

**Warrington Collegiate Institute
Reinspection of Quality Assurance
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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**Warrington Collegiate Institute
North West Region**

Reinspection of quality assurance: January 2000

Background

The college was inspected in November 1998 and the findings published in February 1999, report 21/99. Provision in quality assurance was graded 4.

The key strengths were: a comprehensive quality assurance framework; and well-targeted staff development activities including the introduction of lesson observation. The major weaknesses were: unclear links between groups with quality assurance remits; ineffective implementation of the quality assurance system; lack of rigour in course reviews; underdeveloped analysis of attendance, retention and achievement data; failure of lesson observation procedures to identify weak practice; and a failure to address the weakness in teaching and learning identified in the previous inspection.

Reinspection took place in January 2000. Inspectors examined a range of documents, scrutinised students' achievement and retention data, examined students' work, had meetings with managers and staff and spoke with students from a range of courses.

Assessment

Following the 1998 inspection the college undertook a major reorganisation to make more explicit the responsibilities for quality and standards at senior and middle manager level. Two senior managers have responsibility for curriculum and quality, and performance and information, respectively. They have well-defined roles and work closely with new middle managers. In each curriculum area there is one manager with responsibility for quality and another for business performance. Two college-wide middle manager posts, student quality manager and information and learning technology development manager, have already made progress in identifying issues to be addressed. New posts of attendance administrators, based in curriculum areas, monitor student attendance, follow up absences and assist tutors in identifying quickly issues which might contribute to students leaving their courses early.

The college has established a clearer link between groups with a quality assurance remit. It has established a quality review team to monitor the outcomes of termly course reviews and to identify progress on action taken. A management panel reviews the performance of curriculum teams against targets each term. The reconstituted academic board, through its subcommittee, monitors the effectiveness of quality assurance arrangements. A new corporation committee, the standards and curriculum committee, agrees performance indicators and targets, monitors performance and requires management action on issues of concern.

The college is systematically taking action to improve the implementation of the quality assurance strategy at course team level. The revised framework includes the redefinition of the role of course teams which now sets out clearly what is expected of them. A core agenda for course team meetings has been introduced and is carefully monitored by senior managers to ensure that the agenda is used effectively. There are agreed performance indicators for course teams. However, as the college recognises in its self-assessment report, there is not yet full compliance in all course teams with the revised arrangements. There remains some

inconsistency of practice and lack of rigour in course review and evaluation and in the self-assessment process.

The college has made a concerted effort to improve arrangements for lesson observation and to strengthen arrangements for identifying poor practice in teaching and learning. A revised scheme for 1999-2000 has been introduced which includes arrangements for moderating judgements and grades and a dual observation system to include an observer from outside the curriculum area who accompanies the manager observing the class. The college has met its target for lesson observations and has made an effort to improve standardising arrangements to align more realistically grades awarded with national norms. Where poor teaching is observed, the teacher is referred to the college curriculum centre for guidance and support. The curriculum centre is also instrumental in disseminating good practice identified in lesson observation and organising a rolling programme of staff training. The college has made an effective response to unsatisfactory teaching identified in the inspection. The grades awarded by inspectors during the reinspection represent a significant improvement compared with those awarded at the previous inspection.

The college arrangements for internal inspection and monitoring of action plans have improved since the last inspection. The college has established links with another college in the region to develop good practice. There are improvements in seeking and effectively using students' views. There are student representatives in 90% of substantive courses and student focus groups have been introduced. Student questionnaires and course review and evaluation arrangements have been revised to increase the focus on teaching and learning. There is effective training provided for course representatives. The analysis of attendance, retention and achievement data has improved since the last inspection. A system of strategic quality reviews has been introduced which uses current, historic and national benchmarking data to review retention and achievement rates for all courses. The corporation has agreed eight performance indicators as a framework to undertake strategic quality review. However, the use of benchmarking data for the self-assessment report was not always effectively used by course teams last year and the absence of timely data in September 1999 impeded the rigour of analysis at course and curriculum levels.

Inspectors agreed with the college assessment of achievement and retention in the updated self-assessment report. The impact of procedures in achievement is good, but retention is still below national benchmarks. Achievements are generally above national benchmarks at levels 1, 2, and 3 and there has been an improvement in achievements in the majority of qualifications over the last three years. Retention rates, however, remain below national benchmarks; the majority showing patterns of decline over three years.

Revised grade: quality assurance 3.