

Bexhill College
Reinspection of General Resources: February 2000
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.

*Cheylesmore House
Quinton Road
Coventry CV1 2WT
Telephone 02476 863000
Fax 02476 862100
website: <http://www.fefc.ac.uk>*

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Bexhill College South East Region

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Background

Bexhill College was inspected in January 1998 and the findings published in inspection report 43/98. General resources was awarded a grade 4.

The strengths of the provision were: improved access for students with restricted mobility; and a good range of sports facilities. The major weaknesses were: poor accommodation; an inadequate accommodation strategy; poor access to IT for students; the small library budget and the lack of a central record of bookstock. The college has made a number of improvements to its general resources since the last inspection, but still assesses its accommodation and building quality as poor.

The reinspection was delayed to await the outcome of discussions between the college and the FEFC on options for its future development. These discussions have not yet been concluded. The provision was therefore reinspected by the college inspector, over two days in February 2000. The regional property adviser provided additional advice.

Assessment

Inspectors judged that the college has made considerable progress in addressing the main weaknesses identified in the last inspection. There are significantly more computers of high specification for students to use and the ratio of machines to full-time equivalent students has improved from 1:10 to 1:8. There were 38 machines on open access for students during the last inspection; these have been increased to 56. The college has been successful in its bid for FEFC post-inspection standards fund money to purchase more IT equipment, which will improve further the IT facilities for students.

The library budget has been increased from £8,000 to more than £25,000. The library has been reorganised and there is more workspace for students. A careers area has been located in the library, and a small new area created for students to attend for additional learning support. Staffing in the library has been increased. However, nothing has yet been done to establish a central record of texts and other learning resources held in the different departments of the college. The college is still unable to establish whether there is duplication of resources, where further development may be needed, or how to inform students where additional resources can be found.

The college has been highly imaginative in improving and relocating teaching areas since the last inspection. For example, small exterior spaces have been covered and converted to offices, releasing former office space for teaching rooms. Modification to the students' refectory has released a little more space in it, providing better thoroughfare for students, though its size remains only just capable of accommodating the rising number of students. There is a dedicated social room for adult students. The lecture theatre has been refurbished. Many areas have been newly carpeted and decorated, and some of the common and teaching areas are brighter. The college has made all possible changes to its accommodation to improve the students' learning environment within the constraints of poor, ageing premises. The level of improvement achieved at the time of reinspection cannot be maintained. The level of use of some of the teaching spaces cannot be sustained without continuing

considerable expense. The huts are deteriorating further. The science laboratories remain scattered around the college on different floors; technicians' rooms are mainly small and overcrowded and many teaching rooms need upgrading. Some of the teachers' work rooms have been improved but others cannot be changed because of lack of space. The heating systems are inefficient, mainly old, and corroded. Maintenance is a constant and costly battle. The electric heating in the huts is quite inadequate. There is much wasted energy. The electrical system cannot sustain any further expansion of IT resources.

Expansion and remodelling of existing accommodation has been considered fully and shown to be prohibitively expensive. The new accommodation strategy, based on replacement buildings, has been well thought through. Managers and governors have carefully supervised projects to assess options for relocating the college. The college is bidding for FEFC capital to relocate to a new site which it has purchased recently. Best use has been made of all available space and nothing more can be done with the existing premises. Despite the college's many and costly efforts, the quality of its accommodation remains poor. However, students spoken to are not deterred from enrolling at the college because of its reputation for good student achievements and its pastoral care.

Reinspection grade: general resources 4.