

**Bedford College**  
**Reinspection of Basic Skills: March 2001**  
**Report from the Inspectorate**  
**The Further Education Funding Council**

## **THE FURTHER EDUCATION FUNDING COUNCIL**

*The Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) has a legal duty to make sure further education in England is properly assessed. The FEFC's inspectorate inspects and reports on each college of further education according to a four-year cycle. It also assesses and reports nationally on the curriculum, disseminates good practice and advises the FEFC's quality assessment committee.*

### **REINSPECTION**

*The FEFC has agreed that colleges with provision judged by the inspectorate to be less than satisfactory or poor (grade 4 or 5) should be reinspected. In these circumstances, a college may have its funding agreement with the FEFC qualified to prevent it increasing the number of new students in an unsatisfactory curriculum area until the FEFC is satisfied that weaknesses have been addressed.*

*Satisfactory provision may also be reinspected if actions have been taken to improve quality and the college's existing inspection grade is the only factor which prevents it from meeting the criteria for FEFC accreditation.*

*Reinspections are carried out in accordance with the framework and guidelines described in Council Circulars 97/12, 97/13 and 97/22. Reinspections seek to validate the data and judgements provided by colleges in self-assessment reports and confirm that actions taken as a result of previous inspection have improved the quality of provision. They involve full-time inspectors and registered part-time inspectors who have knowledge of, and experience in, the work they inspect. The opinion of the FEFC's audit service contributes to inspectorate judgements about governance and management.*

### **GRADE DESCRIPTORS**

*Assessments use grades on 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 weaknesses clearly outweigh the strengths*
- *grade 5 - poor provision which has few strengths and many weaknesses.*

*Audit conclusions are expressed as good, adequate or weak.*

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## **Bedford College Eastern Region**

### **Reinspection of basic skills: March 2001**

#### **Background**

Bedford College was inspected in January 2000 and the findings published in inspection report 44/00. Provision for basic skills was awarded a grade 4.

The key strengths were: comprehensive basic skills support; good teaching on community-based programmes; and the development of basic skills to widen participation. The weaknesses were: inadequate initial assessment of some students' learning needs; insufficient attention to the learning needs of individuals; some inappropriate learning activity; poor attendance; insufficient monitoring of students' progress; and insufficient appropriately qualified teachers.

The reinspection took place in March 2001. Inspectors observed 10 lessons covering full-time entry level courses, additional basic skills support and community education. They examined a range of documents, including the college's self-assessment report, inspected students' work, and had meetings with managers, staff and students.

#### **Assessment**

The college has made considerable progress in addressing the weaknesses that were identified in the previous inspection and built on its strengths. The management of the curriculum area has improved. A programme manager has been recently appointed. There are more teachers working full time or with substantial amounts of part-time teaching. Teaching assistants and additional support staff are fully integrated with the basic skills team and make a valuable contribution to the progress of students. On foundation courses, curriculum teams work with basic skills staff to develop students' key skills of communication and application of number. They produce good integrated assignments for level 1 students that are related to the vocational content of their main courses.

The college has given high priority to staff training for basic skills and used the FEFC standards fund to provide extensive opportunities for training. Most staff now have a basic skills qualification. Training is planned to enable basic skills staff to learn how to use new specialist computer software.

The college has improved the initial assessment of students on entry level courses. However, its procedures are not used to identify generic goals which could later be used to assess the improvements that students have made. The college has improved the procedures for tracking students' progress. Many of the procedures are new. It is too early to judge their effectiveness. Additional basic skills support continues to be a strength. Attendance on entry level courses is now monitored rigorously and has improved significantly since the last inspection. However, inspectors observed poor attendance on foundation level key skills programmes.

Teaching and learning has improved since the last inspection and is satisfactory. Of the lessons observed, 40% were good or outstanding compared with 23% at the previous inspection. Of the lessons observed, 10% were less than satisfactory, compared with 38% previously. Students enthusiastically participate in their key skills sessions. However, some

lesson plans did not show how the activities would meet the needs of a wide range of students. In a few lessons observed the work was too difficult for some students. Where students' learning styles had been identified, it was not always clear how this had resulted in the use of different teaching methods. This was particularly an issue where multi-sensory methods would have been more appropriate than paper-based ones.

The college has improved its accommodation for basic skills. Students value the new specialist learning aids, including computer hardware and software. IT is used routinely on basic skills courses.

The college should: assess the effectiveness of its new procedures for recording students' progress; address poor attendance on foundation programmes; and improve lesson planning to meet the needs of individual students.

**Revised grade:** basic skills 3.