Ealing Tertiary College
Reinspection of Computing and Information Technology: 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
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Background

Ealing Tertiary College was inspected in February 1999. The findings were published in inspection report 49/99. Computing and IT was awarded a grade 4.

The main strengths of the provision were some good teaching, and extensive access to modern IT facilities. These strengths were outweighed by significant weaknesses which included low retention and achievement rates, poor attendance at many lessons and inadequate co-ordination of the curriculum across sites.

The provision was reinspected in September 2000. Eleven lessons were observed. The inspector examined a range of students' work, held meetings with college managers, teachers and students, evaluated student achievement and retention data and examined a range of documentation relating to the college and its courses.

Assessment

The college's most recent self-assessment report identified most of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision. The college has responded positively to issues identified in the previous inspection and has taken action to address weaknesses. There has been an emphasis on improving teaching and learning. The majority of the lessons observed were good or outstanding. Most of the staff have attended language awareness training courses. In many lessons, teachers are able to explain technical terms simply and clearly. Students are encouraged to work at their own pace on a variety of projects. In the weaker lessons, teachers failed to adapt their language to the level of students' understanding, and there were insufficient checks on learning. Some learning materials for students are too complex or pitched at too high a level. Students continue to have extensive access to modern IT facilities and books.

Retention and achievements on most courses improved in 1999-2000, but some remain below national averages. On GNVQ courses, pass rates are above national averages. Achievements on the foundation GNVQ in IT have improved. There were low pass rates on GCE A level and GCSE computing courses. Retention was below average on most courses, and was low on the national diploma in computer studies. Action was not taken quickly enough after the last inspection to improve the achievements and retention rates on GCE A level and GCSE IT courses.

Although attendance is more closely monitored than previously, this monitoring is not consistent across all sites. Two new tutors have been appointed with a special responsibility to collect and act upon lateness and non-attendance slips produced by the teachers. There has been some improvement in the co-ordination of the curriculum across the sites. There are now common schemes of work and assessment procedures for GNVQ IT courses. A GNVQ foundation in IT has been running successfully since the last inspection; this offers a more suitable starting point for some students. A GNVQ single award course has been piloted with a view to offering students a practical alternative course to GCE A level computer studies.

The college should improve student retention and pass rates on some courses. There should be consideration of more appropriate course provision, particularly for students on GCSE programmes. There needs to be continued attention to improving the quality of teaching and learning.

Revised grade: computing and information technology 4.