

## INVESTOR IN PEOPLE CASE STUDY: STRODE COLLEGE



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*“We`ve had excellent inspection reports. We are recognised as one of the high quality colleges within the country. Investors in People is helping us to fulfil our mission `to provide high standards of education within an inclusive and supportive environment.”*

**Shonagh Butler, Head of Quality & Staff Development**

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### Background

**Size:** 575 people

**Sector:** Education

**Location:** Street, Somerset

**Status:** Regular successful reviews since first achieving Investors in People recognition in 1996.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

### The organisation

With origins reaching back to the opening of Strode Technical Institute in 1899, Strode College was formed as a tertiary college in September 1973. More than 1560 full-time `post-16` students now pursue courses that range from basic skills to A-Level, diploma and degree level. Strode College also meets the educational, development and leisure needs of 4,000 part-time students of all ages.

The organisation continues to expand.

Since 2004, Strode College has completed a £6 million investment in new teaching and learning facilities for art, design, music, science, maths and entry level studies. A current investment of £1 million includes refurbished facilities for engineering, sculpture, ceramics and design technology. A further investment of £4.7m will result in a new building for humanities and social sciences this year, together with expanded sports facilities that include an all-weather pitch.

Led by Principal Ian Bennett OBE, the college is achieving its aim of “a world class learning environment for students.”

### The challenge

In committing to the Investors in People standard, the ambitious and rapidly growing college rightly saw a well-managed and well-trained staff as critical in meeting the challenges of the 21st century.

“We are a learning establishment that educates and trains students at varying stages in their lives, says Shonagh Butler, Head of Quality and Staff Development.

“It is therefore natural that we train and develop our own staff and that we strive for quality and excellence. We need our staff to be well trained and well qualified. In order for that to happen, they need the full support and commitment of the college. We know that staff want to improve and to

progress, so it's about offering those opportunities and putting systems into place to help them to realise their full potential.

“Our reputation as a “world class” college depends on being able to develop new courses. We already provide 41 separate A Level subjects. Within just one National Diploma course, you may have up to 18 different subject areas. In Sport, for example, they range from sports injuries to sport psychology and from anatomy to physiology. Members of staff have to be `on the ball` with subject knowledge and building expertise. The challenge is to keep that process ongoing.”

## The strategy

Working with Investors in People advisers, the College has a range of systems in place for raising the performance of its staff and of the organisation as a whole.

A rolling three-year Development Plan sets out the purpose and vision of the college in terms to which staff can relate and understand. A Quality Improvement Plan, linked to a Professional Development and Training Plan, identifies training needs throughout the college. Both full and part-time staff are actively encouraged to pursue external qualifications.

During 2006, Strobe College took its commitment to staff development to new levels with the opening of a Professional Development Centre where staff can gain advice on careers and receive training.

“People can drop in and meet our team and discuss anything concerning their development and training,” Shonagh Butler says.

“The College has many interactive whiteboards in its classrooms, so we have one here in the PDC so that staff can come here for training or practise using the system. The students are so `au fait` with IT, there is now an expectation that staff are up to a certain level. So to have this facility where staff can rehearse what they deliver in the classroom is very positive.

Most critically, the College is in constant dialogue with staff to identify areas where training can be improved.

“Some of our middle managers didn't feel that their training was specific enough to their roles,” Shonagh Butler says.

“The result is that we've started an in-house, peer-led management training course running over twenty weeks – and so far we've had excellent feedback.”

Strobe College has also worked hard to improve its communications – and has used the Investors in People process to identify gaps in the system. Part-time staff who were not regularly accessing internal emails, for example, now receive paper copies of the college newsletter `Flash`.

Shonagh says: “We always say to staff, `We want to hear you. Because if we don't hear you, how can we change and improve?`”

## The results

“We are one of only two colleges in the South West to achieve Beacon Status – as a recognition of excellence within the further education system. We've grown from 890 full-time students in 1999 to the 1560 who enrolled in September 2006. Our turnover has increased to £17 million – and Investors in People helps us to continue to grow and to improve.”