

Soundwell College
Reinspection of Art, Design and Media Studies: 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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**Soundwell College
South West Region**

Reinspection of art, design and media studies: February 2001

Background

Soundwell College was inspected in March 2000 and the findings were published in inspection report 79/00. Provision in art, design and media studies was graded 4.

Strengths included: effective teaching on most courses; the detailed written feedback to students; and the high standard of students' work in music technology. Weaknesses included: the inappropriate combining of groups for teaching; poor achievement rates on national diploma media studies and GCE A level art courses; low retention rates; the poor quality of students' work on GNVQ art and design courses; and unsatisfactory accommodation and specialist equipment.

The provision was reinspected over three days in February 2001. The inspector observed lessons; met managers, teachers and students; examined students' portfolios, files, practical work in progress and finished work on display; and scrutinised documentation relating to the college and its courses.

Assessment

There has been good progress in addressing the weaknesses identified in the previous inspection. New staff have been appointed, the provision has been restructured and the curriculum reviewed. The British Display Society awards, the national diploma in media studies, GNVQ intermediate and advanced art and design, GCE A level art and the access to communicating arts courses have been discontinued, having attracted few students in the last three years. Data for 1999-2000 showed poor levels of achievement and low retention rates on a number of courses. Attendance and retention rates for the provision at 60% and 73% respectively, were well below the college's targets of 75% and 80%. A more coherent range of media arts courses has subsequently been put in place, with clearer aims and routes for progression. The provision for full-time students now includes a national diploma in multimedia, GCSE media and a GNVQ intermediate media course. These courses complement the GCE AS/A2 media and the national diploma in music technology, introduced in 1999. Students are responding well to the new programmes. Student numbers have increased. For example, there are now 27 national diploma in music technology students. The new media arts curriculum manager has made good progress in strengthening management procedures. Course and subject leaders with clearly defined responsibilities for curriculum co-ordination and delivery have been appointed. Teams meet regularly. Staff development has taken place to raise awareness of, and commitment to, the new curriculum developments. Student guidance and support systems are being strengthened. Procedures for monitoring attendance and punctuality and following up non-attendance are being enforced. Retention rates, on most courses, have improved. For example, retention on the national diploma in music technology has risen from 67% in March 2000 to 88% and 100% for years one and two, respectively. The majority of lessons observed were lively and interesting. Staff employed a variety of teaching methods, in most cases to good effect. There is an appropriate balance of practical and theoretical work. The needs of industry are taken into account. Staff produce assignments which provide students with good opportunities to develop professional skills by working on realistic exercises. There are clear grading criteria which are shared with students. Students receive constructive feedback from teachers. Most

students are able to comment accurately and realistically on their own progress. The quality of most students' work is good. The work is varied and includes many examples of experimenting with ideas, attention to detail and well-developed practical skills. The quality of the resources and the accommodation have improved. The use of space has been rationalised. More computers are available for students. The college should continue to: improve recruitment procedures to ensure that students are enrolled on courses which match their needs and abilities and limit withdrawals; share good practice in teaching and learning to ensure that learning objectives are achieved; extend the range of specialist equipment and accommodation.

Revised grade: art, design and media studies 3.