

Furness College
Reinspection of Support for Students: 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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Furness College North West Region

Reinspection of support for students: February 2001

Background

Furness College was inspected in January 2000 and the findings were published in inspection report 52/00. Support for students was awarded a grade 4.

The strengths of the provision were: well-managed links with schools; good personal and financial support for students; good support for students with physical disabilities and sensory impairments; and successful monitoring of attendance. The weaknesses were: ineffective management arrangements; inadequate tutorial provision; ineffective identification of most additional support needs; lack of social and extra-curricular activities; insufficient use of careers education and guidance.

The provision was inspected over four days in February 2001. The inspector observed six tutorials, examined a wide range of documents and met with college managers, tutors, teachers and students.

Assessment

The college has made significant progress in addressing the weaknesses identified in the previous inspection while maintaining the strengths. Management and co-ordination of the different strands of student support are much improved. All staff now have job descriptions. Files for each section are comprehensive and contain minutes of the regular meetings of the student support management team and the section teams. The inspector agreed that a well-structured framework for the tutorial support of full-time students is now in place. A range of measures to ensure consistency of tutorial support include a tutors' guide, a published framework for group tutorials, the production of central resources to support tutors, printed record forms for use in individual tutorials, regular meetings of personal tutors, a tutorial newsletter and frequent briefing and training events. Improved links between subject teachers and personal tutors were demonstrated by the production of progress reports for all full-time students at the end of November 2000. There was a positive response to these by parents, employers and students. There is regular and effective monitoring of the quality of tutorial provision through student questionnaires, frequent focus groups and audits of tutorial documents. The director of student support, the senior tutor and curriculum managers regularly carry out observations of tutorials. In addition, an internal inspection of tutorial support was carried out in December 2000. These monitoring activities identified some areas for improvement and these have been incorporated into the action plan. There is now a clear student entitlement to careers education and guidance. Well-publicised arrangements for access to careers advisers have resulted in an increase in the number of students taking up individual careers interviews from 100 in the year preceding the last inspection to 212 so far this year. A specified programme of careers education and guidance forms part of the tutorial framework. Students have access to a pleasant and well-resourced careers library. They undertake visits and have talks from visiting speakers as part of careers education. Identification of the learning support needs of full-time students is now more systematic. Initial assessment of all full-time students following courses at levels 1, 2 and 3 took place during the induction week. Of students identified as needing support, 80% took it up. In addition, self-referred and some tutor-referred students, including approximately 120 part-time students, took up support. Students receiving support have individual learning plans.

Progress against these is tracked, recorded and reviewed with the students at frequent intervals. Full-time students benefit from a well-organised enrichment programme that comprises social, team-building activities and visits. Students complete an enrichment checklist that is signed by their personal tutor.

There remain areas in need of further improvement. Arrangements for supporting part-time students are unsystematic and inconsistent, a weakness not identified in the self-assessment. Part-time students are not systematically assessed to identify learning support needs, though they can self-refer or be referred by a teacher. Current arrangements do not take into account the reluctance of many students with learning support needs to complete the necessary forms or take action to secure appropriate support. The number receiving learning support remains low considering the high proportion of adult students and the high proportion of students following courses at foundation and intermediate levels. Tutorial support is not consistently provided for all part-time students. Though much training of personal tutors has already taken place, many need further training in interactive delivery of group tutorials, in organising tutor group activities to run alongside individual tutorials and in helping students to develop individual action plans

Revised grade: support for students 3.