

**Matthew Boulton College of Further and Higher Education
Reinspection of General Resources: February 2000
Report from the Inspectorate
The Further Education Funding Council**

THE FURTHER EDUCATION FUNDING COUNCIL{PRIVATE }

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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Matthew Boulton College of Further and Higher Education West Midlands Region

Reinspection of general resources: February 2000

Background

Matthew Boulton College of Further and Higher Education was inspected in November 1998 and the findings were published in inspection report 18/99. Provision in general resources was awarded a grade 4.

The strength of the provision was the good services and facilities provided by the learning resource centres. The main weaknesses identified at inspection were: the high proportion of unused accommodation, poor library provision and the inconvenient opening times of some resource areas and of the library. There were inadequacies in IT provision. For example, 80% of computers used outdated versions of industry standard software. There was a mixture of incompatible machines. Response times to Internet requests were unacceptably slow.

The reinspection took place over five days in February 2000. The inspector visited the college's main sites, assessed facilities and equipment, scrutinised the documentation provided by the college and held meetings with managers and students.

Assessment

Progress has been made in each area of weakness identified in the last inspection. Many of the shortcomings have been overcome.

The revised accommodation strategy is clearly linked to the strategic plan. This strategy and the introduction of centralised, computer-based timetabling arrangements have resulted in some rationalisation of room usage. Premises costs have been reduced and a substantial amount of space has been decommissioned. There are significant improvements in the utilisation of space. Maintenance requirements have been thoroughly reviewed and a room condition survey has been undertaken. Provision has been concentrated onto the Sherlock and Hope Street sites. Significant and continuing improvements have been made to the college environment in all but a few areas.

The good services and facilities provided by the learning resource centres were recognised at the last inspection. A complete refurbishment of the library and learning resource centres has since been undertaken. Library provision is now good. The remodelling of the library entrance has provided access for wheelchair users. There is a new computerised library catalogue and a new policy for library purchases. There is a well-resourced facility within the library that provides on-line access to information about Europe. Other improvements since the last inspection include: additional staffing, significant investment in new library books supported by standards funding, more convenient opening hours for the library and resource-based learning centres and access to the library catalogue in the learning centres.

Since the previous inspection the college has made a significant investment in IT facilities and equipment and opened a prestigious high technology centre. As a result of an integrated approach to all aspects of college IT there are now 325 computers of very high specification available to students, giving a ratio of full-time equivalent students to computers of 6.6:1. A single college network has been installed and all computers in the resource-based learning centres are connected to the network and to the Internet. Many staff and students regularly

use electronic mail and the Internet but response times are still too slow. Further planned improvements will allow students file and storage space on the network as well as full access to the developing college intranet.

The majority of the college's estate currently in use is accessible to people with restricted mobility. However, the new high technology centre, which provides a regional centre of excellence for printing, and the three-dimensional art and design workshop do not have wheelchair access. The college plans to address this problem.

The college should: continue to implement its accommodation strategy; continue to improve its space utilisation.

Revised grade: general resources 3.