

Regent College
Reinspection of Science: January 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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Regent College East Midlands Region

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Background

Regent College was inspected in March 1999 and the findings were published in inspection report 72/99. Provision in science was graded 4, consistent with the college's self-assessment.

The main strengths were: well-planned courses; a broad range of subject support strategies for students; well-maintained laboratories and good resources; good retention rates on some courses. The main weaknesses included: poor achievements on GCE A level courses; lack of systematic lesson planning; ineffective teaching and classroom management in some lessons; overgenerous marking of some students' work.

Following the inspection the college prepared an action plan with detailed strategies to improve each of the main weaknesses identified in the report. The college revised its self-assessment report in December 1999, making use of a range of evidence on students' achievements and including internal lesson observation grades.

The provision in science was reinspected over four days in January 2000. Fifteen lessons were observed, including several practical sessions. The inspector scrutinised a wide range of students' work and documentation provided by the college. Meetings were held with managers, teachers, technicians and students.

Assessment

Good progress has been made in addressing the weaknesses identified by the previous inspection. The strengths identified at that time are still evident. Science staff have benefited from a thorough programme of professional development. Courses are effectively organised and lessons are carefully planned, with clear statements of learning outcomes, and sound organisation of practical activities. The proportion of lessons judged to be good or outstanding improved substantially compared with the original inspection, increasing from 36% to 67%. This figure is above the 62% for all inspections in this programme area for 1998-99. The introduction of GNVQ science courses has meant that the college is now providing courses that will lead to more appropriate accreditation for some students. The lessons observed on these courses indicated some outstanding practice and a range of activities appropriate to the abilities of the students.

Marking of students' work is rigorous and there are constructive comments on all marked work. Considerable progress has been made in the development of standard departmental approaches to marking. Teachers make good use of a homework cover sheet. There is a regular programme of tests, and revision sessions. Students make good use of the science study area, which has been further developed since the last inspection.

Students' work observed during the inspection reflected good achievement in all practical and coursework seen. In 1999 there were significant improvements in pass rates in GCE A level biology and chemistry, both in overall passes and higher grades. The value-added scores for all science subjects also improved in 1999. The retention and achievement rates on the science access course remained above national averages. Retention so far this academic year

is above 93% for the majority of courses. Retention on the GNVQ advanced course is currently 100%.

Some weaknesses remain. Pass rates at GCE A level are still generally below the national average. Pass rates in physics have not improved. Teachers do not always ensure that there are strategies to cater for the wide range of abilities in some classes. Teaching approaches to revision sessions are variable and there is scope for sharing good practice. Students' work in physics and, to a lesser extent, chemistry, often has mistakes in calculations caused by wrong or omitted units, or inappropriate numbers of significant figures. The college has provided some voluntary numeracy support, but this is currently only available to students in the first year of GCE A level courses.

Revised grade: science 3.