



Plymouth College of Art and Design

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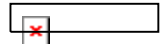
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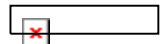
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Basic information about the college

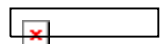


Name of college:	Plymouth College of Art and Design
Type of college:	Specialist college
Principal:	Lynne Staley-Brookes
Address of college:	Tavistock Place Plymouth Devon PL4 8AT
Telephone number:	01752 203 434
Fax number:	01752 203 444
Chair of governors:	Sheridan Brimacombe
Unique reference number:	130650
Name of reporting inspector:	Sandra Tweedie HMI
Dates of inspection:	29 April-3 May 2002

Part A: Summary



Information about the college

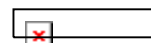


Plymouth College of Art and Design is a specialist college, located in the city centre. The majority of the college's further education (FE) students are from the Plymouth area or travel into the city from rural locations. Plymouth has a population of about 254,000 inhabitants, of whom 1% are from minority ethnic backgrounds. Local schools include three grammar schools, many schools with sixth

Further Education. The college offers a wide range of specialist courses in art, two-dimensional and three-dimensional design, media and crafts. Most students are studying on pre-degree foundation and general art and design courses, and there are substantial numbers following media and photography lens-based courses. The college has a small number of learners on work-based provision in motor vehicle engineering and printing. The college has completed a new extension to the main building at Tavistock Place during 2001/02. At the time of inspection, students were also located in Sutton building, a short distance from Tavistock Place.

In 2001/02, there were 583 full-time students on FE courses, 354 students aged 16 to 18, and 229 adult students. Approximately 460 students were studying full time or part time on higher education (HE) art and design courses. Currently, the college has approximately 532 students taking part-time courses, the majority over 19-years old. Some 43% of FE enrolments are at level 3. The 62% of enrolments at level 2 mainly represent the students taking courses leading to additional qualifications. A new principal was appointed in September 2001. The college in its mission aims to 'provide innovative further and higher education within the visual arts, crafts, design media, meeting the needs of the individual, community and industry, as well as providing a positive contribution to the culture of the city and the region'.

How effective is the college?



Inspectors judged that the quality of provision is inadequate to meet the reasonable needs of students who use the college. Two out of four curriculum areas inspected were judged to be satisfactory. The remaining two areas and the leadership and management of the college were judged to be unsatisfactory. The college's key strengths and the areas that should be improved are listed below:

Key strengths

- effective leadership by the new principal in the last year
- effective identification of actions required to bring about improvements
- good learning resources and the new extension to the main building
- high proportion of students progressing to HE and employment.

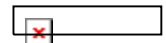
What should be improved

- retention rates on many courses
- quality of some teaching

- governors' overview of the academic performance of the college
- quality assurance and monitoring of the curriculum
- target setting and action plans aimed at raising standards
- co-ordination and management of the curriculum
- computer resources and access to them for some design students
- monitoring of students' attendance
- match of students to levels of study.

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

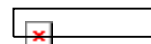


The table below shows overall judgements about provision in subjects and courses that were inspected. Judgements are based primarily on the quality of teaching, training and learning and how well students achieve. Not all subjects and courses were inspected. Inspectors make overall judgements on curriculum 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
Design and craft courses in fashion, interior and three-dimensional studies	Unsatisfactory. Retention rates are low on level 3 courses. Pass rates are low on the national diploma in design crafts and part-time interior design courses. Teachers make good use of their professional experience and teach practical subjects well, but fail to give sufficient emphasis to design principles in lessons. There is an insufficient degree of critical evaluation in assessing students' work. Retention is

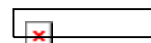
	monitored inadequately.
Vocational courses in graphic design and printing	Satisfactory. There is much good teaching of practical subjects and effective learning. Levels of attainment are generally satisfactory but, in a few lessons, students struggle to achieve appropriate standards. Much practical work is good, often demonstrating effective exploration and high standards of finished design and print. Information technology (IT) provision for design students is inadequate. Retention rates have been below national averages for the last three years.
Pre-degree foundation diploma studies and art and design courses	Satisfactory. Pass rates are high. Some highly effective teaching is reflected in good practical work on foundation diploma courses in graphic design and fine art options. Retention rates on the national diploma course are low. Two courses are poorly managed and the standard of work is low.
Multimedia and lens-based courses	Unsatisfactory. Retention and pass rates over the past three years have been erratic and often very low. Teaching is generally satisfactory and some of it is good. Quality assurance procedures are weak. Course organisation is not fully effective. There are some good specialist resources but students have inadequate access to IT outside lessons. The level of technical achievement in students' work is high.

How well is the college led and managed?



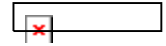
Leadership and management are unsatisfactory. Weaknesses identified during the last inspection have only started to be addressed effectively since the appointment of a new principal in July 2001. The governors' oversight of management, and actions to raise standards, have been unsatisfactory. Attendance and retention rates remain low and aspects of student support are unsatisfactory. Quality assurance procedures are ineffective. The college's accommodation strategy has been implemented effectively and strategic planning is improving. Key weaknesses have now been identified. Staff morale has been raised, communication within the college has been improved, and a programme of change and development is being implemented. The changes have not yet had time to impact on students' achievements. Low retention rates and poor attendance means that the college does not currently provide value for money.

To what extent is the college educationally and socially inclusive?



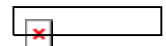
The college's response to educational and social inclusion is good. Significant effort is put into initiatives to draw new students into art and design education. Effective community and school links help the college to attract people who would be unlikely otherwise to participate in FE. Full-time and part-time students who are studying on the same course are integrated effectively. Adult students and students aged 16 to 18 are often taught together, and both age groups gain from the breadth of experience each brings to lessons. Students with dyslexia, sensory impairment or other learning difficulties are supported effectively as integral members of their classes. Students value the creative environment in which they work and the individual support they receive from teaching and support staff.

How well are students and trainees guided and supported?



The majority of students receive a well-planned, informative induction to the college and their course. Nevertheless, some students end up being placed on the wrong level of course. Learning support is very good and the college has a good range of support facilities. However, the management of financial support for students is poor, with some students experiencing long delays in receiving their money, and the monitoring of students who are at risk of leaving their course, and of attendance overall, is unsatisfactory. Students receive good tutorials on an individual basis, where their work and progress are discussed. Career guidance and support are effective, and a high proportion of those who complete their course progress to HE.

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

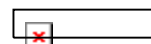
- teachers and technicians who are supportive and accessible
- good learning facilities and resources
- new library and college shop
- excellent atmosphere, the buzz and the creative ethos of the college
- teachers who use their professional contacts to help students.

What they feel could be improved

- access to computers
- access to some studios outside lesson time, including evenings

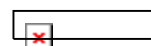
- opening times of student services and the college shop
- organisation and communication in the college
- choice of food in the canteen.

Other information

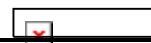


The college has two months to prepare an action plan in response to the report. It must show what action the college will take to bring about improvements in response to issues raised in the report. The governors must agree the plan and send copies of it to the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and the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

Part B: The college as a whole



Summary of grades awarded to teaching and learning by inspectors

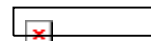


Aspect & learner type	Graded good or better (Grades 1 to 3) %	Graded satisfactory (Grade 4) %	Graded less than satisfactory (Grades 5 to 7) %
Teaching 16-18	63	28	9
19+ and WBL*	41	47	12
Learning 16-18	59	35	6
19+ and WBL*	47	41	12

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. The majority of students study on full-time courses at level 3. Pass rates are above average or high for those who complete their courses. Retention rates, however, are consistently low on many of the level 3 courses, both for students aged 16 to 18 and adult students. They are lower for students aged 16 to 18 than for adult students. In 2001, for example, retention rates were 15% and 10% below the national average respectively. At level 1, pass rates for students aged 16 to 18 have fluctuated significantly, moving from above average in previous years, to low in 2001. Pass rates for adult students at level 1 have improved recently. On level 2 long courses, pass rates are low. Pass rates for students aged 16 to 18 at level 2 fell in 2001 and there were some particularly low pass rates in some key skills qualifications. Retention rates have been up to 10% below the national average in two of the last three years. Retention rates for those aged 19 and over, however, have been high.

2. At present, there are approximately 240 students on national diploma courses in 9 subjects. Retention rates on these courses were consistently low between 1998 and 2001 with the exception of printing, where they were satisfactory. There are indications that retention rates for the current year are lower on four of the courses, compared with 2001, and higher on only two. Many full-time students are also studying for level 1 or 2 art, design craft and technical qualifications in addition to their main studies. Pass rates for these qualifications are generally high.

3. Recently, the college management has begun to monitor students' attendance more closely, with reports being sent to governors. In the current year, three quarters of courses are falling below the target of 80% which the college has set. In media and foundation diploma courses, long-term staff absence and ineffective arrangements to manage it, have disrupted courses and learning. On courses in the media school, students' attendance is above the college target in only 7% of cases. Average attendance during the inspection was 74%. Attendance was highest on vocational courses in graphic design and printing, at 78%.

4. The proportion of students who progress to FE and HE courses is high. Many students are successful in gaining places at their first choice university; many also continue their HE courses at the college. A high proportion of students on the printing courses are successful in gaining employment. There are high standards of technical and practical work in several subject areas. For example, in fashion garment construction, interior design model making, printing and graphic design, students produce well-finished work and have a good understanding of their subject. Multimedia students demonstrate a good knowledge of relevant computer software. Students on print courses often win national awards. The standard of drawing on the national diploma in fine art course and the General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) intermediate art and design course is low. Students do not develop an appropriate approach to visual research of media, technique and image exploration. In fashion illustration, there is little experimentation, although the work is well finished. First-year textile students had successfully produced a long dress coat using printed fabric they had designed themselves.

16-18 year olds

5. In 2001, the average retention rate for the 175 students on national diploma courses was very low, at 57%. There has been little improvement during the last three years. The college management has recently identified strategies to improve retention rates, which they term as 'unsatisfactory', but the impact of these has yet to be seen. On courses in fashion, three-dimensional interior and three-dimensional crafts, media and national general art and design, less than half the students completed their studies. On many courses, however, pass rates are high for those students who complete their studies.

6. Approximately 70 students are taking the foundation diploma studies in art and design course. Pass rates are high, but the retention rate fell to 85% in 2000/01, which is low for a foundation course. On the new Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE) single award courses, pass rates in 2000/01 were high, at 91% and the retention rate, although low, was higher than on some of the national diploma courses. The number of students following the National Vocational

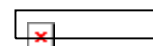
Qualification (NVQ) course in printing is low, but pass rates and retention rates are high. Key skills qualifications were introduced for the first time in 2000/01 at level 1 and 2 in communication, IT and application of number. The pass rate in communication level 2 was 55%, with 56 students achieving the award. In IT at level 2, 28% of students achieved the qualification. There were no achievements in application of number.

Adult learners

7. At the time of the inspection, there were 214 full-time students over the age of 19, accounting for 39% of FE students. Almost all of them are also studying for additional qualifications at levels 1 and 2. At level 1, pass rates have risen substantially, to reach 73% in 2000/01. At level 2, pass rates have declined and are well below the national average. Pass rates at level 3 are high for those who complete their courses. Retention rates have risen slightly over the last two years, but remain 10% below average.

8. Approximately 75 adult students took the national diploma courses in 2000/01. The retention rate, at 69%, was slightly higher than that for students aged 16 to 18. Pass rates are high on the foundation diploma studies in art and design, though the retention rate of 83% is slightly lower than that for students aged 16 to 18. The number of adult students taking General Certificate of Education Advanced levels (GCE A levels) in photography and fine art studies is small. Pass rates have fluctuated. In 2000/01, a very low number of students completed their courses. Pass and retention rates on the pre-degree foundation course in lens-based media are high. Pass and retention rates are high on the three-dimensional access and on some part-time courses, such as photography.

Quality of education and training



9. Teaching, learning and attainment were graded by inspectors in 63 sessions. Teaching was good or better in 57% of lessons, satisfactory in 33% and less than satisfactory in 10%. Grades for learning were similar, with a slightly smaller proportion of lessons graded unsatisfactory. There were, however, considerable differences between the curriculum areas. Teaching was good or better in 50% of design and crafts lessons, 46% of multimedia lessons, 66% of lessons on general art and design courses, and 64% of lessons on graphics and printing courses.

10. The better teaching, across all courses, was well planned and effectively structured. It extended students' skills and abilities and helped them to work independently, to develop their ideas, and to communicate clearly and confidently. In an ambitious, well-managed lesson in life drawing, for example, students were able to exploit different media and styles to explore concepts of time, memory and space. In some weaker lessons, students were not fully involved in their work. The degree to which practical and theoretical work were integrated effectively varied. In graphics and printing it was done well. In design and crafts courses, there was some good practical teaching but the teaching of theory was less successful. In lens-based and multimedia courses some complex technical issues were explained very effectively. In several lessons across different courses, students had a less than satisfactory grasp of the principles of the design process as it applied to their work.

11. Teachers are well qualified in their specialist areas. They have extensive professional experience which is generally up to date. However, 55% of teachers do not have a recognised teaching qualification. The college has identified teacher training as a staff development priority and 20% of staff are currently studying for a teaching qualification. Technicians contribute much to teaching and learning and, except in the case of the IT facilities at the Sutton building, they are effectively deployed. A high level of staff absence on sick leave has adversely affected the continuity of teaching and learning. One course has had three course co-ordinators in one year. Staff allocated to cover absent colleagues have not always been appropriately qualified. The

college is seeking to address the problem by appointing fractional staff to increase the flexibility of cover where staff are absent.

12. The Sutton building was still in use at the time of the inspection. Difficulties associated with it, such as lack of access to most of the building for those with restricted mobility, and poor IT facilities, are close to resolution with the completion of the new building and refurbishment at Tavistock Place. The accommodation in the new building is much better than that at Sutton. There are good multimedia, ceramics, photography, print, sound and edit facilities and professional-level resources for fashion. The building also has a well-equipped and well-managed photography and video equipment store. At the time of the inspection, some difficulties with IT remained. In some lessons, there are not enough computers for the students.

13. Efficiencies are already being gained from rationalising the number of sites. However, the way that timetables are currently structured does not enable the college to make the most efficient use of resources. Some groups use more than one resource area at a time and some classes are too large or too small for the rooms in which they are taught. The college recognises the need for a better match of resources to students' needs and a new central timetable has been introduced.

14. The new library and learning resource centre provides a very good resource for students. It has plenty of private study tables, a spacious quiet reading area, areas for collaborative work and an area in which students can prepare and complete documents for assessment. The centre includes a large air-conditioned open-access IT area, and the key skills and learning skills co-ordinators are located nearby, making them easily accessible. This is a well-designed environment for students to work in effectively on their own. Other improvements coming from the successful accommodation strategy include a student support area which is near the college reception area.

15. Assessment is fair and follows awarding body guidelines. Assessment criteria are often identified on individual learning assignments. Regular, critical discussion means that students are monitored informally as part of their normal work routine. They receive guidance on developing their skills and this helps motivate them. There is good, regular verbal feedback to students on how they might improve their work. The wide use of self-assessment, together with the comments provided by staff, help students to develop their critical awareness. On a number of courses, however, teachers' written guidance on students' work is insufficiently analytical and evaluative.

16. The college assessment policy states that students should be informed of their grades within three working weeks of the submission of work, but this is not always happening in practice. There are no checks on teachers' compliance with the policy. The disruption arising from staff absences has added to the inconsistent quality of the feedback provided to students. Some of the staff who teach on several courses also have high assessment caseloads.

17. The college has devised new improved systems for monitoring students' progress. However, teachers and course managers are not familiar with target setting and the new procedures are not yet giving an accurate overview of students' progress. Employers are given regular feedback on work-based learners, but there are no reports written to parents of students aged 16 to 18 unless they specifically ask for one.

18. Internal verification is not always thorough enough. Although 14 full-time staff have assessor awards, verification is usually carried out by heads of schools. Some verification is undertaken using very small samples of work and some areas have no overall sampling plan. The college has an internal verification policy, which outlines people's responsibilities, but it is not being implemented consistently.

19. FE courses comprise 60% of the college's provision. Students have a good choice of full-time courses at level 3. Opportunities for students to progress from level 3 to HE programmes in the college are good, and students also benefit from working in the same building as HE students. Pre-degree foundation students find places in a wide range of HE provision. There is an access to HE course for adults, a one-year pre-degree foundation art and design programme, and a similar course in lens-based media, an AVCE course and a programme of nine specialist national diploma

pathways.

20. Subject specialisms include fashion and clothing, photography, multimedia studies, fine art, interior design, media production, design crafts, graphics and printing. This range and volume of specialist vocational courses is unusual. However, enrolments on the national diploma programme as a whole have declined over the last three years and retention rates are low on several of the courses. A minority of students who find it difficult to make progress at level 3 would have been better placed on a level 2 course before attempting more specialist studies at level 3. The college has offered a full-time level 2 course only since September 2001, when it started the intermediate GNVQ in art and design. There are no full-time programmes in art and design at level 1. In motor vehicle body work there is a full-time programme at level 1 and part-time programmes at levels 1 and 2. There is a small amount of work-based learning in engineering and printing. About 11% of college enrolments are in the humanities area. The college has carried out a review of its curriculum and is aware that it needs to develop and strengthen provision below level 3 in order to cater effectively for its students.

21. The college is active in the city and the locality, conducting initiatives to attract new learners to art and design education, mostly in collaboration with other organisations. One joint initiative with a local community college and the Family Education Service aims to use art and design activities to develop the basic skills of parents of primary age children. The college provides workshops in three youth and community centres in deprived areas of the city. Tutors from the college contributed to a 'party in the park' programme planned by local agencies, including the youth justice service, to attract young people during the summer holiday period.

22. The college has productive working relationships with local schools and the FE college. A local community college runs a pre-degree foundation art and design course in partnership with the college. School students in Year 10 and Year 11 attend college for two days a week and take a tailor-made course which includes GCSE art and design. There are Saturday workshops and summer schools for young people who are aiming at FE and HE careers in art and design. These initiatives are successful in encouraging young people to stay on in full-time education and training.

23. The college intended to make maximum use of vocational assignment work to develop and accredit key skills, providing additional workshops where necessary. The success of this model has varied very widely. On a lens-based media course, key skills work is so well integrated with other elements of the course that students say they do not regard it as a separate element. On other courses, poor communication and planning means that key skills provision does not suit the needs of students well.

24. The college makes effective use of its links with local industry and employers, particularly in printing and fashion, to arrange work experience and student visits. The college has good exhibitions, invites visiting speakers to talk to the students and arranges visits for students. Many students achieve a basic health and safety qualification and students study for a number of qualifications in addition to the main qualification for which they are aiming. The college is reviewing the appropriateness of its programme of additional qualifications. There is very little else for students in the way of enrichment activities.

25. Initial guidance to applicants is good. Prospectuses are clear, informative and make good use of students' art work. Parents value the enrolment guidance provided at the college's open days and evenings. Students receive a good introduction to the college and to their programme of study, although this was adversely affected by staff absences in some classes during 2001. During their first week, most students are tested in the key skills of communication, use of number and IT. They also take a short basic skills test which focuses on reading, spelling and comprehension. Both sets of tests are conducted efficiently, and well-qualified learning support staff are able to identify students who require further diagnostic testing and/or additional learning support. A high proportion of the students who are diagnosed as needing additional learning support take up the college's offer. The retention rate for students in receipt of learning support and other support services is 14% higher than the college's average retention rate.

26. The learning support team provides effective individual support to an increasing number of

students each year. For example, a laptop computer for an adult student, who had never before had his dyslexia accurately diagnosed, helps him to complete his written work, and his teachers give him extra tuition at the end of sessions. A student with Asperger's syndrome and another with cerebral palsy have individual support workers with them for most of their lessons. Visually impaired students can request learning materials in large text as well as help with proof reading and study skills. Hearing-impaired students are provided with note takers, lip readers and sign language interpreters during formal lectures.

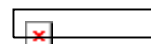
27. The wide range of other support services available to students includes a full-time counsellor, who is in turn assisted by two trainees. Financial help, much appreciated by students, includes childcare support, lodging bursaries, access funds for students from disadvantaged backgrounds and educational maintenance allowances for students from out of the district. However, some students complain of considerable delays in receiving their money which was an area of weakness identified in the last inspection report. The college has recently appointed a welfare officer to take responsibility for this area of work.

28. In the last inspection report, the monitoring of students' attendance was highlighted as a weakness. The college has now introduced a computer-based attendance register but there are continuing weaknesses in the monitoring of attendance. There is no regular forum at which students 'at risk' can be discussed, and no central system for identifying students who are late for lessons or failing to complete assignments.

29. Tutorials for individual students are consistently good. Tutors check students' understanding of their work, for example, by discussing the research base on which projects are built. They also coach students on the work needed to develop their projects. There is a standard form to record what takes place in tutorials, including information on the external pressures that may influence a student's ability to complete tasks on time.

30. Guidance on HE is a particular strength of the college. Students receive careful and considered advice about which HE course would most suit their individual needs. Preparation for HE interviews is thorough and students' rate of success in progressing to establishments of their choice is high. There have been opportunities for teachers to research opportunities for progression at a range of providers, as part of staff development. Students value the professional advice which they receive from visiting artists, designers and photographers. A course in employment skills and career development is being piloted on two courses.

Leadership and management



31. Leadership and management are unsatisfactory. Weaknesses identified during the last inspection have only now started to be addressed effectively. Retention rates for level 3 students are consistently low and improved retention at level 2 in 2001 was accompanied by a significant decline in pass rates. A new principal took up post in July 2001. Since that time, governors and senior managers have carried out a fundamental review of college activities. Key weaknesses have been identified and a major programme of change and development is being implemented. The changes have yet to have an impact on students' achievements. A re-organisation of the college's management was being initiated at the time of the inspection.

32. Some courses are well managed, but in several areas of the college, there are significant weaknesses in the management of the curriculum. In design and crafts, fashion, interior and three-dimensional studies, the organisation of courses is satisfactory for planning activities and timetables but quality assurance is weak. There is little effective use of targets to bring about improvement. In graphic design and printing, operational management at a day-to-day level is good. However, the area lacks overall direction to improve retention and pass rates. In the foundation and art and design area, staff changes and staff absence have had a disruptive effect on learning and little has

been done to try to raise retention rates. Quality assurance procedures and course organisation in multimedia and lens-based media are weak.

33. Governors work well with senior managers and are well supported by the clerk. Since the appointment of the new principal, governors have made it a priority to try to raise staff morale. Communication within the college has improved. Staff are now consulted about developments. They feel valued and are committed to raising standards. The principal and staff have developed an effective dialogue with student representatives and there is good support for the students' union by senior staff. Governors' oversight of management actions to address weaknesses identified during the last inspection, however, has been unsatisfactory. Governors have not been sufficiently well informed about the academic performance of the college. Attendance and retention rates have remained low and there has been little improvement in quality assurance and aspects of student support. Effective, routine procedures for monitoring the academic performance of the college and the impact of strategic planning have not been established.

34. Accommodation has been improved significantly and the new learning resources provided are having a positive impact on staff and students' morale. The accommodation strategy has been well conceived and successfully implemented. A major capital project was completed just prior to the inspection without significant disruption to teaching and learning. Governors' involvement in planning and monitoring the work was effective. Since the appointment of the principal, governors and senior staff have reviewed the mission and strategic aims of the college and the strategic planning process has been strengthened. Strategic aims have been clarified and there is now a clear focus on raising standards. Operational objectives are not always precise enough and, in some cases, there are no short-term targets for helping to achieve the objectives. Although the college provides specialist courses in art and design, it operates in a competitive environment for attracting students and has failed to achieve its funding unit targets for two consecutive years.

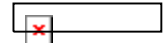
35. The college is making good use of partnerships to widen participation. Students are attracted from across the city and from the surrounding rural areas and beyond. Some 24% of students are from widening participation areas. Students are accepting of each other's needs and are well integrated. At the time of inspection, the college was establishing an equal opportunities working group. Sufficient attention is not given to ensure that students are placed on the course level most appropriate for them.

36. At the time of the inspection, quality assurance procedures were being reviewed and strengthened with the support of a consultant. A clearer framework has now been established. During the last year, external consultants have also been used to carry out lesson observations. The consultant's feedback to teachers and managers has been useful in drawing attention to the fact that internal lesson observations have not been sufficiently self-critical. The staff development programme has been strengthened, but there are no formal mentoring procedures for supporting teachers and disseminating good practice. The new management structure of the college includes a head of learning and professional development. Line managers observe teachers as part of the college's appraisal procedures, but procedures were in the process of being revised during the last year and not all teachers had been appraised.

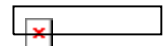
37. Programme reviews are carried out annually as part of the college's self-assessment process. The college recognises these reviews are not sufficiently analytical and self-critical. It also recognises that target setting is weak and that action planning lacks precision and is failing to bring about improvement. The update to the 2000/01 self-assessment report is evaluative and self-critical and it identifies the major weaknesses that need to be addressed. Since her appointment, the principal has made effective use of consultants to analyse teaching and learning, review and improve quality assurance and management information, to carry out surveys of students' perceptions and to provide benchmarks for the financial management of the college. At present, self-assessment action plans are not sufficiently integrated with the college's operational plan and not all staff are aware of the key action points for raising standards. The reliability of centrally held management information has been improved and electronic systems for recording attendance have been established along with new procedures for monitoring attendance and following up absenteeism.

38. Resources are deployed satisfactorily. Teachers' workloads are monitored effectively. The college plans to move from an average class size of 14 to an average of 18. With the completion of the capital building programme, space utilisation will be at the sector norm. At the moment, the college does not provide satisfactory value for money because of its low attendance and retention rates.

Part C: Curriculum and occupational areas



Design and craft courses in fashion, interior and three-dimensional studies



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

Strengths

- high standards of work in fashion and interior design
- good teaching in practical lessons
- highly effective use of teachers' professional experience
- effective specialist support for individual students.

Weaknesses

- low retention rates on national diplomas in interior design and fashion
- low pass rates on national diploma design crafts
- insufficient emphasis on design principles in lessons

- lack of critical evaluation of students' work
- inadequate monitoring of retention rates.

Scope of provision

39. There are full-time national diploma courses in design crafts, interior design and fashion. The college also offers an access to HE course in three-dimensional art and design. Courses in interior design and practical crafts, such as glass blowing and ceramics, are available for study on a part-time basis. There are currently 78 full-time students. The majority of part-time students are adults. There are no full-time programmes at levels 1 or 2.

Achievement and standards

40. Retention rates are low overall. Over the last three years, retention rates on national diploma courses are at, or significantly below, the national average. For example, in 2001, retention rates on interior design and fashion were 56% and 57% respectively, compared with the national average of 74%. Pass rates are low on the national diploma course in crafts. Last year only 6 of the 12 students who completed the course achieved their qualification. Pass rates were also significantly below the national average in previous years. Pass and retention rates on the access course are generally average.

41. Students on fashion and interior design courses achieve high standards in their practical work, reaching professional levels of competence in technical aspects. Fashion students, for example, are able to make accurate patterns showing complex adaptations, and to work on difficult fabrics achieving high standards of manufacture. Interior design students were working on a project to design and make a model for an exhibition space. Their finished models had visual impact and were well presented.

A sample of retention and pass rates in design and craft courses in fashion, interior and three-dimensional studies 1999 to 2001

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
City and Guilds creative studies interior decorative techniques	3	No. of starts	26	22	11
		% retention	77	73	85
		% pass rate	24	56	55
National diploma design - interior design	3	No. of starts	22	20	32
		% retention	41	50	56
		% pass rate	100	80	88
National diploma design - crafts	3	No. of starts	14	11	16
		% retention	33	70	75
		% pass rate	67	67	50
National diploma design - fashion	3	No. of starts	29	20	14
		% retention	72	55	57

		% pass rate	100	100	100
Access to HE in three-dimensional art and design	3	No. of starts	*	17	15
		% retention	*	88	93
		% pass rate	*	93	79

* course not running

Source: ISR (1999 and 2000), college (2001)

Quality of education and training

42. There is good teaching in practical lessons. Teachers keep comprehensive records of their students' progress and development. They give appropriate advice and good specific guidance. For example, in one lesson where students were working on garments for their final collection, the teacher had recorded each student's progress in detail and was giving practical advice to help individual students understand the complex manufacturing processes involved and the difficult pattern cutting techniques.

43. The teaching of theory is less than effective. In many lessons, teachers attempted to provide detailed information about a technical aspect of the work, or a description of particular artists' work, by reading aloud from notes or lengthy handouts. They failed to make key points clear or to structure lessons to take account of all students' learning needs. For example, when students working in pairs, were questioned by the teacher about their work, the rest of the group was not encouraged to take part in the process or to offer any comment. Many of the students, therefore, lost concentration and interest. In many practical lessons, teachers do not emphasise design principles sufficiently and students do not receive enough guidance on applying formal elements of basic design. Students are not able to link theory and practice effectively.

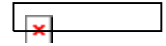
44. There is a good range of resources for practical work, and workshops and studios are well organised. Fashion students work on sewing machines that meet industrial standards. Teachers use their professional practice and industrial contacts effectively to help students gain valuable insight into the design industry. Interior design students benefit from their teachers' contacts in respect of employment opportunities and visits from external speakers. Fashion students' experience is enhanced by appropriate residential visits.

45. Students appreciate the informal verbal feedback they receive on their work, but teachers' written feedback is not sufficiently evaluative. Students' efforts are valued and commented on and there is not enough analysis of the creative aspects of students' work. Students on the national diploma in design crafts and the access course receive regular tutorials at which their individual progress is monitored and recorded, however, this is not the case for all courses.

Leadership and management

46. The organisation of each course is satisfactory on a daily basis, where activities and timetables are planned in discussion between members of staff. There is not enough detailed attention to issues within team meetings, however, and actions to effect improvements are not being identified. Levels of retention and achievement are not monitored closely enough. Target setting is weak. Quality assurance of the assessment process is ineffective. Staff are not sharing good practice in assessment and some written feedback to students is poor. Internal verification is not thorough. In many cases, records are incomplete. The self-assessment report is evaluative. Strengths and weaknesses are clearly identified but the impact of weaknesses on retention and achievement are insufficiently emphasised. Development plans contain intended outcomes but these are expressed too broadly. Most decisions are taken at management level. It is unclear what role teachers are expected to play in drawing up actions to bring about improvements.

Vocational courses in graphic design and printing



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

Strengths

- good schemes of work and lesson planning
- good teaching of graphic design and printing techniques
- high standard of practical work
- productive links with employers
- high proportion of students progressing to HE and employment
- high pass rates.

Weaknesses

- insufficiently demanding work for students in some lessons
- failure of some students to achieve appropriate standards
- lack of effective monitoring of students' performance
- low retention rates
- poor access to computers for graphic design students.

Scope of provision

47. The national diploma courses in graphic design and in printing are well established and there are productive links with HE and employers. There is also a NVQ in machine printing and short specialist printing and design courses. Provision at levels 1 and 2 is restricted and some students are being accepted onto national diploma courses when a foundation or intermediate level course would be more appropriate.

Achievement and standards

48. Pass rates for students who complete their courses are high. Last year, for example, all students completing the national diploma course in printing were successful and pass rates for students completing the graphic design course were high, at 98%. In 2001, however, only 71% of students on the NVQ in machine printing successfully completed their course. Retention is low. Retention rates have been below national averages for the last three years. For example, in 2001, only 69% of students completed the national diploma courses in graphic design and printing. Students on work-based learning in printing are achieving their certification, NVQ at level 2.

49. Students' practical work is generally good. It builds on an appropriate level and range of specialist knowledge, and basic design and printing skills. Graphic design portfolios provide evidence of good research and investigative skills, and practical skills in the development of ideas and finished designs. Students have a sound understanding of commercial practice and the needs of employers. This is particularly evident in the case of printing students, most of whom undertake work placements with printing companies. Several students on the national diploma in printing have been successful in national competitions. In 2001, for example, a mature student who returned to the classroom on the NVQ course, won the 'Student of the Year' award from the Print Week magazine and another student was 'highly commended'. Graphic design students carry out a number of commercial projects with local companies.

A sample of retention and pass rates on vocational courses in graphic design and printing, 1999 to 2001

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
National certificate calligraphy (short course)	1	No. of starts	16	17	15
		% retention	75	76	100
		% pass rate	67	100	100
NVQ machine printing	2/3	No. of starts	*	16	17
		% retention	*	88	100
		% pass rate	*	100	71
National diploma graphic design	3	No. of starts	45	74	58
		% retention	64	68	69
		% pass rate	100	98	98
National diploma printing	3	No. of starts	29	17	26
		% retention	69	82	69
		% pass rate	100	100	100

* course not running

Source: ISR (1999 and 2000), college (2001)

Quality of education and training

50. Teaching is generally good or satisfactory. Teachers are well prepared and set students a good range of activities. Most project briefs are well designed, containing aims and objectives, assessment criteria and deadlines for completion. In a few cases, learning outcomes are not clear and some students are not certain what is required of them. Theory is linked effectively to practical work. For example, in lessons on the national diploma course in printing, specialist terminology and technical processes are well related to the demands of different methods of print production. Pre-press activities in research, design development, typography and page layout are taught effectively. Key skills work is evident in some aspects of students' work and efforts are being made to make the development of key skills an integral part of project work. In a good lesson on the national diploma in graphic design course, in which students were being introduced to a new project on logo design, the teachers gave students clear guidance on how to progress through the different stages of exploration, developing ideas for the design. Despite teachers' careful preparation, however, some lessons were not successful. Students had difficulty in undertaking the tasks set and in discussing and explaining what they were doing. Several students struggled to understand and apply basic visual concepts and their design vocabulary was weak.

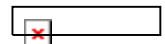
51. Assessment and monitoring of students' progress are satisfactory. Assessment criteria are shared with the students. Work-based learners in the printing industry are assessed appropriately but not enough use is made of individual learning plans. Teachers are well qualified and have up-to-date knowledge of professional developments. Students are positive about the specialist help they receive, including the effective induction to courses.

52. Resources are generally good. Since the last inspection, there has been investment in the refurbishment of classrooms and workshops used for printing courses. Both printing and graphic design students have access to an appropriate range of general and specialist equipment, workshops and studios. Although computer facilities for print students have improved since the last inspection, however, the facilities for students on the graphic design courses, based at the Sutton site, are very poor. There are only five computers for over 80 students within the Sutton building.

Leadership and management

53. Courses in graphic design and printing are well managed. Day-to-day operational systems are good. Communication within the school and with other areas of the college is improving. There remains no overview of the provision, however, and the monitoring of students' performance is inadequate. Teachers and support staff have not been appraised. Teachers and managers are not familiar with the process of target setting. Information on students' performance is available but it is not being analysed effectively to try to improve performance.

Pre-degree foundation diploma studies and art and design courses



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

Strengths

- high pass rates on level 3 courses

- good franchised foundation course
- effective teaching in foundation fine art and graphics
- good school link course
- high proportion of students progressing from the foundation course to HE.

Weaknesses

- very low retention rates on the diploma in fine art course and its precursor
- low standards of work on the diploma in fine art and GNVQ intermediate courses
- disruption to students' learning stemming from the absence of staff
- poor management of diploma in fine art and GNVQ intermediate courses.

Scope of provision

54. The general art and design courses include the pre-degree foundation course in art and design and AVCE in art and design. The college also franchises a small full-time and part-time pre-degree foundation course to the neighbouring Estover community college. A new national diploma course in fine art has replaced the previous diploma in general art and design. The GNVQ intermediate course in art and design was introduced in 2001. A school link course, the first certificate in art and design course, prepares students for GCSE examinations in graphic design and photography. It also provides an opportunity for students at school to develop their art and design skills in a specialist college environment.

Achievement and standards

55. Pass rates on the national diploma courses and the AVCE course are all above the national average. School link students' pass rates at GCSE are in line with the national average. The Estover franchise foundation course has achieved a 100% pass and retention rate in the three years it has been running. In 2001, the retention rate on the national diploma in general art and design course was very low. At 50%, it was 24% below the national average. The diploma in fine art course, which has replaced this course, also has a low retention rate in the second year. The

retention rate on the full-time foundation course has been declining over the last three years. This year, 29 students out of 122 on the current course have left. A high proportion of foundation course students go on to HE.

56. Graphic design students on the foundation course are producing work of a high standard. Much of the work is innovative, containing a rich combination of hand rendered images, computer-generated imagery and typography. In the fine art option of the course, the work is informed by sophisticated contemporary ideas. Students on the Estover foundation course produce good work. Although the work is mainly within a fine art tradition, they are beginning to develop a personal visual language. One mature student had built a range of exotic and surrealist hats using a range of different materials including, wire, silk and paper. Students on the AVCE course are achieving appropriate standards, but they do not have enough opportunity to develop their observational drawing. Students' work on the national fine art and GNVQ intermediate courses is poor. Observational drawing is weak and too many drawings are left in an unfinished state. The students are not developing a thorough process of researching media, technique and image to explore and develop their ideas.

A sample of retention and pass rates on pre-degree foundation studies and art and design, 1999 to 2001

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
National certificate art and design subjects	2	No. of starts	*	274	283
		% retention	*	91	88
		% pass rate	*	98	88
Pre-degree foundation diploma studies in art and design (part time)	3	No. of starts	19	7	11
		% retention	61	71	73
		% pass rate	91	100	100
National diploma in general art and design	3	No. of starts	46	41	52
		% retention	63	76	50
		% pass rate	97	94	100
AVCE art and design	3	No. of starts	*	*	42
		% retention	*	*	68
		% pass rate	*	*	93
Pre-degree foundation diploma studies in art and design (1 year)	3	No. of starts	78	87	101
		% retention	92	88	84
		% pass rate	86	99	99

Source: ISR (1999 and 2000), college (2001)

* course not running

Quality of education and training

57. Most lessons are well planned and well structured, drawing on detailed schemes of work. The teaching on the foundation course options in graphic design and fine art is good. The work is demanding and teachers have high expectations of students. In one life class, two models and a video were arranged in an elaborate way to present students with issues of time, memory and space. The students used a range of media and styles to explore these concepts in very personal drawings. In the best classes, teachers monitor students' attendance and punctuality carefully. It is

accepted practice that students telephone if they are going to be late or absent for any reason. Some weaker lessons lack a clear focus. Work proceeds at too slow a pace and students are not fully involved in activities.

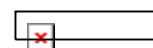
58. In most cases, assessments are appropriate and take place regularly. Students receive thorough verbal feedback on the progress they are making and the standards they are reaching. The written feedback on work produced by national diploma in fine art and AVCE students is helpful but there is not enough critical and analytical judgement to establish standards clearly. Students are well supported by their course tutors, many of whom make themselves available for advice outside timetabled time. The quality of formal group and individual tutorials varies. Staff records of tutorials and action plans sometimes give the appearance of having been written in a rush. They are difficult to read and are not detailed enough to guide students effectively in improving their work.

59. Teaching on the school link and the AVCE courses is disciplined and thorough. Staff keep detailed records of individual students' progress, attendance and punctuality. Staff on the school link course maintain excellent communication with each student's school. They make contact with schools daily and provide detailed records of students' progress on a regular basis. The link course helps students to make a smooth transition from school to college. The foundation course at Estover community college is taught well. Facilities are good, with each student enjoying a large dedicated work space. Most full-time staff are well qualified. There are some good facilities for students in photography, and the new library is an excellent resource. While the general accommodation at Sutton is adequate, the lack of computing facilities has restricted students' ability to explore digital imagery. The work space for foundation textiles and three-dimensional studies students is cramped. These courses will be moved to the new building for next September.

Leadership and management

60. The head of school and course co-ordinators meet regularly and provide good support to staff. There have been many staff changes, and a substantial number of long-term absences, which have adversely affected the smooth management of courses and caused some disruption to the first term of the foundation course. The organisation and timetabling of the national diploma in fine art and GNVQ intermediate courses are such that the course lacks a clear identity, and this has affected students' progress. The national diploma in fine art course has had three course co-ordinators since September 2000 and students only attend for two and a half days a week. On the intermediate course, lessons are spread across the week and many of the sessions are taught by different staff. Course teams review their work on an annual basis. The reviews are carefully produced, but there is little indication of effective measures to improve retention. There are good records of students' progression.

Multimedia and lens-based courses



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

Strengths

- good resources in photography and sound

- high standards of technical achievement in students' work

- high retention and pass rates in lens-based media.

Weaknesses

- low and declining retention rates on national diploma courses
- low pass rates
- weak quality assurance
- inadequate access to IT resources for specialist work.

Scope of provision

61. There are full-time courses leading to national diplomas in photography, communications and media production. A national diploma in multimedia, introduced in 2000, has superseded the diploma in design communications. Most students are aged 16 to 18. A one-year course in lens-based media is offered as a specialist preparation for HE. Many full-time students study for additional qualifications to complement their main area of study. These qualifications include GCE Advanced Subsidiary (GCE AS) photography and GCE A level and a number of certificate courses, including sound recording, video production, photography and telematics courses.

Achievement and standards

62. Some pass rates are at or above the national average, but a significant number are well below. On the national diploma in photography, the pass rate was above the national average in 2001, but below in 2000 and 1999. The pass rate on the national diploma in media has varied between 29% and 100% over the last three years. A substantial number of students leave their course before it finishes. Where pass rates are high, the retention rate is often very low. On the diploma in media and on the communication course, retention rates have been consistently low. Interim retention rates for 2001/02 indicate that there is no improvement on most courses. On the lens-based media course, where the majority of students are aged 19 and over, pass and retention rates are generally high.

63. Levels of attainment in lessons are mainly satisfactory or better. Multimedia students show a good command of relevant computer software. A student from a photography course was a recent winner in the Royal Institute of British Architects photographic competition.

A sample of retention and pass rates in multimedia and lens-based courses, 1999 to 2001

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
National certificate	2	No. of starts	30*	33*	37**

sound recording		% retention	73	79	95
		% pass rate	23	0	6
National diploma in photography	3	No. of starts	20	23	16
		% retention	60	57	75
		% pass rate	67	62	92
National diploma in communications	3	No. of starts	13	27	17
		% retention	38	54	63
		% pass rate	100	100	78
National certificate lens-based media	3	No. of starts	23	31	32
		% retention	96	80	90
		% pass rate	91	92	93
National diploma in media	3	No. of starts	18	20	18
		% retention	28	35	47
		% pass rate	60	29	100
GCE A-level photography	3	No. of starts	15	10	10
		% retention	47	40	70
		% pass rate	83	100	57

Source: ISR (1999 and 2000), college (2001)

* 1 year course ** short course

Quality of education and training

64. Teaching is mainly satisfactory and there is some good teaching. In lens-based media, a complex lesson on editing and production techniques was taught to students using a number of small edit suites. The assignment was to develop an animated television sequence. The students were able to work well independently and to develop their ideas as a group member. The lesson was well planned and skilfully managed so that students worked efficiently. Part-time staff are used effectively. They offer valuable professional expertise, particularly a working knowledge of current software applications. Some teaching was unsatisfactory. Teachers failed to extend students and they sometimes learned little. In some lessons, there was not enough attempt to apply information gathering and technical aspects of the work to the project students were tackling. In some lessons, the pace of work was too slow to complete the tasks which had been planned. In many lessons, complex technical issues were explained well and students showed that they understood them. However, not enough emphasis is given to the concepts and ideas which underpin practical work.

65. Resources are generally good. Students on FE courses benefit from sharing facilities with students taking the higher level courses offered at the college. There are good studio and darkroom facilities for photography and a newly equipped multimedia suite. The sound studio and edit suites in the new building are good. Demand for computers and IT support is high And students are sometimes frustrated by the shortage of workstations on which to undertake independent study outside lessons. The college's plans for its new building include an additional two IT suites. Examples of good work are used well in explaining complex processes and ideas and enriching students' learning. One exhibition space featured the work of an invited photographer, showing work documenting experiences of third world relief projects.

66. Work is marked carefully and students received constructive and evaluative feedback. In some instances, students are referred to additional reference material. In multimedia, teachers provide concise comments and give students useful practical guidance on how they might improve their

work. In many cases, however, feedback on the outcomes of assessment was received too late to inform the next assignment, and in some cases, teachers failed to meet the targets set by the college. There are rigorous procedures for assessment and verification at the end of the course, but not for the interim grading decisions arrived at during the course.

67. Students recognise and value the professional knowledge of staff. Induction to technical procedures and equipment is comprehensive. Teachers are sensitive to individual needs in giving advice on progression and careers. Students feel they are well briefed. Many of the students progress to other courses in FE or to HE.

Leadership and management

68. Course organisation is not fully effective. Quality assurance procedures have not proved successful in addressing low retention rates and some low pass rates over a long period. Action plans arising from course reviews are not sufficiently focused and many staff are not familiar with the outcomes of course reviews. College targets for student attendance have led to more effective monitoring of attendance. Arrangements for covering staff away on sick leave, however, failed to prevent significant interruptions to the teaching schedule over the last year.

Part D: College data

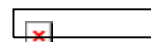
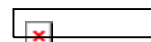


Table 1: Enrolments by level of study and age 2000/01

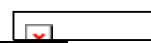


Level	16-18 %	19+ %
1	12	26
2	40	22
3	23	21
4/5	0	6
Other	24	24
Total	100	100

Source: Provided by the college in spring 2002

Note: The percentages have been rounded up and hence do not add up to 100%

Table 2: Enrolments by curriculum area and age 2000/01



Curriculum area	16-18 No.	19+ No.	Total enrolments %

Science	121	20	5
Agriculture	0	0	0
Construction	19	15	1
Engineering	39	46	3
Business	13	35	2
Hotel and catering	0	0	0
Health and community care	141	248	14
Art and design	864	729	59
Humanities	245	56	11
Basic education	90	33	5
Total	1,532	1,182	100

Source: Provided by the college in spring 2002

Table 3: Retention and achievement

Level (Long courses)	Retention and pass rate	Completion year					
		16-18			19+		
		1997/98	1998/99	1999/00	1997/98	1998/99	1999/00
1	Starters excluding transfers	27	64	65	81	153	109
	Retention rate (%)	89	73	72	85	79	75
	National average (%)	86	88	88	82	83	84
	Pass rate (%)	58	66	79	58	60	52
	National average (%)	73	66	69	69	69	65
2	Starters excluding transfers	70	137	94	86	92	58
	Retention rate (%)	83	77	74	85	95	88
	National average (%)	85	85	84	77	79	82
	Pass rate (%)	70	76	63	86	79	53
	National average (%)	82	79	77	82	78	75
3	Starters excluding transfers	234	203	215	167	168	125
	Retention rate (%)	66	66	67	65	58	66
	National average (%)	80	81	83	79	81	83
	Pass rate (%)	86	94	89	91	87	90
	National average (%)	85	86	81	77	73	67
4/5	Starters excluding	2	2	1	64	56	77

	transfers						
	Retention rate (%)	*	*	*	84	93	86
	National average (%)	*	*	*	76	81	81
	Pass rate (%)	*	*	*	69	73	82
	National average (%)	*	*	*	81	77	80

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).

** numbers too low to provide a valid calculation*

Sources of information:

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

2. College rates for 1997/98 - 1998/99: *Benchmarking Data 1999/98 to 1999/2000: Retention and Achievement Rates, produced by the Further Education Funding Council, September 2000.*

3. College rates for 1999/00: *provided by the college in spring 2001.*

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)	61	31	8	52
Level 2 (intermediate)	43	43	14	7
Level 1 (foundation)	33	34	33	3
Other sessions	0	100	0	1
Totals	57	33	10	63

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