

Kidderminster College
Reinspection of Quality Assurance: January 2001
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

Reinspection of quality assurance: January 2001

Background

Kidderminster College was inspected in October 1998 and reinspected in November 1999. In both inspections provision in quality assurance was graded 4.

By the time of the reinspection in November 1999 the college had taken some steps to improve quality assurance. There was a detailed annual cycle of quality assurance activities linked to strategic planning and clear guidelines understood and supported by staff. A teaching and learning improvement team had been created and the college had a process for tackling poor retention and low achievement. Flaws in the self-assessment process had been corrected and the self-assessment report was comprehensive. Arrangements for obtaining students' views had improved. However, significant weaknesses remained. There was insufficient attention to setting goals for quality improvement across the college. The cycle for setting and monitoring targets for achievement and retention had not been satisfactorily completed and some targets were unrealistically high. Service standards were underdeveloped, arrangements for staff development were weak and appraisals slow to get under way.

A further reinspection took place over five days in January 2001. Inspectors scrutinised documentation relating to quality assurance procedures and the self-assessment report. They considered students' achievement and retention data and targets set by the college. Meetings were held with managers, teachers, support staff and students.

Assessment

The college has made good progress since the last reinspection in developing and implementing its quality assurance procedures. There is a detailed and effective cycle of quality assurance activities linked to strategic planning and supported by a detailed quality assurance operational plan. The self-assessment process is thorough and involves all staff at every level of the organisation. The self-assessment report is comprehensive. The setting and monitoring of targets is now fully embedded at course and college level. There are clear indications that there are improvements in students' achievements. However, there are still a number of courses that are underachieving. The college has a process for tackling low achievement and the scheme is now in its second year. In the first year, 25 courses were identified as underachieving and were targeted for inclusion in the scheme. By the end of the first year 23 courses had made improvements in achievements. Arrangements for staff appraisal and staff development are well established. The staff development report for 1999-2000 is evaluative. The comprehensive staff development plan for 2000-01 takes account of the staff training needs identified in appraisals and is linked to the strategic objectives of the college. Staff appraisals are up to date. Service standards are now in place in all areas of the college and there are clear arrangements for the monitoring of the standards.

The college acknowledges that there is still further work to do on the monitoring of charter commitments. The charter is in the process of being redrafted and will be more closely monitored through the use of revised student questionnaires. The teaching and learning observation scheme is well established but further work needs to be done on the sharing of good practice in teaching and learning across the college. The college should raise student

achievement in those courses where student achievement rates are low. The college also needs to continue its work on developing the course approval system.

Revised grade: quality assurance 3.