

**Ealing Tertiary College
Reinspection of Horticulture: September 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.

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**Ealing Tertiary College
Greater London Region**

Reinspection of horticulture: September 2000

Background

Ealing Tertiary College was inspected in February 1999 and the findings published in inspection report 49/99. Provision in horticulture was graded 4.

The strengths of the provision were good retention on some courses, and the wide range of opportunities for relevant practical work. The major weaknesses were: low achievement rates on some courses; poor tracking of students' progress on NVQ programmes; poor attendance rates on most courses; late starts to many lessons; insufficient learning materials for private study; and that some students were following inappropriate courses. Data were unreliable so a table of retention and achievement rates could not be included in the inspection report.

The inspection covered horticulture and floristry courses, including NVQ levels 2 and 3, C&G programmes, and national certificate and national diploma courses. Inspectors observed 11 lessons and held meetings with course managers, teachers and students. Resources, documentation and students' work were examined.

Assessment

There has been considerable progress since the inspection, and action has been taken to address all of the weaknesses in the report. The area has undergone a series of changes in staffing and this has hampered progress to some extent. Much good teaching and learning was observed, which represents a significant improvement from the previous inspection. There are good opportunities for practical work, which is effectively linked to theory, and reinforced by the use of well-chosen examples from industry. In some lessons the teaching does not meet the needs of all students. More realistic completion times for students' work have been introduced, and there is now careful tracking of students' progress on NVQ programmes.

In 1998-99, most achievements were close to or above the national average, which is a marked improvement from the previous year. For example, there were good achievements in NVQ level 2 floristry and horticulture, and the national certificate in horticulture. There are indications that the improvement trend continued during 1999-2000, although not all the examination results were available at the time of the reinspection. Achievements on the national diploma in horticulture improved significantly during 1999-2000, to an above average level. Retention remains a strength for most level 1 and level 3 programmes, but there has been a decline in retention on level 2 programmes, which was low in 1999-2000. Attendance on some programmes was still low in 1999-2000 and the college has introduced more rigorous monitoring this year. Students' late arrival in lessons is still a weakness.

Some of the records of review meetings with full-time students, and the resulting action plans, were insufficiently detailed last year. All prospective students are interviewed and a clearer specification of entry criteria has been established. For some courses these aspects need further development. There have been changes in the range of courses and more are planned to address the gaps in provision, and increase group sizes in lessons. Since the inspection a learning resource centre has been opened. It provides good private study

accommodation, IT facilities and a reasonable range of learning resources for horticulture. Arrangements for the development of key skills are not fully effective and there is a need to enhance the learning materials for key skills in the learning resource centre. Most areas of the curriculum are well provided with specialist resources. The college is taking action to address weaknesses in the range and quality of resources in a few areas.

The college needs to improve: students' attendance and punctuality; pre-entry guidance; and the process for placing students on appropriate courses. There needs to be continued attention to improving the quality of teaching and learning.

Revised grade: horticulture 3.