

**Wirral Metropolitan College**  
**Reinspection of Management: 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.*

*Cheylesmore House  
Quinton Road  
Coventry CV1 2WT  
Telephone 02476 863000  
Fax 02476 862100  
website: <http://www.fefc.ac.uk>*

© FEFC 2000

*You may photocopy this report and use extracts in promotional or other material provided quotes are accurate, and the findings are not misrepresented.*

## **Wirral Metropolitan College North West Region**

### **Reinspection of management: November 2000**

#### **Background**

Wirral Metropolitan College was inspected in March 1999 and the findings published in inspection report 69/99. Management received a grade 5.

In the inspection in 1999, inspectors did not agree with any of the key strengths identified by the college in its self-assessment report. The audit service assessed financial management as weak. There were no key strengths of management. The major weaknesses were: failure to deliver the college mission; weak financial management and the critical financial situation; disorganised planning, based on inaccurate data; poor management of resources; poor internal communications; lack of target-setting; and the lack of review of teaching and learning.

Management was reinspected over four days November 2000. Inspectors examined a range of documents, held meetings with managers and staff and held discussions with representatives of the college's external partners.

#### **Assessment**

The college has made considerable progress in addressing the major weaknesses identified during the previous inspection. Its self-assessment report recognises both the progress made and the work still to be done. The new principal took up post in May 1999 and, together with other managers, has successfully introduced a more open and responsive style of management. Improvements have been made to the management structure. The responsibilities of key postholders are now clearly set out. Managers understand their roles and have been given increased responsibility for implementing actions, including delegated budgets. A new system of programme management at curriculum level includes a greater emphasis on team working and this is well supported through a cycle of cross-college meetings. Curriculum management, the quality of teaching and learning and the resources available to support learning have significantly improved. Through much improved internal communications, staff now have a clearer understanding of the issues facing the college and their part in addressing them. The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is adequate. The underlying financial position is still weak. The internal auditors have reported some weaknesses in the application of the internal control system.

College managers have responded to the need to reduce costs and have implemented the first phase of the accommodation strategy. The previous absence of a marketing strategy has been addressed with vigour. Publicity materials, links with press and radio, the compilation and analysis of data to inform planning at all levels have begun to improve the college's image in the communities it serves. Links with employers and the community are developing positively.

Though there has been significant progress, much still needs to be done. The cross-college roles of senior managers are insufficiently well defined. Arrangements for the college management team to review progress systematically against strategic and operational objectives and to monitor teaching and learning are not yet complete. There has been much improvement this year in the reliability of college management information. However,

further work is needed to provide managers with direct access to data and to train them in its use. The historic unreliability of management information has made difficult any analysis of trends towards targets and key performance indicators. Data for 1999-2000 indicate that, although there has been some improvement in retention, pass rates remain below sector averages on a number of courses, particularly those at levels 2 and 3. Some key policy documents, especially in relation to management of staff, have yet to be updated to meet the needs of the college. The college has made slow progress in implementing its equal opportunities policy.

**Revised grade:** management 3.