

Exeter College

Inspection report

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Background information

Inspection judgements

Grading

Inspectors use a four-point scale to summarise their judgements about achievement and standards, the quality of provision, and leadership and management, which includes a grade for equality of opportunity.

The descriptors for the four grades are:

- *grade 1 – outstanding*
- *grade 2 – good*
- *grade 3 – satisfactory*
- *grade 4 – inadequate*

Further information can be found on how inspection judgements are made at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Scope of the inspection

In deciding the scope of this inspection, inspectors took account of: the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans; comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) or other funding body; and where appropriate the previous inspection report (www.ofsted.gov.uk); reports from the inspectorate annual assessment visits or quality monitoring inspection; and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the last inspection. This inspection focused on the following aspects:

- overall effectiveness of the organisation and its capacity to improve further
- achievement and standards
- quality of provision
- leadership and management.

Description of the provider

1. Exeter College was established in 1970 as the first tertiary college in England. The college was designed to provide all post-16 education and training provision for the city, bringing together the sixth forms from the former grammar schools and the Exeter Technical College. Each of the secondary schools outside the city boundary has a sixth form, providing young people and their parents with a choice of post-16 opportunities. The college has two major campuses in the city centre, at Hele Road and Queen Street, and two specialist training centres on the outskirts of the city.
2. In the past two years, full-time numbers for learners aged 16-18 have risen rapidly, increasing by almost 500 since 2005. In 2007/08, the college

enrolled 4,000 full-time learners and expects to enrol around 7,000 part-time learners. The college is a major provider of work-based learning and Train to Gain with around 1,700 learners in 2006/07. It also provides vocational courses for more than 500 learners aged 14-16, mainly drawn from the city's secondary schools. Higher education is also growing at the college, with 500 learners, mainly on foundation degrees, studying in 2007/08.

3. Exeter College offers a wide curriculum, from entry level to level 4 in all sector subject areas except land-based industries. The vast majority of learners aged 16-18 follow level 3 programmes. In recent years, the college has expanded its provision for learners aged 16-18 at entry level and levels 1 and 2. The number of learners aged 19 and over has dropped significantly during the past two years. In 2006/07 the college achieved Investors in People status and achieved the Positive about Disabled Standard.
4. The City of Exeter has a population of about 119,000 and is growing rapidly with significant new investment from major employers. Unemployment levels are low, at 2% in 2007. The staying on rate for learners aged over 16 was very low at 59% in 2004 but has risen to 73% in 2007/08. The percentage of pupils gaining at least five GCSE passes at A* to C, including mathematics and English, is below the national average across the city's five secondary schools.

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Good: Grade 2
Capacity to improve	Good: Grade 2
Achievement and standards	Good: Grade 2
Quality of provision	Good: Grade 2
Leadership and management	Good: Grade 2
<i>Equality of opportunity</i>	<i>Good: contributory grade 2</i>

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Good: Grade 2

5. The effectiveness of provision is good. Achievement and standards are good overall. The vast majority of learners study at level 3 and long course success rates at level 3 have been consistently above the national rate for several years. Success rates for adults on courses at level 1 have improved but remain below the national rate. For adults on level 2 courses they declined significantly in 2006/07, largely due to one poorly performing information technology (IT) course. The college has put in place effective measures to improve this provision. Success rates are good on adult and community learning and Train to Gain programmes and are satisfactory for work-based learning provision.
6. Teaching and learning are good. Learners are motivated, attentive, and participate well in lessons which enable them to make good progress and achieve well. The use of information and learning technology (ILT) in some lessons is good. Specialist facilities are particularly good in health and care, construction, motor vehicle engineering, engineering and art and design. Assessment practice is good. In some lessons, poor planning, a lack of challenge in tasks that learners are set or unclear lesson outcomes inhibit learners' progress.
7. The college's response to meeting the needs and interest of learners and to educational and social inclusion is good. The curriculum is broad and increasingly inclusive. Good progress is being made in developing successful links with employers. Most learners benefit from a good range of activities, in addition to their formal curriculum, that contribute to their knowledge, enjoyment or well-being. Partnership work with local schools to develop a coherent city-wide curriculum with clear progression routes has made slow progress.
8. Guidance and support are good. Arrangements for ensuring that full-time learners are on the right course are very good and for part-time learners they are improving. Learners benefit from good tutorial support. Group tutorials are used well to inform learners about a wide range of issues outside the formal curriculum. Learners in need of additional help with their studies are well provided for and an impressive range of support services is available to all learners.
9. Leadership and management are good. Over the last few years the senior leadership team has successfully overseen an extensive property development project, enrolled more young learners, expanded provision and improved success rates for most learners. Systems to assure the quality of provision have improved and are now good, supported by readily available and reliable data. The lesson observation system provides the college with a broadly accurate assessment of the quality of teaching. Links with employers and community organisations are productive. Equality of opportunity is

good. The college complies with race and disability legislation and meets its responsibilities to protect children and vulnerable adults. Governors are supportive, financial management is good and the college provides good value for money.

Capacity to improve

Good: Grade 2

10. The college's capacity to improve is good. Quality assurance is good. Self-assessment is broadly accurate and development plans set a clear agenda for improvement. The ambitious strategic aim to become an outstanding institution is underpinned by good leadership and management.

The effectiveness of the steps taken by the college to promote improvement since the last inspection

11. The college has made good progress in addressing weaknesses identified at the last inspection. For example, construction provision and accommodation have improved significantly. Success rates for work-based learning and key skills have risen, although these remain areas for further development.

Key strengths

- high success rates on level 3 advanced courses for learners aged 16-18
- good teaching and learning particularly on foundation courses
- broad range of provision with good progression routes
- very good pastoral and welfare support for learners
- good use of trained volunteers to support learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities on adult and community learning programmes
- successful management of the complex property project providing learners with high quality learning environments.

Areas for improvement

The college should address:

- success rates for learners aged 19 and over
- target setting for learners to raise both aspirations and achievement
- strategic development of the curriculum with schools.

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Good: Grade 2

Contributory grades:

Adult and community learning

Good: grade 2

Work based learning

Satisfactory: grade 3

Train to Gain

Good: grade 2

Learners aged 14 to 16

Good: grade 2

12. Achievement and standards are good overall. This agrees with the judgement in the college's self-assessment report. In 2006/07 approximately 70% of full-time equivalent (FTE) learners were aged 16-18 and the vast majority studied at level 3. The overall success rates for long level 3 courses are high and have been consistently above the national rate for the last three years. The success rate for general certificate of education (GCE) AS level has been above, or around, the national rate for the last three years and learners make good progress when measured against their starting points. Success rates for long courses at levels 2 and 3 have significantly improved over the last three years and are now around the national rate. Key skills success rates have also improved to around the sector average.
13. Long course success rates for learners aged over 19 are low at levels 1 and 2. At level 1 the rate has improved over the three year period but remains below the national rate. At level 2, the success rate declined significantly in 2006/07 due to poor achievement on one information technology course with an outside contractor. The college has terminated this contract and put in place a detailed and effective improvement plan. Data for the current year show that 91% of learners are still in learning. At level 3, for adults, the success rate has steadily increased each year and is around the national rate.
14. There are approximately 500 young people aged 14-16 studying at the college. The success rates for this group have varied but remain good. Success rates for adult and community learning and Train to Gain programmes are high and in work-based learning are satisfactory.
15. The standard of learners' work is generally good. Learners make good use of IT skills and work is well presented, particularly on level 1 courses. Learners on work-based learning and Train to Gain programmes develop a wide range of skills which effectively contribute to their future economic well-being and work performance. Progress onto other courses or employment is good. The attendance of learners is good.

Quality of provision

Good: Grade 2

16. The quality of provision is good. Teaching and learning are good and particularly so on foundation programmes. In the better lessons, teachers are enthusiastic, knowledgeable and well prepared. As a result, learners are motivated, attentive and participate well in lessons which enable them to make good progress and achieve well. In some lessons, poor planning, a lack of challenge in tasks that learners are set or unclear lesson outcomes inhibit learners' progress. Inspectors noted that the college's lesson observation records focus on the quality of teaching rather than on what learners achieve or the progress they make in lessons.
17. The use of ILT in some lessons is good. Specialist facilities are particularly good in health and care, construction, motor vehicle engineering, engineering and art and design. There are some good resources to support learners on the college's Train to Gain programmes.
18. A team of 12 advanced practitioners motivate staff to focus on improving teaching and learning. As well as providing individual support, they also deliver well attended staff development activities in areas such as theory teaching and active learning. There is effective mentoring support for new teachers and those who have assumed new teaching responsibilities.
19. Good arrangements are in place for the initial assessment of learners' literacy and numeracy needs, especially for full-time learners. Effective and appropriate in class support is provided, but the planning of activities by teachers to support individual learners' needs in lessons is not consistently well developed. The college makes good use of trained volunteers to support adult learners with difficulties and/or disabilities on adult and community courses.
20. Assessment practice is good and is a particular strength on Train to Gain programmes. In a few subjects, work marked by teachers lacks precise comments to enable learners to improve their work. Learners' progress is well managed on work-based learning programmes and is carefully checked by assessors. As noted in the college's self-assessment report, arrangements for internal verification are effective, notably on national vocational qualification (NVQ) programmes.
21. The college provides a good range of programmes to meet the needs and interest of learners. The curriculum has broadened and there is now a wide range of courses from entry level upwards offering good progression routes in most sector subject areas. The college's approach to educational and social inclusion is good. Efforts to attract more learners, including adults, from groups who are under-represented in further education are increasingly successful. The college works well with other community partners to achieve this. The comprehensive curriculum includes a very broad foundation programme and a good mix of academic and vocational programmes at levels 2 and 3, including an increasingly popular International Baccalaureate

- programme. However, progress in developing a coherent city-wide curriculum in partnership with local schools has been slow.
22. Engagement with employers has much improved in both scope and scale. The profile of the college with employers has recently been raised with the acquisition of significant training contracts with major companies. The full benefit of the improvement in employer links is yet to be felt by many learners on courses at the college.
23. Learners benefit from a good variety of enrichment programmes accessible through their courses, in tutorials and in a cross-college programme. Very good use is made of visiting speakers and many learners enjoy participating in sporting and cultural activities.
24. Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that guidance and support for learners are good. Full-time learners value highly the very good advice and guidance they receive prior to starting at the college. Arrangements to provide appropriate advice and guidance to part-time adult learners have been reviewed and are improving. Learners on full-time courses benefit from good support from personal tutors. Group tutorials are very good and have a strong focus on the Every Child Matters themes and on the promotion of equality and diversity. Tutors are thorough in monitoring learners' progress and attendance but many do not set sufficiently challenging targets for their learners.
25. Learners have good access to welfare, counselling, health and other support services. Learners identified as needing additional learning support benefit from high quality support and college data show that learners in receipt of such support achieve better than other learners.

Leadership and management

Good: Grade 2

Contributory grade:

Equality of opportunity

Good: grade 2

26. Leadership and management are good. The ambitious aim, to become an outstanding institution by 2010, is understood by staff and supported by governors. Staff are aware of the college's strategic priorities. Governors and college staff are clear about the need to become ever more flexible to respond to a wide range of changing local and national requirements. However, there is a lack of clarity about the extent to which the drive towards excellence, as outlined in the college's mission, will involve working collaboratively with local schools.
27. Whilst successfully managing a complex property project over the last few years, the senior leadership team has led the college well. The number of learners aged 16-18 has increased, provision at levels 1 and 2 has expanded and success rates on courses at all levels have further improved for learners aged 16-18. New accommodation is of a high quality, with particularly well equipped learning resource centres.

28. Systems to monitor the quality of provision are good. However, until recently, quality improvement arrangements were insufficiently refined to detect under-performing courses early enough to make a difference. This contributed to a significant decline in success rates for adult learners at level 2. Managers have since taken action to improve this provision and in-year retention on level 2 programmes is much improved.
29. The well designed management information system provides teachers and managers with the information they need to do their job. Accurate data underpin the self-assessment process and evaluative course reviews feed in, through faculty self-assessment reports, to the overall college self-assessment report. Inspectors broadly agree with the judgements in the self-assessment report although some are overly generous.
30. A small group of advanced practitioners plays a pivotal role in improving the quality of teaching and learning. Inspectors agree with the college's own assessment that teaching and learning are good. Effective appraisals and good continuing professional development activities are well targeted to link to college objectives. The college is on track to ensure that all teachers have appropriate qualifications in line with recent workforce reforms.
31. Equality of opportunity is good. An enthusiastic equality and diversity group has helped to raise the profile of the college's race, gender and disability schemes and associated action plans and this has begun to impact on curriculum practice. The college meets statutory requirements in relation to the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2002 and Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. Appropriate procedures are in place for the protection of children and vulnerable adults and college staff and governors have had relevant training on the legislation and their responsibilities.
32. Governance is satisfactory. Governors are supportive of the college and, in many cases, provide a valuable commercial perspective. Financial management is good and the college provides good value for money.
33. Relationships with partner organisations are generally good. College staff have productive links with employers within vocational areas and through work-based learning and Train to Gain and, more recently, as the preferred training partner for a locally based airline. The college's adult and community learning provision builds on very good working relationships with community organisations. The strategic development of the curriculum with schools is an area the college needs to further develop.

Learners' achievement

Table 1

Success rates on mainstream level 1 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2005 to 2007, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
1 Long	04/05	1157	53	65	-12	2377	46	62	-16
	05/06	1302	65	69	-4	1530	51	65	-14
	06/07	1449	70			439	52		
GNVQs and precursors	04/05	59	88	68	20	2	100	69	31
	05/06	75	76	72	4	2	50		
	06/07	66	76			3	67		
NVQs	04/05	197	62	68	-6	45	60	66	-6
	05/06	163	74	72	2	21	43	74	-31
	06/07	173	77			12	83		
Other	04/05	901	49	64	-15	2330	46	62	-16
	05/06	1064	63	69	-6	1507	51	65	-14
	06/07	1210	68			424	51		

Table 2

Success rates on mainstream level 2 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2005 to 2007, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
2 Long	04/05	1498	58	61	-3	920	57	60	-3
	05/06	1444	59	66	-7	972	56	66	-10
	06/07	1554	69			1240	38		
GCSE	04/05	563	63	64	-1	180	62	62	0
	05/06	520	60	68	-8	192	61	67	-6
	06/07	636	69			178	56		
GNVQs and precursors	04/05	286	72	67	5	6	83	75	8
	05/06	267	72	69	3	7	43	68	-25
	06/07	236	69			8	75		
NVQs	04/05	144	59	57	2	203	70	60	10
	05/06	230	61	65	-4	126	67	67	0
	06/07	220	64			740	25		
Other	04/05	505	45	60	-15	531	49	59	-10
	05/06	427	48	66	-18	647	53	65	-12
	06/07	462	70			314	59		

Table 3

Success rates on mainstream level 3 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2005 to 2007, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	<i>Diff</i>	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	<i>Diff</i>
3 Long	04/05	5968	75	68	7	1005	60	58	2
	05/06	5581	73	70	3	973	61	63	-2
	06/07	5262	75			770	63		
A/A2 Levels	04/05	1575	90	87	3	247	70	71	-1
	05/06	1719	89	88	1	233	63	74	-11
	06/07	1353	88			174	66		
AS Levels	04/05	3401	72	66	6	186	45	52	-7
	05/06	2879	66	67	-1	138	60	55	5
	06/07	2986	71			114	56		
GNVQs and precursors	04/05	590	65	61	4	70	54	54	0
	05/06	607	65	66	-1	75	56	56	0
	06/07	533	62			77	58		
NVQs	04/05	46	83	62	21	109	42	56	-14
	05/06	53	75	71	4	150	54	63	-9
	06/07	61	95			77	62		
Other	04/05	356	63	60	3	393	66	59	7
	05/06	323	74	65	9	377	64	64	0
	06/07	329	80			328	65		

Table 4

Success rates on work-based learning programmes managed by the college 2005 to 2007.

Programme	End Year	Success Rate	No, of learners *	College NVQ rate **	National NVQ rate **	College framework rate **	National framework rate **
Advanced Apprenticeships	04/05	overall	141	47%	48%	27%	34%
		timely	100	27%	31%	22%	22%
	05/06	overall	147	61%	53%	46%	44%
		timely	167	31%	34%	26%	27%
	06/07	overall	111	59%	64%	53%	58%
		timely	90	41%	43%	36%	37%
Apprenticeships	04/05	overall	348	59%	51%	46%	39%
		timely	329	19%	29%	15%	22%
	05/06	overall	207	56%	58%	47%	52%
		timely	193	29%	38%	24%	34%
	06/07	overall	363	61%	65%	59%	61%
		timely	324	48%	47%	47%	44%
Adult training (long courses) ***	04/05	overall					
		timely					
	05/06	overall					
		timely					
	06/07	overall	203 leavers	76%	No national benchmark on LSC website		
		timely					

* Learners who leave later than originally planned are counted in the year they actually leave. This group of learners are then added to the learners who planned to complete in a given year and did so or left earlier than planned

** College and national qualification success rates are calculated using LSC published data derived from the 'Individual Learning Record'

*** Adult training (long courses) includes 'Train to Gain' provision, but not 'Skills for Life'

Table 5

Outcomes on Entry to Employment (E2E) programmes managed by the college 2005 to 2007.

Year	Number of starts in year	Achieved Objectives vol (%) *	Progression % **	Still in learning
04/05	101	58 (42%)	50%	0
05/06	76	51 (58%)	51%	0
06/07	70	42 (61%)	33%	5

* These are key objectives identified for each learner following an E2E programme

** Progression is measured in terms learners' movement to further education, education and employment, during or at the end of their training period