

Wirral Metropolitan College
Reinspection of Construction: October 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

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Background

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

The key strengths were: the good range of provision and opportunities for learning; a good resource centre and excellent brickwork facilities; and good practical and teamwork activities. The main weaknesses were: much inadequate teaching; poor retention and pass rates on most programmes; poor levels of attendance and punctuality; some unsafe facilities and practices; inadequate development of construction workshops; and insufficient key skills development for craft students.

The provision was reinspected over three days in October 2000. Inspectors observed 12 lessons, and met with managers, teachers and students. Students' work was examined, together with data on students' achievements and a wide range of documentation prepared for the reinspection.

Assessment

The quality of teaching has significantly improved. Inspectors judged that 67% of lessons were good. None were unsatisfactory. This is better than the national average of 57% for inspections in this programme area in 1999-2000. It also compares well with the outcomes of the previous inspection, when only 30% of lessons were good and 24% were unsatisfactory or poor. Lesson plans clearly identify learning objectives, resources required and how the needs of individual students will be met. Teachers use questioning effectively to check students' understanding. Poor student punctuality is challenged. The college has introduced key skills lessons for all full-time and substantive part-time courses, although the teaching materials used contain few construction-related examples. In poorer lessons teachers do not always share the experiences of individual students with the rest of the group, effectively draw the lesson to a close or correct poor workshop practice.

Retention and pass rates have improved since the last inspection. In 2000, both were above national averages for foundation level courses. However, retention and pass rates remain poor on most intermediate level craft courses and on some advanced technician courses. Attendance has improved to 76%, which is above the national average for this programme area. The average class size has improved to 11.2, also above the appropriate national average. Students are still not making enough use of IT in their portfolios.

Craft workshops have been relocated since the last inspection. Woodworking workshops are now clean and tidy, and have sufficient teaching and assessment areas with good quality hand and power tools. Good health and safety practices adopted for workshops include the requirement for students to wear hard hats and safety footwear. Weaknesses remain in specialist resources. For example there is a lack of computers in workshops.

Management of the curriculum has improved. A detailed action plan addressed issues raised at the last inspection. There is a strong emphasis on improving the quality of teaching and learning. There is increased sharing of good practice between different crafts, such as the

adoption of standard internal verification procedures. Newly introduced entry and foundation level craft qualifications better meet the needs of students. Links with employers and parents have improved. Course teams monitor the views of students and their attendance, retention and pass rates. However, analysis of this information at course and programme area levels is not rigorous enough.

Revised grade: construction 3.