

Kendal College
Reinspection of Management: October 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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Kendal College North West Region

Reinspection of management: October 2000

Background

Kendal College was inspected in October 1999 and the findings were published in inspection report 05/00. Management was awarded a grade 4.

The key strengths of the provision were: the involvement of staff at all levels in strategic planning; and significant improvements in financial performance since the previous inspection. Weaknesses of the provision were: underdeveloped links between strategic and operational planning; poor levels of achievement on many programmes; inadequacies in management information; ineffective management in a number of curriculum areas; and unclear roles and targets for course managers.

Reinspection took place in October 2000. Inspectors examined the post-inspection action plan, together with a new self-assessment report, and scrutinised students' achievement and retention data and college targets. They had meetings with governors, managers, teachers and support staff.

Assessment

Progress has been made in addressing many of the weaknesses identified in the last inspection. However, the financial performance has deteriorated. In early 2000, managers identified a projected shortfall in the college's volume of activity of 30,000 units. In addressing the issue the college deviated from its strategic plan which caused a financial shortfall. In 1999-2000 the college's internal auditors stated that, overall, the college had an adequate internal control system. Both they, and the college's external auditors, have identified problems in the student numbers system. The college has taken action to address these problems. The activities of the enterprise unit have been the subject of an internal audit which identified instances of non-compliance with the college's financial regulations. The college has addressed this situation. The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is adequate.

The college introduced a new management structure in August 2000, following effective internal consultation. The reorganisation addresses many of the issues raised at inspection. Some new appointments are not yet in post and many staff have still to come to terms with their new roles. All managers have clear job descriptions. Senior managers have adopted a more open and supportive style of management. Staff are actively encouraged to discuss issues and concerns with members of the college management team.

Since the inspection the college has comprehensively reviewed its mission statement. Governors, managers and staff consider the new mission to be more relevant than previous statements. Staff continue to be involved in the strategic planning process. Development plans are linked to strategic objectives, but cross-references between the two documents are not always clear. The decision to include a particular strategic objective in a development plan is taken at programme area or support unit level. There is no college-wide monitoring of coverage.

The management information system now provides accurate and timely information. There is online access in staff rooms. At the last inspection overall retention rates were at or above the national benchmarks, but pass rates were poor on many courses. Retention rates have been maintained. Pass rates have improved year-on-year and were at national averages in 1998-99. Provisional figures for 1999-2000 indicate that the trend has continued. Strategies to improve attendance, retention and achievement include the introduction of more entry and foundation level courses.

A recent comprehensive curriculum review provides accurate data on true costs, income and viable group sizes for each course. The college intends to use these data to determine changes to its course portfolio, set enrolment targets for curriculum areas and inform a new accommodation strategy to replace the current strategy, which is out of date.

There are still some weaknesses in the management of part-time teachers. The proportion of work they deliver has been reduced from 60% to 39%, partly by the better utilisation of full-time teachers and partly by employing more teachers on fractional contracts, but the proportion is still high compared to the sector average. A published schedule of meetings has increased attendance of part-time teachers.

Revised grade: management 3.