualifications within the target time because they are slow in completing their development portfolios. The college is improving this by insisting that all students have a work placement before starting the course. Similarly, the small number of NVQ students, at both levels 2 and 3, are not achieving their qualifications within the target period. The college has started to address this shortcoming. Standards of students' behaviour and attainment in most lessons are very good. Most students exhibit good independent learning and research skills. They also display good understanding and awareness of difference and diversity in society and are fully conversant with current practices in the health, social and childcare professions. Many students progress from level 2 to level 3 courses at the college. Most health and social care students on level 3 courses progress to HE or enter relevant employment. However, few childcare students go on either to HE or to relevant employment, and some remain at the college to study other level 3 courses or they enter employment that is unrelated to their studies.

A sample of retention and pass rates in health and social care, and counselling, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
Introduction to pre-school practice	2	No. of starts	9	7	18
		% retention	100	100	100
		% pass rate	89	86	100
National diploma in caring services	3	No. of starts	16	13	12
		% retention	100	92	92
		% pass rate	93	82	91
National diploma in childhood studies	3	No. of starts	9	12	*
		% retention	78	83	*
		% pass rate	83	100	*
Combined certificate in counselling skills	2	No. of starts	28	28	27
		% retention	79	**	81
		% pass rate	95	85	95
Certificate in counselling	2	No. of starts	28	28	27
		% retention	100	100	90
		% pass rate	100	75	100

Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

* course did not run

** data unreliable

Quality of education and training

64. Overall, teaching is good. Teachers are adept at developing students' confidence. Students engage in lively class discussions, are articulate and demonstrate good understanding of relevant terminology and concepts. Teachers enable students to make clear and meaningful links between theory and practice. There are good workshops, which allow students to learn at their own pace. During these sessions, many students build their investigative and research skills by, for example,

compiling case studies on family and friends to promote health and well being. On level 2 childcare courses, teachers take care to develop the confidence of students to use correct terminology by devising tasks that enable them to practise these both in written work and class discussions. In the more effective lessons, teachers' mastery of their subjects successfully captivates students' enthusiasm for new ideas and information. On counselling courses, teachers treat students as co-tutors. This enables students to practise their developing skills as counsellors. Teachers ensure that students are aware of different cultures.

65. Teaching rooms are attractive and provide a good learning environment for students. Students have easy access to, and make good use of, IT for class work and independent research. The learning centre has a good range of textbooks, journals and videos to support the curriculum area. While all full-time students undergo an introduction to the learning centre during their induction, not all part-time students have this experience, which inhibits their full use of this valuable resource.

66. All childcare students and most health and social care students attend relevant work experience placements. These are well managed, reviewed and evaluated. There are good links with local childcare and education providers, including families with babies under one year of age. Childcare students also invite the college's nursery children into their practical room to engage them in play activities, and the activity forms part of their coursework.

67. Teachers monitor students' work and progress regularly. Their written and verbal comments are clear and help students to improve their performance. Written briefs for assignment are clear. Students on NVQ courses are guided well and their work is assessed regularly but, at the time of the inspection, seven months from the start of the academic year, few or none of most students' completed study units had been assessed.

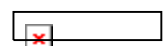
68. Students receive good guidance and support when choosing courses at levels 2 and 3. However, there is only one course at foundation level, which is in health and social care. Students are not able to begin their studies in childcare at level 1. Some, therefore, study at level 1 on the health and social care course and then change to childcare at level 2. There are a few part-time courses which attract small numbers of students. Full-time and part-time students receive very good tutorial support. Attendance at group and individual tutorials is good. In tutorials, students receive effective guidance on academic, pastoral and personal issues. While tutors set short-term targets for students, they do not set longer-term targets, based on the use of relevant data on students' previous attainment, for the end of the course.

69. All full-time students undergo initial diagnostic assessment of their learning needs. The results of this assessment inform tutors of any need for additional support and identify students' level of achievement in key skills. The small number of students identified as needing specific support is assisted well in the classroom and in the college's Backup area. However, the results of the initial assessment are not shared or used by course teachers routinely when planning lessons or teaching. As a result, individual students' learning needs are frequently not met. For example, most teachers provide the same teaching materials for all students, irrespective of their differing abilities and/or learning needs.

Leadership and management

70. Curriculum leadership and management are effective. Teachers meet regularly to review and monitor existing course provision and to plan future courses. Communication within course teams and the department is very effective. Teachers are dedicated to their work and support each other. They undertake regular training and professional development. The self-assessment report is clear, but the grades awarded by college staff to the lessons they observed are unrealistically high.

Visual and performing arts and media



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

Strengths

- high pass rates
- additional vocationally relevant courses for students
- much good teaching
- good support for students.

Weaknesses

- low retention rates on some courses
- insufficient attention to the differing needs of students
- much unsatisfactory teaching accommodation.

Scope of provision

71. The college offers a wide range of full-time courses in visual arts, performing arts and media studies. At the time of the inspection, there were 626 full-time enrolments and 778 part-time enrolments on these courses. There is a wide range of level 3 and part-time recreational provision. However, there are few courses at level 2 and none at level 1. The enrichment programme is greatly valued by students. Students visit London, Amsterdam and Barcelona to see exhibitions and visit museums and theatres. The college offers GCE AS and A-level courses in art and design, graphics, photography, media and film studies, drama, dance, music and music technology. There are also national diploma courses in fine art, multimedia, performing arts, music practice and music technology. The provision at level 2 consists of a GNVQ intermediate course in art, a first diploma in performing arts and a foundation art and design course at level 3. There is also a range of short part-time courses in ceramics, printmaking, life drawing and photography. Music and drama lessons are provided in the early evening for local schoolchildren aged 14 to 16.

Achievement and standards

72. In 2001 and 2002, the pass rates on GCE A-level art and design, drama and music were excellent, at 100%. The first diploma in performing arts, national diploma in performing arts and the

diploma in foundation studies also had 100% pass rates. Pass rates on most other courses are above the national average. However, in 2002, the pass rate on the GNVQ intermediate course, at 40%, was very much below the national average. Students may study a wide range of additional courses, including life drawing, ceramics, photography, video editing, and 'Trinity College acting'. A high proportion of students progress from level 2 to level 3 studies.

73. The standard of students' work is generally high. Many students display a good range of skills, are confident and are able to critically evaluate their own work. Groups of students work effectively together. For example, every year, national diploma in multimedia students run a well-produced live radio show. Second-year students obtain the sponsorship and write the news and advertisements; first-year students carry out the broadcast throughout the day. In music lessons, students use industrial-standard computer software confidently in order to write compositions. Students enjoy practical activities and teachers help them to experience work of a professional standard, including the meeting of tight deadlines. On performing arts courses, students have to audition for parts for each production, receive and sign 'contracts' and are paid imaginary salaries. Students' attendance in observed lessons, at 75%, is lower than the national average. Registers indicate this is the usual rate of attendance.

A sample of retention and pass rates in visual and performing arts and media, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
GNVQ intermediate art	2	No. of starts	11	12	14
		% retention	73	92	71
		% pass rate	75	82	40
GCE A-level drama	3	No. of starts	19	15	10
		% retention	100	87	100
		% pass rate	100	100	100
GCE A-level art	3	No. of starts	32	43	37
		% retention	81	88	95
		% pass rate	96	100	100
National diploma in media	3	No. of starts	18	22	*
		% retention	72	63	*
		% pass rate	88	79	*
National diploma in multimedia	3	No. of starts	*	*	19
		% retention	*	*	74
		% pass rate	*	*	92
Diploma in foundation studies art and design	3	No. of starts	6	11	18
		% retention	83	100	100
		% pass rate	100	91	94

Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

* course did not run

Quality of education and training

74. There is much good teaching. Lessons are well structured and schemes of work are comprehensive. Teachers are enthusiastic and use their specialist expertise to good effect. They are adept at helping students to combine the theoretical and practical aspects of the course. In group

discussions, most students are able to evaluate their work and demonstrate critical and analytical skills. In a lesson devoted to evaluating students' efforts after the first day of broadcasting their live radio show, students were highly critical about their own broadcast and technical skill. The evaluation was used to improve the next broadcast. In a life drawing lesson, students analysed their own work and that of their classmates and identified points for improvement. In a music technology lesson, students demonstrated good independent thought when comparing the work of different composers. In a drama lesson, students were able to discuss authoritatively the issues surrounding restoration comedy, including those related to social and political history. In a performance lesson, the teacher led students in physical and vocal warm-up exercises. Each student then took a leading role in turn, and the class worked effectively together throughout the lesson. Every summer, students on national and higher national diploma in multimedia courses record and edit live performances of new bands at a local festival. Other highly successful activities include those of second year students on the national diploma dance and drama course leading drama workshops for local schoolchildren and giving end-of-year exhibitions.

75. In the less successful lessons, teachers fail to identify the different needs of students in the class. Some students, for example, require more support than others to enable them to carry out research effectively, particularly for preparing written work. Assignments include clear assessment criteria. Teachers use a variety of appropriate methods to assess students' written work, performances and presentations. However, the results from assessing students' work are not used by teachers to modify their materials or teaching methods to meet the different learning needs of students.

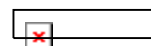
76. Teachers are well qualified and have relevant industrial experience. There is good specialist accommodation in performing arts. However, much of the other teaching accommodation is unsatisfactory. Students can use the Strode Theatre, situated on the shared campus, but the rehearsal area has no changing rooms, and the floor is only semi-sprung and is uneven. There are no showers and drinking water is unavailable; both of which are needed after vigorous rehearsals or lessons. The rehearsal room is adjacent to the music recording studio, which is inadequately soundproofed. Loud sounds from the music studio interfere with students' concentration in the rehearsal room, and vice-versa. Music students' theory rooms, computer workstations, and rehearsal and recording studios are all located in different buildings. This results in poor supervision of students' work and often prevents lessons from being concluded effectively. On media courses, computers are sometimes unable to support the design of interactive web pages. In visual arts, the rapid growth of student numbers has led to classes being taught in rooms that are too small, and to insufficient storage areas. In ceramics, there is little room for the teacher to move around the students while they are working. There is also insufficient technical support. This leads to poor housekeeping, and there is sawdust and loose plaster on the floors. The same area is used for a jewellery lesson, during which enamelling equipment is used without adequate ventilation.

77. Full-time students receive good and effective tutorial support, advice and guidance. Part-time students on foundation courses are integrated well into the full-time group.

Leadership and management

78. Leadership and management of the provision are generally good. Teams meet regularly. However, there is little sharing of good practice across the different teams. There are appropriate staff development opportunities for teachers. The mentoring scheme for new staff is good. Teachers understand the college's quality assurance arrangements and implement them consistently. However, the college staff who observe and grade lessons award grades that are unrealistically high.

Humanities



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

Strengths

- consistently high pass rates on GCE AS and A-level courses
- much very good teaching
- thorough review of students' progress
- comprehensive and effective support for students
- students' well-developed skills of communication, analysis and evaluation
- good course review and evaluation.

Weaknesses

- poor teaching accommodation in some areas.

Scope of provision

79. The inspection covered GCE AS and A-level courses in psychology, sociology, history and law. Nearly all the courses are full time. The vast majority of students are aged 16 to 18. There are approximately 300 enrolments on GCE AS courses and 113 on GCE A-level courses. More than half of all enrolments are in psychology. Students aged 16 to 18 study for additional qualifications in the key skills of problem solving and improving your own learning as well as the European computer driving licence. While students are able to practise the key skill of communication, their performance is not assessed. The college offers a GCE AS course in critical thinking for gifted pupils in Somerset schools. It provides evening classes for adult students in just two subjects: GCE AS psychology and sociology.

Achievement and standards

80. The standard of full-time students' work is high. During lessons, students acquire a secure grasp of the subjects they are studying. Their research skills in psychology and sociology are well developed. In lessons, students show particular strengths in analysis and evaluation. They articulate their responses to questions fluently and confidently. They are able to concentrate hard and work well on their own or collaboratively. However, students have not developed adequately their skills of

reading, summarising and note making, appropriate to the demands of advanced level courses. Many students go on to GCE A-level study after completing their GCE AS course, especially in sociology. A high proportion of students go on to HE.

81. Pass rates on GCE AS courses are very high. On GCE A-level courses, high pass rates have been maintained in psychology, sociology and history. The proportion of students on GCE A-level courses who gain grades A or B significantly exceeds national averages, as it does for GCE AS sociology. For GCE A-level law, pass rates have fluctuated and, in 2002, they were unsatisfactory. There was a marked decline between 2001 and 2002 in the number of law students who gained grades A or B. In 2002, retention rates on all courses were high. Retention rates are low on the small number of courses for adult students.

A sample of retention and pass rates in humanities, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
GCE A-level psychology (16 to 18)	3	No. of starts	48	59	57
		% retention	*	80	98
		% pass rate	97	95	100
GCE A-level sociology (16 to 18)	3	No. of starts	25	27	26
		% retention	*	*	100
		% pass rate	94	93	100
GCE A-level history (16 to 18)	3	No. of starts	32	33	22
		% retention	*	*	95
		% pass rate	85	88	100
GCE AS psychology (16 to 18) new scheme from 2001	3	No. of starts	n/a	104	91
		% retention	n/a	85	91
		% pass rate	n/a	92	90
GCE AS history (16 to 18)	3	No. of starts	7	42	46
		% retention	71	83	87
		% pass rate	20	100	98
GCE AS law (16 to 18)	3	No. of starts	**	21	56
		% retention	**	90	89
		% pass rate	**	89	84

Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

* data unreliable

** course did not run

n/a not applicable

Quality of education and training

82. Much of the teaching is very good. Students are strongly motivated and teachers' expectations of them are high. Students acquire secure knowledge and understanding of their subjects. They gain regular practice in applying their knowledge and developing a range of appropriate skills. In the better lessons, teachers move briskly from one topic to the next, ask searching questions of students to check their understanding, and use good handouts to help students understand complex concepts and extend their knowledge. In a lesson about how to evaluate questionnaires, students were provided with useful prompts to guide them while they devised a questionnaire. Students then

presented their questionnaires to the group. The teacher drew out skilfully some key sociological issues raised during the presentations and students clearly added to their understanding of the issues and their impact on the design and use of questionnaires. Students develop good IT skills and use them to produce assignment work and undertake research outside the classroom. However, teachers rarely use IT as a means to teaching in lessons, other than as a substitute for using a whiteboard. Not all students' learning needs are recognised and addressed in lessons. Teachers have not devised differentiated materials or methods to meet the differing abilities of students in many of the lessons. The additional workshops for students do not fully address these needs either. In some lessons, students spend too much time copying notes from the board. In others, teachers sometimes spend a long time talking themselves and give students few opportunities to contribute fully to the lessons.

83. Most staff are appropriately qualified, and take good advantage of the opportunities for staff development. Two part-time teachers, employed to cover the long-term absence of a full-time teacher, are not qualified teachers but are being well supported. Some teaching accommodation is of a high standard but a significant minority of lessons take place in huts, which restricts the activities that can be used for teaching. Students have their own copies of up-to-date textbooks, but the supply of additional books for loan from the learning resources centre is neither adequate nor, in some cases, sufficiently up-to-date. Students can use the recently developed college intranet to locate the college's resources in the learning resource centre and some relevant web sites, but there are few materials on it to help students wanting to learn on their own.

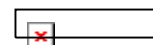
84. Teachers mark students' work thoroughly. Students know the criteria by which their work will be assessed. They receive useful feedback on their written work. Teachers and tutors review students' progress regularly. Students are set realistic learning targets. The records of students' progress are good and used both to enable students to evaluate their own performance and to keep parents fully informed of students' progress.

85. Students on full-time courses receive much effective guidance and support. In contrast, adult students on part-time courses are inadequately guided and supported. Students aged 16 to 18 receive good academic and pastoral support. The programme of group tutorials is less effective, and not as highly valued by students as individual support. The monitoring of students' attendance has been strengthened and there are signs that attendance rates are improving. Careers and HE guidance are effective.

Leadership and management

86. Leadership and management in humanities are good. Teachers carry out review and evaluation of the provision for students aged 16 to 18 well in order to maintain or improve standards. They devise realistic action plans and suitably demanding targets for improvement. The plans are monitored regularly. Close attention is paid to the views of students. The weaker aspects of management include the small part-time provision for adults, the promotion of equal opportunities in schemes of work, the review of lesson observation gradings and the sharing of good practice.

English, communication, and English as a foreign language



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

Strengths

- outstanding pass rates on some level 3 courses

- very good teaching on some level 3 courses
- regular and thorough monitoring of students' progress
- high standard of student's work
- highly effective curriculum management.

Weaknesses

- unsatisfactory pre-enrolment guidance for GCSE students.

Scope of provision

87. The college offers GCE AS and GCE A-level courses in English language, English literature, and communication. GCSE English is offered during the day for full-time and part-time students and in the evening for adults. There are 170 students on level 3 courses and 48 students taking GCSE English. Most students are full time, aged 16 to 18. There are 12 part-time adult students. The proportion of students progressing from GCE AS to GCE A-level courses is high. Enrolments on GCE communication courses declined in 2002, to only 17. There is an access to HE course and a small provision of EFL. Most EFL courses are designed to meet the needs of the local hotel and catering trade. Accredited courses are offered at entry and at advanced level. Some 40 students are enrolled on EFL courses.

Achievement and standards

88. There are very high pass rates on level 3 courses, and many students achieve grades A and B. In 2001 and 2002, the pass rate for GCE A-level English literature was 100%. On GCE A-level English language, for the three years 2000 to 2002, the pass rate has remained at 100%. Pass rates for GCE communication studies were at the national average in 2002, but the proportion of students achieving grade A or B was high. In 2001/02, pass rates on the GCE AS English literature and English language courses were also well above the national average. Pass rates for English GCSE are generally at, or close to, the national average. Retention rates are generally above the national average.

89. Students are highly motivated to succeed. Generally, they are able to use critical vocabulary appropriately and can write well. Their written work demonstrates high standards of spelling and punctuation, and some excellent creative writing skills. Students are punctual for lessons and their attendance is good.

A sample of retention and pass rates in English, communication, and English as a foreign language, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
GCSE English	2	No. of starts	49	33	50
		% retention	67	58	78
		% pass rate	61	37	44
GCE A-level English language	3	No. of starts	30	31	28
		% retention	83	*	100
		% pass rate	100	100	100
GCE A-level English literature	3	No. of starts	32	25	19
		% retention	84	56	89
		% pass rate	92	100	100
GCE AS English language	3	No. of starts	**	42	52
		% retention	**	93	83
		% pass rate	**	97	98
GCE AS English literature	3	No. of starts	**	34	41
		% retention	**	88	85
		% pass rate	**	97	97
GCE A-level communication studies	3	No. of starts	43	42	24
		% retention	91	81	100
		% pass rate	80	94	100
GCE AS communication studies	3	No. of starts	**	34	17
		% retention	**	85	100
		% pass rate	**	100	82

Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

* data unreliable

** course not running

Quality of education and training

90. Teaching on level 3 programmes is very good, and some is excellent. Teachers plan lessons very well and design clear schemes of work. They demonstrate very good subject knowledge and communicate their enjoyment to students. The quality of students' discussions in English language and literature lessons is very high. Teachers take care to encourage the weaker students to work as hard as possible in order to reach the same high standards as their classmates. Students undertake a substantial amount of background reading and research. Much of this work is at a higher standard than is required for the course. Assignments are well designed and prepare students effectively for the specific requirements of external examinations. Students are tested regularly under 'mock' examination conditions. The standard of students' investigative writing in GCE A-level English language is excellent. Specific English workshops for students are attended well and provide students with good additional subject support. GCE communication students have an excellent grasp of communication issues. In a GCE AS lesson, students were asked to analyse leadership styles. Students were able to grasp the conceptual issues swiftly and then work through worksheets at their own pace. The worksheets contained tasks of varying range and level in order to meet the different learning needs of students.

91. In GCSE English, teachers prepare their lessons thoroughly. They work hard to motivate

students, many of whom have previously failed to gain a good grade. The progress that students make in lessons is satisfactory. However, the guidance given to students before they enrol on the GCSE course is unsatisfactory. Class registers show persistent patterns of poor attendance and low retention in the early weeks of the course. Some students transfer from the GCSE course to a level 2 key skills communication class, but this takes place late in the course. The standard of students' work in EFL lessons is good. Teachers are careful to establish a good working atmosphere. Students of different nationalities learn quickly to share ideas and to support each other. Teachers combine successfully for students the development of essential grammar with that of language for day-to-day speaking and listening.

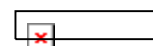
92. Teachers are very experienced and are suitably qualified. They share their experience and expertise with students during creative writing workshops. Some teachers work as external examiners; they share their experience with their colleagues and help students to develop very good examination techniques in their lessons. Teaching accommodation, except in the huts, is good. There are adequate current editions of texts for students' use.

93. Personal tutors monitor students' progress carefully. Students have regular opportunities to discuss their progress with their teachers and personal tutors. The learning support centre is well used and effective. Students greatly benefit from visiting speakers to the college and from visits to lectures and to the theatre.

Leadership and management

94. There is strong and effective management of the curriculum. Communication between the five course leaders and their teams is very effective. Teachers have a good awareness of long-term planning strategies. Team meetings are regular, well minuted and focus on students' progress. An advanced practitioner has been appointed, whose role is to improve the use of technology in the teaching of languages and oversee lesson observations. While self-assessment was thorough, the grades awarded by the college for the lessons observed were much higher than those awarded by inspectors.

Literacy and numeracy



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

Strengths

- much good teaching in practical numeracy lessons
- effective use of individual learning plans for students
- high pass rates on entry level literacy and numeracy programmes.

Weaknesses

- failure of teaching in some literacy lessons to meet the needs of all students
- some unsatisfactory teaching accommodation
- poor learning resources for students at some venues in the community.

Scope of provision

95. The college offers full-time and part-time courses in literacy and numeracy from pre-entry level to level 2. More than 300 adults and 44 students aged 16 to 18 are enrolled on these courses. Courses in literacy and numeracy are provided at the college and various locations in the community, including schools, community halls and a family centre. In the spring of 2002, the college introduced a pilot National Test literacy and numeracy programme at level 1 and level 2.

Achievement and standards

96. Pass rates on the basic skills literacy course have been above the national average for the three years 2000 to 2002. In 2001 and 2002, the pass rate on the National Open College Network (NOCN) credit entry level course in literacy and numeracy was around the national average. In 2002, on the short numeracy course, it was below the national average, having been around the average in 2000 and 2001. Retention and pass rates are above the national average for similar colleges.

97. Most students on these programmes develop their confidence and are able to explain well the benefits of their courses. Although the number of students is sometimes low on some of the courses held for adults at community venues, students develop an appropriate range of skills and knowledge. Students on vocational and other full-time courses, who have been identified as needing extra help, improve their basic skills as a result of receiving additional learning support.

A sample of retention and pass rates in literacy and numeracy, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
Basic skills literacy	X	No. of starts	108	90	85
		% retention	73	83	84
		% pass rate	100	100	100
NOCN credit entry level	1	No. of starts	*	11	22
		% retention	*	91	100
		% pass rate	*	100	95
NOCN numeracy (short course)	1	No. of starts	220	243	226
		% retention	95	97	99
		% pass rate	100	100	87

Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

* course did not run

Quality of education and training

98. There is some good teaching in numeracy lessons. Some teachers are adept at using learning resources to develop students' skills and their understanding of relevant concepts. For example, in an entry level numeracy lesson, the teacher provided a range of household items and food packages to enable students to recognise and describe shapes. In a level 2 numeracy lesson for engineering students, in order to help students to develop their trigonometry skills, the teacher made very good use of a wide range of items. For example, some of the materials used had been made by students in the engineering workshop, and some were typical of those found in large supermarkets. Students not only gained experience using the calculator and the relevant function keys, but also developed an understanding of more complex numerical relationships.

99. In the effective lessons, teachers ensure that topics or skills are broken into small incremental steps, particularly in the early part of the courses, so that students can build up their achievement. Teachers make good use of students' individual learning plans, which are drawn up after the initial assessment of their literacy and numeracy skills. Teachers also often encourage students to learn from each other. For example, in some lessons for adults, students are often paired with a volunteer tutor, who is training to become a literacy and numeracy teacher. Students value this additional assistance. However, though adult students have individual learning plans that identify their learning needs, the topics and the pace of the lessons do not match what is in the learning plans; students' needs are not met and teachers fail to involve them fully in the lessons.

100. In some lessons, teachers take a long time to move students from one topic or task to another, and more could be done in the time. Sometimes, students lack the skills and knowledge to undertake properly the work being given to them, but this is not always recognised by the teacher. In some lessons, teachers do not adequately take into account the starting point of the students varying levels of ability. They do not adapt their teaching methods or materials to enable the more able students to extend their abilities and the less able to work at their own pace. In other lessons, the instructions given to students regarding tasks are unclear and students do not fully understand what they were being asked to do.

101. The level of support and encouragement that staff provide, particularly for adults returning to study, enables students to develop confidence. They are encouraged to attempt more difficult work and to work in small supported groups, on their own, and with IT, where it is available. Students receive generally good learning support from the college's Backup support centre. Support assistants also give effective assistance during lessons to students with specific needs, such as help with dyslexia. The Backup additional learning support centre is located in a large open-plan area, which also contains IT facilities for students' use. While the open plan areas are pleasant and well furnished, noise from students working on their own on the computers often distracts students receiving learning support.

102. Teaching rooms and IT resources are very good in the new 'M' block on the main college campus. Adult students in particular make good use of the computers for their studies. Some adult students are taught in open plan learning areas at other venues, which are frequently used at the same time by younger students. These students are also distracted by, and feel uncomfortable being taught in the presence of, younger students. Some teaching rooms in other parts of the college and at community venues are too small for the size of classes working in them. There is insufficient space for students to work in small groups and often there are no IT facilities for students' use. The provision of computers for students and staff in some community venues is unsatisfactory. Teachers of literacy and numeracy in the centres can borrow laptop computers from IT teachers, but only when they are not required for use by the IT team. The classroom at Frome Community College has two out-of-date computers that have been passed on by the local adult education team because they were no longer fit for purpose. This centre does not have access to the Internet. There is an appropriate range of practical learning resources on the main site to help students to learn. Adult students at other venues are not so well served. There is a small stock of reading materials and books available at Frome, which are old and not suitable for the students following courses there.

Leadership and management

103. Leadership and management are improving, following the recent appointment of a new manager. New management and communication systems have been introduced and improvements are planned for the teaching of literacy and numeracy. Inadequate attention has been paid to ensuring the quality of provision being run at locations in the community. The monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning has been inconsistent and unsatisfactory. Team meetings are held, but there is over-reliance on informal communication between teachers. The curriculum manager has begun to visit the community venues, and 'cluster meetings' of groups of teachers have also begun recently. It is too early to judge the full effectiveness of these developments. The teachers in the large team teaching on literacy and numeracy courses are part time. Teachers were not involved in the self-assessment process and some had not seen the completed self-assessment report.

Part D: College data

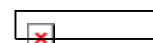
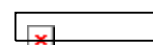


Table 1: Enrolments by level of study and age



Level	16-18	19+
1	9	50
2	12	17
3	67	7
4/5	0	1
Other	33	25
Total *	100	100

Source: provided by the college in 2003

* figures have been rounded and may not total 100%

Table 2: Enrolments by curriculum area and age



Curriculum area	16-18 No.	19+ No.	Total Enrolments %
Science and mathematics	554	572	7
Land-based provision	0	0	0
Construction	0	0	0
Engineering, technology and manufacture	93	36	1
Business administration, management and professional	274	471	5

Information and communications technology	258	663	6
Retailing, customer service and transportation	20	10	0
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	243	1,586	12
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	89	248	2
Health, social care and public services	536	2,725	21
Visual and performing arts and media	737	1,154	12
Humanities	1,114	1,516	17
English, languages and communication	970	157	7
Foundation programmes	79	1,668	11
Null AOL Unassigned	30	30	0
Total	4,997	10,836	100

Source: provided by the college in 2003

Table 3: Retention and achievement

Level (Long Courses)	Retention and pass rate	Completion year					
		16-18			19+		
		2000	2001	2002	2000	2001	2002
1	Starters excluding transfers	666	98	259	879	549	498
	Retention rate (%)	89	85	84	89	86	78
	National average (%)	80	79	*	78	78	*
	Pass rate (%)	65	40	85	75	71	79
	National average (%)	65	68	*	66	68	*
2	Starters excluding transfers	362	320	388	482	420	430
	Retention rate (%)	75	81	80	83	82	82
	National average (%)	76	76	*	79	78	*
	Pass rate (%)	59	71	62	66	64	67
	National average (%)	66	69	*	65	69	*
3	Starters excluding transfers	1,048	2,151	2,330	427	394	503
	Retention rate (%)	87	84	88	85	82	83
	National average (%)	76	77	*	78	78	*

	Pass rate (%)	89	90	90	72	74	75
	National average (%)	74	76	*	66	69	*
4	Starters excluding transfers	1	1	1	19	43	52
	Retention rate (%)	*	*	100	79	93	88
	National average (%)	79	82	*	81	84	*
	Pass rate (%)	*	*	0	67	80	44
	National average (%)	66	55	*	56	53	*

Note: summary of retention and achievement for the last three years by age and level of course, compared against national averages for colleges of the same type (that is general FE/tertiary colleges or sixth form colleges).

Sources of information:

1. National averages: *Benchmarking Data 1997/98 to 1999/2000: Retention and Achievement Rates in Further Education Colleges in England*, Learning and Skills Council, September 2002.

2. College rates for 1997/8-1998/9: *Benchmarking Data 1997/98 to 1999/2000: Retention and Achievement Rates*, produced by the Further Education Funding Council, September 2000.

3. College rates for 1999/2000: provided by the college in spring 2001.

* data unavailable

Table 4: Quality of teaching observed during the inspection by level

Courses	Teaching judged to be:			No of sessions observed
	Good or better %	Satisfactory %	Less than satisfactory %	
Level 3 (advanced)	78	18	4	82
Level 2 (intermediate)	50	46	4	24
Level 1 (foundation)	50	40	10	10
Other sessions	44	56	0	9
Totals	68	28	4	125