Hammersmith and West London College
Reinspection of Mathematics, 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.

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Hammersmith and West London College
Greater London Region

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Background

Hammersmith and West London College was inspected during November 1999 and the findings were published in inspection report 37/00. Provision for mathematics, computing and information technology was graded 4.

The strengths of the provision were: a good range of courses that encouraged community group participation; good-quality learning materials; and the ease of access to good quality computer resources. These strengths were outweighed by weaknesses which included: a lack of attention by some teachers to the different learning needs of students; poor punctuality in many lessons; poor completion of work set in mathematics; low retention rates on the majority of courses; and some low pass rates.

The provision was reinspected in November 2000. Inspectors observed 12 lessons. Meetings were held with senior and curriculum managers and teachers. Students' work and documentation relating to computing, IT and mathematics courses were examined, and students' achievements analysed.

Assessment

The college has built on the strengths identified in the inspection and started to address the weaknesses. A new head of IT has been appointed and the organisation of courses strengthened. Course teams meet regularly and undertake detailed quality reviews. Targets are set for each course, although these are not always realistic. Entry requirements for advanced level courses are rigorously adhered to. Students are given helpful guidance in choosing the best course for their needs. There is effective screening to identify students who need additional support. Care is taken to ensure that students receive the help they need. There are additional workshops, open to all students, and double staffing on some courses. Work experience is to be offered this year for students on advanced GNVQ IT courses. Mathematics and IT teachers provide effective specialist input on a wide range of programmes including key skills. Lessons are generally well planned and most course materials are good. There are some high-quality learning resources in the mathematics and IT skills centres. The quality of teaching and learning has improved and some of the teaching is innovative. In the better lessons observed, teachers used a variety of activities to enthuse and involve students. An excellent example of interactive on-line learning was observed. In a few weak lessons, classroom management was poor and teaching did not adequately meet the needs of all students. Students' work is generally at an appropriate standard. The setting and marking of homework on some courses is inconsistent. Students' punctuality is now generally satisfactory but in a minority of lessons, late students severely disrupted teaching. Student retention and achievement have improved on most courses. Achievements are generally at or above the national averages for colleges with a similar intake. Pass rates on GCE A level mathematics courses have improved and are now well above national averages. Pass rates on the intermediate GNVQ IT course are poor. Retention on most courses is now roughly in line with national averages. Retention rates on advanced courses remain poor, although they have improved recently. Teaching rooms are well maintained. There are high quality general IT facilities.

The college should improve: retention rates on advanced courses; pass rates on some courses; the quality of some teaching; and the setting and marking of homework on some courses.

Revised grade: mathematics, computing and information technology 3.