

**Stoke-on-Trent College**  
**Reinspection of Construction Crafts: 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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**Stoke-on-Trent College**  
**West Midlands Region**

**Reinspection of construction crafts: January 2001**

**Background**

Stoke-on-Trent College was inspected in October 1999 and the findings published in the inspection report 19/00. Provision in construction crafts was awarded a grade 4.

The key strengths were: a broad range of construction craft courses; good, well-equipped specialist accommodation; good teaching of practical subjects; and good links with local high schools. The weaknesses were: teaching not effectively planned for mixed-ability classes; students' achievements well below the national average; some retention rates below the national average; and information upon hazardous materials not readily available to students.

The reinspection took place in January 2001. Inspectors observed 13 lessons and held meetings with staff and students. They examined students' work, reviewed resources and scrutinised documentation, including student achievement and retention data.

**Assessment**

The provision has greatly improved in the 15 months since the inspection. There is evidence of improvements in the quality of teaching and learning and in students' retention and achievement. Most lessons are good and there is no unsatisfactory teaching. The percentage of higher grades awarded for lesson observations is above the national average for the programme area identified in *Quality and Standards in Further Education 1999-2000: Chief inspector's annual report*. Lessons are generally well planned. In the best lessons, there are clear objectives and the delivery and coverage of topics is well managed. In most lessons teachers make extensive efforts to meet individuals' learning needs. Most students participate well in lessons and their knowledge and understanding is cleverly extended through debate. A wide variety of teaching methods is used to stimulate students and to extend their learning. These include the effective use of videos, overhead transparencies, and models, combined with a good use of whiteboard presentations. Teachers offer students good support and guidance. They make constructive use of their industrial knowledge and enthusiasm to inform lively and stimulating construction activities. Information is provided at the appropriate level mainly in the form of paper-based materials but some learning materials are not suitable for all abilities in the group, especially the less able students. Teachers share their own industrial experience to ensure that learning is relevant to the industry and encourage students to talk of their own experience. Practical work is carried out safely with students demonstrating good skills. Less effective lessons rely too heavily on contributions from the teacher and some students do not effectively participate. Some group sizes are too small for there to be good student interaction and learning from peers. Opportunities to reinforce key skills are sometimes missed. The standard of students' computing skills has improved to a satisfactory level. The marking of students' work is fair and consistent. However, some teachers fail to provide detailed feedback to enable students to learn from their mistakes. In one example, there was no evidence that the course work had been marked. The average class size of eight students was low compared with the national average for the programme area of 10.9. Average attendance in lessons was 71%, which is similar to the sector average for all construction lessons observed in 1999-2000.

Most student retention rates have been below the national average for the last two years. There was, however, good student retention and achievement at NVQ level 1 in 2000. At NVQ level 2, student retention has been poor for the last three years. In spite of improvements in 2000 the retention rate at NVQ level 2 was still more than 20% below the national average. Achievement at NVQ level 2, however, rose significantly in 2000 to above the national average. Student achievement at NVQ level 3 improved significantly in 2000 to well above the national average.

There is a wide range of construction craft courses that include those not often found at foundation level. There are good and improving links with local high schools and employers. Curriculum management is satisfactory. There is good, well-equipped specialist accommodation including some useful learning resource centres. The quality of hand tools reflects industrial standards. Teachers are well qualified for the courses they teach. The quality of information on hazardous materials has improved, is readily available to students and forms part of assignments. Students' understanding of this information is reinforced in theory lessons. Good use has been made of standards funding to improve the quality of teaching, and to provide effective staff development on managing disruptive behaviour.

The college should address: the low student retention at NVQ level 2; the small class sizes; missed opportunities to reinforce key skills; the inconsistent practice in the marking of students' work; and the unsuitability of some learning materials.

**Revised grade:** construction crafts 3.

**A summary of retention and achievement rates in construction crafts, 1998 to 2000**

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
NVQ	1	Number of starters	47	71	76
		Retention (%)	77	61	87
		Achievement (%)	49	70	89
NVQ	2	Number of starters	219	214	224
		Retention (%)	49	39	55
		Achievement (%)	55	67	78
NVQ	3	Number of starters	121	45	49
		Retention (%)	88	71	82
		Achievement (%)	46	59	87

*Source: ISR (1998 and 1999), college 2000*