

Wirral Metropolitan College
Reinspection of General Resources: November 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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Wirral Metropolitan College North West Region

Reinspection of general resources: November 2000

Background

Wirral Metropolitan College was inspected in March 1999 and the findings were published in inspection report 69/99. Provision in general resources was graded 4.

The strengths of the provision were: some well-furnished areas at the Borough Road site; good quality teaching and refectory accommodation at the International Business and Management Centre; and welcoming neighbourhood colleges and outreach centres. The weaknesses were: much excess accommodation; planned maintenance not being carried out; several years of insufficient expenditure on curriculum resources; IT not well used or monitored; and limited access for students with restricted mobility.

The provision was reinspected over four days in November 2000. Inspectors visited the college's three main sites and one outreach centre, assessed facilities and equipment, held meetings with students, staff and managers and scrutinised a wide range of college documents. Inspectors found that the self-assessment report was comprehensive and evaluative and they agreed with the majority of its findings.

Assessment

Substantial improvements have been made since the previous inspection. The college has successfully implemented the first phase of its accommodation strategy. A significant proportion of the college's excess accommodation has been taken out of use prior to disposal. The remainder has been refurbished and re-allocated to better meet curriculum and service area needs. For example, catering, hairdressing and beauty courses have been moved from Carlett Park to suites of better equipped accommodation at Conway Park (formally the International Business and Management Centre). There have been further improvements at the Borough Road site where most of the classrooms have been refurbished to a good standard. Much outstanding maintenance has been completed within the refurbishment programme, and the college has developed a new schedule for its planned preventative maintenance scheme. The college has implemented many of the key recommendations of its access audit and has improved access for people with restricted mobility. The quality of accommodation in outreach centres remains good. Resourcing of curriculum areas is much improved. Budgets are now allocated in good time and managers can plan expenditure over the whole year without fear of their budget being prematurely closed, as was often the case previously. Students now have good access to a high quality computer network. The purchase of 500 new computers and disposal of 300 outdated ones has improved to adequate the ratio of modern computers to students. Library facilities are much extended and better co-ordinated. The libraries now include a suite of open-access computers. They have closer links with curriculum areas. New books have been purchased in all curriculum areas and outdated books removed. All premises are much tidier and cleaner than they were. Many of the corridors are decorated with displays of students' work, marketing material and celebrations of students' success.

Although progress has been made there is much still to do. The college still has accommodation in excess of its requirements. Many of the public areas at Borough Road are still in need of refurbishment. Some rooms at this site are not numbered or are incorrectly

labelled. Although curriculum areas are clearly identified, routes through the buildings are not well signed, particularly for wheelchair users. Access for people with restricted mobility is improved but the college recognises that further work is required. As acknowledged in the self-assessment report, the opening hours of the college libraries have been reduced and staff are not able to provide all students with a full library induction. Car parking at the Borough Road site is limited and external lighting is still inadequate. Though the Carlett Park site has a gym and other outdoor sports facilities, there are insufficient sports and recreation facilities for students at other sites. The overall ratio of computers to college staff is good, but there are insufficient computers in some staff rooms.

Revised grade: general resources 3.