

Brighton College of Technology
Reinspection of Quality Assurance: February 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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Brighton College of Technology South East Region

Reinspection of quality assurance: February 2001

Background

Brighton College of Technology was inspected in March 2000 and the findings published in inspection report 86/00. Quality assurance was graded 4.

Inspectors judged as strengths the improving achievement rates on many courses and a well-documented quality assurance system. Although the college had recently reviewed existing policies and practices, and roles and responsibilities for aspects of quality assurance were defined clearly, inspectors identified more weaknesses than strengths. These included: the lack of an overall strategy to improve persistently poor retention; some weak course reviews; inconsistently implemented quality assurance procedures; and findings from lesson observations not being used to improve the quality of teaching.

Reinspection took place in February 2001. Inspectors examined college records, policy documents, the self-assessment report, course reviews, and considered the effectiveness of the post-inspection action plan. They interviewed governors, managers, teachers and students.

Assessment

The college is progressing well in achieving the objectives and targets set out in its action plan. A manager has been appointed with specific responsibility for improving student retention rates. There is now a retention strategy which sets objectives with quantifiable targets. Progress in meeting these is monitored carefully. Course leaders are provided regularly with retention data as part of the course review process. Curriculum directors meet the principal each month to report on retention, attendance and student satisfaction. There has been a significant improvement in the number of students retained at this stage in the year compared with the same period last year. The recently formed standards committee of the corporation monitors closely student achievement, retention and progress against performance indicators and advises the corporation on quality matters.

Since the inspection the college has revised and improved its course review process and it is now implemented across the college. Staff understand and support the quality assurance system and the part they play in it. Course reviews form an integral part of the college's self-assessment process. They are now completed three times a year. All course reviews have been completed within the required timescale. The accuracy of the data which informs course evaluation and action planning has improved. Its regular use in course review provides an opportunity to address errors. The college acknowledges that not all course reviews are analysed sufficiently rigorously and has planned some additional training for staff to address this weakness.

The rigour applied to lesson observations has been improved and observation findings are being used to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Tutorials are also observed, and targets for improvement in retention and student satisfaction have been set as a measure of success. The college is set to meet its target of observing 80% of teachers this year. Lessons given a grade 3 or less are observed again within four weeks. The college has recognised that some grading remains generous and is addressing this through additional training and increased internal moderation of grades. Lesson observation grades, and the identification of

staff development needs, are central to the college's staff appraisal scheme. All full-time and permanent part-time teachers are appraised annually and the scheme is being extended to include part-time sessional teachers. Staff have good opportunities for training and development.

The academic board's role has been significantly enhanced. Its deliberations are more focused and members contribute more effectively to debate and decision-making. In addition to advising the principal, it reports to the standards committee of the corporation on issues related to students' retention and achievements.

The college has made good use of standards funds in bringing about improvements to the quality system and some of its outcomes. In particular, there have been improvements in student retention and punctuality, the quality and accuracy of management information data, and the training and support needs of part-time teachers to help them improve teaching and learning. The pass rates on full-time courses are generally better than in 1999.

In order to effect further improvements, the college should: improve further students' achievements, particularly on part-time courses; maintain the rigour with which it monitors student attendance and retention; ensure that some weaker course reviews are conducted more analytically; and address some generous grading of lesson observations.

Revised grade: quality assurance 3.