

Brighton College of Technology
Reinspection of Support for Students: February 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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Brighton College of Technology South East Region

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Background

Brighton College of Technology was inspected in March 2000. The inspection findings were published in inspection report 86/00. Support for students was awarded a grade 4.

Inspectors identified the following strengths: comprehensive and well-managed student services; effective arrangements for identifying students' learning support needs; and a well-organised induction programme for full-time students. However, these strengths were outweighed by the following weaknesses: deficiencies in implementing admissions procedures; poor take-up of learning support; inconsistent quality of tutorial support; and insufficient careers advice and guidance.

Inspectors reinspected the provision over three days in February 2001. They examined the college's self-assessment report, the post-inspection action plan and documentation provided by the college. Inspectors observed tutorials and held meetings with senior and middle managers, staff and students.

Assessment

The college has made much progress in addressing the weaknesses identified in the last inspection report and has implemented successfully many of its planned actions to address weaknesses. Standards fund money has been used effectively to support key actions for improvement, particularly for training tutors and increasing the staffing for learning support in order to strengthen the quality of provision.

Some of the strengths identified in the last report have been further enhanced. For example, the comprehensive and well-managed student services identified in the last inspection have been extended to include additional learning support and the monitoring of student tutorials. This action has created a cohesive and integrated student support service. The director of student support co-ordinates the various specialist teams and reports directly to the college's executive team. These improvements have raised the profile of student support services amongst staff and students in the college.

The college has improved its admissions procedures. Inspectors agreed that course information is accurate and helpful to students. Students who are undecided about their future receive impartial pre-entry guidance from the college careers co-ordinator and a detailed interview with subject tutors. Of students who started a full-time course in 2000, 90% received a formal interview. Student satisfaction with the advice and guidance received has shown some improvement.

Effective arrangements for identifying students' learning support needs have been maintained. Diagnostic assessments are now used to determine the support needs of full-time students. However, this provision has not yet been extended to assess the needs of many part-time students. Records show that the take-up of learning support has improved considerably. At the time of the reinspection, 94% of full-time and 66% of part-time students identified as needing additional learning support have a personal learning plan as a result of the college's improved measures for helping students. In February 2000, 65% of students were receiving

learning support, while in February 2001, 80% are receiving learning support. The majority of students identified as needing help now join learning support sessions within four weeks of their initial assessment. Attendance at these sessions is monitored carefully.

The college's tutorial policy was revised following the last inspection. There is a clear framework for tutorial sessions for full-time students which includes time allocated for individual and group tutorials. A minimum entitlement for tutorial support has yet to be defined for part-time students. Inspectors observed tutorials across a range of the college's provision and found much good practice in individual tutorials. Attendance monitoring and reporting are strong. The college recognises that there is some inconsistency in the quality of group tutorials. Further developments are planned for next year.

In order to achieve further improvements, the college should: extend the use of diagnostic assessments to part-time students and ensure students receive the help they need; address the variation in the quality of group tutorials; and provide an entitlement to tutorial support for part-time students.

Revised grade: support for students 3.