

Myrrh Education and Training

**Inspection of FEFC-funded provision
in external institutions**

March 2000

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1999-2000**

THE FURTHER EDUCATION FUNDING COUNCIL

The Further Education Funding Council has a legal duty to ensure that further education in England is properly assessed. Where the arrangements for the assessment of the quality of provision in the external institution are not the legal responsibility of the LEA, the Council reserves the right to inspect the quality of the provision funded by the Council. This condition is set out in the Council's funding agreement with such institutions.

College inspections are carried out in accordance with the framework and guidelines described in Council circulars 97/12, 97/13 and 97/22. Inspections seek to validate the data and judgements provided by institutions in self-assessment reports. They involve full-time inspectors and registered part-time inspectors who have knowledge of and experience in the work they inspect.

*Cheylesmore House
Quinton Road
Coventry CV1 2WT
Telephone 024 7686 3000
Fax 024 7686 3100*

© FEFC 2000 You may photocopy this report. A college may use its report in promotional material provided quotes are accurate, and the findings of the inspection are not misrepresented

GRADE DESCRIPTORS

The procedures for assessing quality are set out in the Council Circulars 97/12 and 97/22. During their inspection, inspectors assess the strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum and other aspects of provision they inspect. Their assessments are set out in the report. They use a five-point scale to summarise the balance between strengths and weaknesses.

The descriptors for the grades are:

- *grade 1 - outstanding provision which has many strengths and few weaknesses*
- *grade 2 - good provision in which the strengths clearly outweigh the weaknesses*
- *grade 3 - satisfactory provision with strengths but also some weaknesses*
- *grade 4 - less than satisfactory provision in which the weaknesses clearly outweigh the strengths*
- *grade 5 - poor provision which has few strengths and many weaknesses*

In the first four-year inspection cycle of inspection, 25 external institutions were inspected. A single grade was awarded for the overall quality of FEFC-funded provision in each institution. The grade profile is shown below.

Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
4%	36%	44%	16%	0%

Source: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1996-97; Chief inspector's annual report. Grades were awarded using guidelines in Council Circular 93/28, Assessing Achievement*

Contents

	Paragraph
Summary	
The establishment and its mission	1
The inspection	5
The curriculum	9
Other aspects of provision	16
Conclusions	27

Summary

External Institution 02/2000 Inspection of FEFC-Funded Provision in External Institutions

Myrrh Education and Training London

Inspected January 2000

Myrrh Education and Training occupies four sites in the London boroughs of Lambeth, Southwark, and Brent. It was established in 1994 to meet the training needs of unemployed people who are economically and educationally disadvantaged. In its first two years of operation, the company failed to achieve its funding targets by a significant margin. Since 1997, it has been required to make a contribution from its annual funding allocation to the debt it incurred as a result. In order to comply with this requirement, the company has reduced its staffing levels, particularly at management level. The company's performance against its funding targets is improving. The FEFC provides most of the company's funding. The remaining funds come from private benefactors.

The company prepared its second self-assessment report for the inspection. The report did not rigorously evaluate the quality of provision. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths identified in relation to teaching and learning but considered that some had been overstated. They could not verify assertions about improvements in students' retention and achievements because of inaccuracies in the company's data. Some major

weaknesses were overlooked. Consequently, the action plan did not adequately address some important areas of concern.

Provision has been designed to meet the vocational needs of unemployed people living in economically disadvantaged areas of London. The main aim is that students should be able to enter employment locally as a result of acquiring new, marketable skills. However, data on students' progression into employment is not collected. Most lessons are well-planned and lively. Workshop activities are well-managed and students work conscientiously and purposefully. Work experience placements and realistic workshop assignments are used effectively to enable students to extend their learning. Staff offer students a high level of pastoral support. Students also help and encourage each other. Students' needs for various kinds of learning support are not accurately identified or appropriately catered for. No attention has been given to the development of key skills. Support services for students are generally poor. Many students leave without completing their awards. Students' overall progress is inadequately monitored, and they are not encouraged enough to action plan their learning to improve their performance. Workshop facilities are good and classrooms satisfactory. Some public areas in buildings are poorly maintained.

The company has worked hard, and with some success, to overcome its

Summary

financial difficulties. Some measures have been introduced since the last inspection to improve the quality of students' learning. These are at an early stage of development. Myrrh lacks effective medium-to long-term strategies for raising the levels of students' retention and achievement and for securing an appropriate asset base.

The provision funded by the FEFC was judged to be less than satisfactory, in which weaknesses clearly outweighed strengths. It was awarded a grade 4.

Context

The Establishment and its Mission

1 Myrrh Education and Training occupies four sites in the London boroughs of Lambeth, Southwark, and Brent. Myrrh Education and Training was established as a result of the local Roman Catholic diocese's commitment to help people overcome the consequences of unemployment through improving their skills. It has its origins in the much larger Cathedral Training, which no longer exists. Myrrh Education and Training is a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee.

2 Myrrh continues to uphold the principles of Cathedral Training's founders. The company's premises are located in areas of economic disadvantage and high unemployment. People of minority ethnic origin are disproportionately represented in the unemployment statistics in these areas. Myrrh estimates that it had 350 full-time and 45 part-time students in 1998-99. Of these students, 83% are in receipt of benefit; 84% have no previous qualifications; 48% are women; and 63% are from minority ethnic groups, as compared with 33% within the boroughs as a whole. The company's widening participation factor is 1.050, which is in line with that of other further education institutions in inner London.

3 Myrrh has been in receipt of Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) funding since August 1994. Its sponsor, as an external institution, is St. Francis Xavier Sixth Form College. In the years 1994-95 and

1995-96, Myrrh failed to achieve its funding targets. Since 1997, the company has been required to make a contribution from its annual funding allocation to the debt it incurred as a consequence. A proposed merger with St. Francis Xavier College has been considered but rejected as unviable by the governors of that college. The Council allocates funding on an annual basis, taking account of performance against funding agreement targets. In the year 1998-99, the FEFC provided £860,00 of funding which was approximately 97% of the company's income. This figure does not include £101,000 which the Council withheld as a payment against the outstanding debt. The remainder of Myrrh's income came from benefactors. The company's unit target for 1998-99 was 61,774, of which it is estimated to have achieved 56,577. The average level of funding in 1998-99 was £13.89.

4 All of Myrrh's provision, with the exception of basic skills, leads to NVQs at levels 1, 2 or 3. Courses are offered in seven of the Council's programme areas. Childcare, social care and administration courses are offered at Myrrh in Cricklewood, and at the Flint Street Training Centre in Walworth. Carpentry, painting and decorating, catering, hairdressing and horticulture courses are offered at the Brass Tacks Training Centre in Brixton. The Kevin Keohane Centre in Peckham offers motor vehicle repair and maintenance courses, and also houses the company's main office. Basic skills tuition is available for students who are struggling to achieve their primary learning goal. Courses

Context

are free to those who are in receipt of benefit. Since the last inspection, a number of centre managers' posts have been deleted. There are currently 26 full-time and eight part-time staff. These staff include the chief executive, one centre manager, and four part-time support staff. A new Chief Executive was appointed in July 1998.

The Inspection

5 Myrrh Education and Training was inspected in January 2000 by a team of six inspectors working for a total of twenty-two days. Inspectors examined students' portfolios and practical work, records of their learning, course review forms, records of staff meetings and records of board committee and sub-committee meetings. Meetings were held with the company's chief executive, with staff and students, with members of the board and with community representatives. Inspectors also evaluated the company's self-assessment report.

6 The areas of the curriculum included in the inspection were: construction, specifically carpentry, painting and decorating; engineering, specifically motor vehicle repair and maintenance; health care, specifically childcare and social care; and basic skills. Seventeen lessons were observed. Of these, 29% were judged to be good. This is lower than the national average for external institutions. Of the remainder, 59% were judged to be satisfactory.

7 Prior to the week of inspection, inspectors examined the company's 1998-99 students' achievement data, and data for previous years where the ISR indicated that there were anomalies. Reference was made to four sources of evidence: the ISR data for 1996-97 and 1997-98; the organisations' own data for 1998-99 and data prepared by management for the governing body for the years 1996-97 to 1998-99, inclusive; and records from awarding bodies. The conclusions relating to the accuracy of the available data were as follows:

- there were inconsistencies in the way that staff record data at the company's different sites
- the ISR data was unreliable and could not be used for the purposes of inspection
- there were mistakes in the data which the company had sent to the FEFC for the year 1998-99
- figures produced by the organisation's management for 1998-99 demonstrated a greater degree of accuracy than the ISR, and management's own figures for the previous years, but still contained a number of anomalies which meant that they could not be used for inspection purposes.

In addition, inspectors concluded that Myrrh is significantly underclaiming funding for students' achievements. There is no data on students' destinations.

8 During the inspection, inspectors examined records held by

Context

teaching staff and class registers to try and arrive at retention and success rates and figures for attendance. This proved to be impossible because the company operates a continuous programme of 'roll-on, roll-off' enrolments, with each student having a personalised timetable. Student cohorts could not be identified.

The Curriculum

Grade profile of sessions observed

Grade	1	2	3	4	5
Number of lessons	0	5	10	2	0

9 Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report, but judged that a number of strengths had been over-stated and that important weaknesses had been omitted.

Key Strengths

- a pattern of provision suited to the needs of adults
- realistic learning environments
- good standard of students' portfolios
- good workshop facilities.

Weaknesses

- failure of a substantial numbers of students to complete awards
- inappropriate teaching of basic skills
- no ESOL provision
- no attention to key skills
- unreliable retention and achievement data
- lack of reference and background literature for motor vehicle and construction students.

10 Myrrh's curriculum has been developed with the local labour market in mind. There is scope for students to progress from NVQ level 1 to level 3 courses in most of its curriculum areas.

In administration, where this was not previously possible, a level 1 course has recently been introduced. A level 1 course in practical caring skills is planned. This demonstrates the company's commitment to those with few or no previous qualifications. Myrrh operates a programme of continuous enrolment. Each student is allowed to devise a personal study timetable which fits with his or her domestic responsibilities. Lessons take place at times of the day which enable parents to fulfil their childcare responsibilities. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that this flexibility constitutes a strength.

11 Staff work co-operatively, and there are regular course meetings. Childcare provision lacks adequate direction and leadership.

12 Many lessons are well-planned. Teachers use a variety of appropriate teaching methods to sustain students' interest. Teachers are enthusiastic, and supportive. They give clear and interesting explanations of their subject, drawing upon relevant trade and professional experience. Students participate willingly in group discussions, and display a high level of mutual support. Workshop activities are well organised. Students understand what is required of them and are able to work independently on

The Curriculum

assignments, developing their skills to an appropriate level. Students apply themselves readily and work diligently. Newcomers are welcomed, and settle in quickly. They are allocated appropriate individual tasks. In motor vehicle and craft workshops, due attention is given to health and safety. Students carry out practical tasks competently and safely under supervision. All students undertake realistic work assignments. For instance, motor vehicle students overhaul the cars of genuine clients, while construction students carry out work on community premises. Care and childcare students undertake work experience placements. Some students arrange these themselves. Although teachers visit the establishments concerned to judge whether or not they are suitable, there is no formal partnership agreement between Myrrh and the placement providers. Teachers visit and observe students on work experience regularly and assess effectively the skills they are developing. Inspectors agreed with Myrrh's assertion that the opportunity to learn in realistic work environments helps students to develop their knowledge and skills.

13 Some lessons lack structure and students become confused. Teachers fail to check that students are learning. Insufficient attention is given to theoretical aspects of care and childcare. At one centre, too few students are enrolled on these courses for effective group work to be possible. Since the last inspection, Myrrh has made efforts to strengthen its support for students who do not have a firm

grasp of basic skills. However, basic skills provision is poor. Lessons are not vocationally relevant and materials are poorly presented. Students' progress is inadequately recorded. Vocational and basic skills lessons run concurrently and students must choose between them. Nearly all the students assessed as in need of support cease to attend for basic skills tuition after a few lessons. There is no specific provision for students for whom English is not a first language. This is a serious weakness. Inspectors did not agree with Myrrh that its support for students with basic skills needs is a strength. Staff have failed to realise the importance of key skills within the NVQ framework and there is no evidence of key skills activities being undertaken in lessons. No progress has been made in this area since the last inspection. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report. There is little IT equipment available for students' use and, consequently, few opportunities for students to develop or practise skills in this area.

14 The practical work on display in craft workshops is of a good standard. The work contained in students' NVQ portfolios is also of a good standard. It includes some impressive photographic evidence of students' achievements. Neither the ISR data nor the company's own data could be used reliably for inspection purposes. There is evidence that students' achievement rates are improving on some courses, for example, levels 1 and 2 carpentry. On the other hand, out of 111 students who enrolled for painting and

The Curriculum

decorating level 1 in 1998-99, only 27% achieved the award. While some retention rates appear to have improved, others have fallen.

Inspection of students' files and discussions with staff confirmed that substantial numbers of students have not completed awards in previous years. For 1997-98, the company collected data which showed good progression between courses.

However, there is insufficient evidence to be able to discern a trend. Student destination data has not been collected.

Inspectors judged that on the basis of the evidence available to them, they were not able to evaluate the company's claim of improved performance.

15 Inspectors agreed with Myrrh's assertion that its workshop facilities are a strength. The motor vehicle workshop is equipped to commercial standards, and a range of diagnostic equipment is available. Craft workshops are spacious and have good natural lighting. The work bays for painting and decorating provide realistic room settings. The resources available for care and childcare courses at one site are insufficient. In craft subjects and motor vehicle maintenance and repair, students have no access either to basic reference material or to relevant background literature which would enhance their studies. This weakness was not recognised in the self-assessment report. Staff have a suitable range of experience and are appropriately qualified.

Other Aspects of Provision

16 Inspectors judged that the self-assessment report relating to other aspects of provision was not sufficiently evaluative.

Key Strengths:

- successful attraction of students from educationally and economically disadvantaged groups
- commitment of board members and staff to the company's mission
- good induction procedures
- good involvement of staff in new developments

Weaknesses:

- inadequate diagnosis of students' learning support needs
- inadequate monitoring of students' progress
- lack of adequate support arrangements for students
- lack of access to careers advice and guidance for students
- poor quality of some premises
- underdeveloped quality assurance arrangements
- unreliable data on students' retention and achievements
- lack of effective strategic management.

17 Myrrh is successful in attracting students who are educationally and economically disadvantaged. The scale and ethos of the organisation are reassuring for people who feel intimidated by larger institutions. Staff are whole-heartedly committed to the company's aim of

meeting the training needs of unemployed people with few or no previous qualifications. Staff enthusiastically support students pastorally as well as educationally. Relationships between staff and students are extremely positive, and students are appreciative of the support they receive. The company is perceived by other community organisations as making a valuable contribution to the quality of life of people in those areas where it operates. Myrrh has established links with other agencies to secure work placements for its students, and to recruit new students. Myrrh provides assessor training for staff working in other community organisations.

18 Most students are recruited through advertisements in local newspapers, or by word of mouth. Prospective students have their enquiries dealt with in a friendly and efficient manner, and are able to start their course within a few days of applying and being interviewed. Courses are free to students on benefit and equipment is provided. Induction is comprehensive and friendly, and students are provided with a useful and concise handbook. Inspectors agreed with Myrrh's assertion that induction is a strength.

19 All students undergo an initial assessment in English and numeracy, but this is not an effective means of identifying the needs of adult students with diverse learning goals. There is no mechanism for identifying the particular needs of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities

Other Aspects of Provision

nor of the many students for whom English is not a first language. Myrrh only partially acknowledged this weakness in its self-assessment report.

20 Students' overall progress in learning is not rigorously monitored. Myrrh operates a system of student progress reviews. The student meets their course tutor after attending for one month and, thereafter, at three-monthly intervals. The full potential of this arrangement has not been realised. Review forms are completed only cursorily and there is little evidence of effective action planning. Students play little part in setting their objectives and working out how they will achieve them. Some teachers offer students additional, regular tutorials, but most students do not have the opportunity to benefit from this type of support. Students' punctuality and attendance is not monitored consistently.

21 Many students are dealing with extremely difficult personal circumstances. Despite this, Myrrh has not developed arrangements to help them to gain access to professional counselling or financial advice. There is no arrangement for students to have professional careers advice and guidance. Teachers carry the responsibility for dealing with issues arising in all of these areas. For instance, they draw upon their personal contacts not only to try and find students suitable work placements, but also to find them employment on leaving. While the commitment of staff to this is commendable, it diverts them from their primary purpose of

teaching, and does not provide students with the full range of support they need. None of these weaknesses was identified in the self-assessment report. Staff and students are adamant that access to childcare is a key factor in whether or not students can take up or continue to attend a training programme. Myrrh has not identified any means of helping existing or potential students in this respect.

22 Myrrh's premises are not well sign-posted, and do not afford access for people with restricted mobility. Classrooms are generally suitable for the purposes intended. However, at the Cricklewood site, which has some of the best classroom space, the security arrangements are a deterrent for prospective students and the building is underused. At two of the sites, the public areas are poorly maintained and present some health and safety risks. Some social and rest areas are of a poor quality. The limitations of Myrrh's premises were not fully acknowledged in the self-assessment report.

23 Since the last inspection, the organisation has made good progress in developing its staff to deliver its educational programme. Nearly all teachers have gained assessor and verifier awards. Some have embarked on the City and Guilds course leading to an adult education teachers' certificate. Staff have a good working knowledge of NVQ requirements and are able to carry out internal verification procedures satisfactorily. Since the last inspection, annual course reviews have been introduced.

Other Aspects of Provision

Procedures have been developed which encourage course teams to consider performance against a number of relevant criteria, such as the effectiveness of induction and the participation of students by gender and ethnicity. However, the procedure is not being exploited fully. Teachers set unrealistic targets for improvement, for example, an increase in achievement from 23% to 75% in one year.

Strategies for bringing about improvements are not identified, and responsibilities for carrying forward the necessary action are not allocated to specific members of staff. There is no evidence that the performance of staff is reviewed against the targets they have identified as desirable. A new staff appraisal scheme is being piloted by one course team. The previous scheme has lapsed. The company has begun to collect useful information from students about their experience at Myrrh, but this information has not been used to effect improvements. The company does not operate a lesson observation scheme. It lacks an overall quality assurance action plan. The data which should underpin the process of quality assurance is flawed. Inspectors judged that Myrrh's quality assurance arrangements remain underdeveloped. The weaknesses identified through inspection were underestimated in the self-assessment report. In some cases, they were wrongly identified as strengths.

24 There are many opportunities for staff to contribute to the work of the organisation as a whole. The chief executive consults staff about new

developments and refines them in the light of their comments. There are regular meetings at each centre where staff are briefed about recent developments and can discuss them. Staff representatives attend the curriculum sub-committee of the board. An action group comprised of staff representatives from each centre has also been formed. This has been responsible for standardising much of the paperwork used with students. It has also initiated a large-scale drive to recruit students. Inspectors judged this level of staff involvement to be a strength.

25 Considerable efforts have been made to address issues identified at the last inspection. However, the organisation lacks comprehensive strategies for improving student retention and achievement and for managing its assets. Inspectors judged the lack of these strategies to be a significant weakness, and one which was not mentioned in the self-assessment report. Managers have little awareness of sources of funding which would enable the organisation to broaden its funding base while at the same time securing much-needed support services and facilities for its students. Contacts with local authorities, further education colleges, the careers service and philanthropic enterprises such as Business in the Community are lacking. The company is managing to balance its books at the end of the financial year while paying off its debt to the FEFC, but has no premises strategy. It continues to retain the lease on one property which is significantly underused. New

Other Aspects of Provision

classroom space has been developed at the Flint Street site, but there are no plans to use it. Essential structural repairs are being carried out but, beyond this, there is no repairs and maintenance programme, and no programme for acquiring or renewing educational resources.

26 Board members are fully committed to the organisation's mission. They take a close interest in all aspects of the company's operations. Since the last inspection, they have dealt with many difficult financial and personnel issues. They have established a sub-committee which reviews curriculum issues, including student retention and achievement. The board receives regular financial reports and reports on students' academic performance. It has reviewed and reaffirmed its commitment to its strategic purpose, and has set about widening the range of expertise available to it by recruiting new members. The board provides a good level of support to the chief executive. Members demonstrate understanding of the difficulties faced by Myrrh's students and of the issues involved in overcoming them. They are hampered in their decision-making by inaccurate retention and achievement data, and by a lack of strategic guidance from management.

Conclusions

27 The self-assessment report was drafted by the company's chief executive after consultation with staff and with members of the board. It incorporated strengths and weaknesses which staff identified through the course review process. It was produced in response to inspection, and was the second the company had prepared. Staff could remember contributing to the process, but had no recollection of the resulting document. The report was well presented and had clearly been prepared with the inspection framework in mind. It served as a useful basis for inspection.

28 Inspectors agreed with some of the judgements in the self-assessment report. They considered that some strengths had been over-stated, that some important weaknesses had not been identified and that some weaknesses had been wrongly identified as strengths. Because the assessment was not sufficiently rigorous, the action plan did not address some crucial points.

29 The provision funded by the FEFC was judged to be less than satisfactory, in which weaknesses clearly outweighed strengths. It was awarded a grade 4.