

Kidderminster College
Reinspection of Management: November 1999
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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Kidderminster College West Midlands Region

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Background

Kidderminster College was inspected in October 1998. The inspection findings were published in inspection report 06/99. A grade 4 was awarded in management.

Inspectors identified several strengths. The college had developed new courses for a wider cross-section of the community. Improvements in internal communications had raised staff awareness of college issues. There were productive links with external organisations including employers. The day-to-day organisation of the curriculum was effective. These strengths were outweighed by weaknesses. There was a lack of effective monitoring of the college's performance and managers failed to address the decline in students' achievements. Strategic and operational plans were of poor quality and the college lacked an effective marketing strategy. The management structure did not support the effective co-ordination and delivery of cross-college services and policies. Staff resources were not efficiently deployed. There were shortcomings in the development and use of management information.

Management was reinspected over five days starting on 29 November 1999. Inspectors met with managers, governors and other staff, inspected documentation and reviewed progress made against the action plan.

Assessment

The college has made good progress in addressing a number of weaknesses identified in the last inspection report. Some weaknesses identified in the inspection report have been tackled successfully. For example, the college's overall performance is now monitored and a marketing strategy has been decided. In other cases, for example, the development of a strategic planning cycle, it is too early to judge the effectiveness of the actions taken.

There is an effective management structure and clear understanding by staff of the roles and responsibilities of managers. There are good communications throughout the college and students, staff and governors feel well informed. Pass rates on most long and short courses improved between 1997 and 1999. The college has increased significantly the number of full-time students recruited. There has been a further growth in the links with external organisations that has led to widening participation. These links embrace work with homeless people, with disaffected young people and with local businesses. The college has tackled effectively weaknesses in the deployment of staff resources. Retention rates continued to improve between 1997 and 1998. However, between 1998 and 1999, retention rates on over half the college's long courses declined to below national averages. The college has still to address the following matters: the underdeveloped use of management information; the slow progress in implementing the equal opportunities policy; the poor quality of some operating plans which lack measurable targets and standards; and the poor achievements in a minority of courses.

Revised grade: management 3.