

Halton College
Reinspection of Computing and Information Technology: November 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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Halton College North West Region

Reinspection of computing and information technology: November 2000

Background

Halton College was inspected in October 1999 and the findings were published in inspection report 15/00. Provision in computing and information technology was graded 4.

The strengths of the provision were: above national average achievement levels on NVQ level 1 and GNVQ intermediate courses; good range of courses with significant progression opportunities; and high quality hardware and software. The weaknesses were: adverse effect of significant recent staff changes on course management and teaching; lower than national average profile of teaching and learning grades; attendance and retention on most courses well below national average; low achievement rates on some courses in 1999; low level of successful completions within agreed timescales for franchised provision programmes.

The provision was reinspected over four days in November 2000. Inspectors observed 12 lessons, held meetings with programme team leaders, teachers and students, scrutinised a wide range of college documents and assessed students' marked work.

Assessment

The quality of teaching and learning has improved significantly. Inspectors judged 58% of lessons to be good or outstanding. This compares favourably with the 48% of lessons judged good at the last inspection, and is just below the national average for this programme area of 61%. All teachers prepare detailed lesson plans and structure their lessons well. In the better lessons, they use a range of learning activities that appropriately challenge the students. In one lesson, students worked in groups to prepare and deliver a tender for a contract. The teacher took on the role of company manager. Students had researched the topic well and confidently presented their tender using a presentation software package. They gained assessment evidence to include in their key skills portfolio. In a minority of lessons there were some missed opportunities to sufficiently challenge the students. In one lesson, the room was unsuitable for the activity and this adversely affected students' learning. Students generally attend punctually. Any lateness is challenged. Attendance has improved from 72% to 78%, above the national average for the programme area. Average class size is now 15.3, compared with the national average of 11.2. Specialist student support is strong and is highly appreciated by students. Teachers are effective in providing group and individual support to students both in and out of class. Second-year GNVQ advanced IT students are employed to provide teaching support in many lessons.

Pass rates on the majority of courses in 1999-2000 were substantially above the national average. All students who completed the course achieved the GNVQ intermediate in IT. However, pass rates on the C&G 7261 course remained well below the national average. Retention rates were poor on most courses, a weakness identified at the last inspection. Strategies now in place to address this weakness include the recent appointment of a tutorial support assistant who monitors attendance and contacts absent students. The college recognises that it is too early to judge the success of this initiative.

As identified at the last inspection the quality and quantity of the specialist resources are good. There are attractive, well-equipped learning centres and modern, networked computers

in specialist rooms. Technician support is provided at the many outreach centres. Learning materials are of high quality. Teachers have participated in a wide range of staff development events.

Course organisation and management is much improved. There is now clear leadership. Staff work well in teams. The number of full-time staff has increased. Regular meetings are minuted and action points followed up. Course files are well organised. Schemes of work are detailed and shared through the college intranet. The wide range of courses, identified as a strength at the last inspection, has been extended. New courses recently introduced include the European computer driving licence and a foundation level GNVQ in IT. Students are encouraged to undertake additional qualifications to improve their employability. Students on NVQ courses undertake an accredited health and safety course and C&G numeracy up to level 4. Internal verification is carried out effectively. Since the last inspection, the college has significantly reduced its franchised provision in this programme area.

Revised grade: computing and information technology 3.