

# **Workers' Educational Association**

**REPORT FROM  
THE INSPECTORATE  
1998-99**

**THE  
FURTHER  
EDUCATION  
FUNDING  
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL**

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*College inspections are carried out in accordance with the framework and guidelines described in Council Circulars 97/12, 97/13 and 97/22. Inspections seek to validate the data and judgements provided by colleges in self-assessment reports. They involve full-time inspectors and registered part-time inspectors who have knowledge of, and experience in, the work they inspect. A member of the Council's audit service works with inspectors in assessing aspects of governance and management. All colleges are invited to nominate a senior member of their staff to participate in the inspection as a team member.*

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## Grade Descriptors

Inspectors assess the strengths and weaknesses of each aspect of provision they inspect. Their assessments are set out in the report. They use 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 the 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.

Aggregated grades for aspects of cross-college provision and curriculum areas, for colleges inspected during 1997-98, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1	2	3	4	5
	%	%	%	%	%
Curriculum areas	9	60	29	2	-
Cross-college provision	18	54	24	4	-

Source: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1997-98: Chief inspector's annual report*  
Sample size: 108 college inspections

## Student Achievements

Where data on student achievements appear in tables, levels of achievement are shown in three ways:

- as expected completions, which is the number of initial enrolments on qualifications where the student expected to complete the qualification in a given year. For example, a student on a two-year programme who began their programme in October 1995, would appear in the results for 1996-97 because this is the year in which they expected to complete their qualification
- as a retention rate, which is the percentage of qualifications which the students have completed as expected (or are continuing with the prospect of late completion). For programmes of study of two years or more, retention is calculated across the whole programme, that is, from the start to the end of the qualification
- as an achievement rate, which is the number of qualifications students have fully achieved as a percentage of completed qualifications with a known outcome. Partial achievements are not shown.

# Summary

## Workers' Educational Association

### *Greater London Region*

#### Inspected March 1999

The Workers' Educational Association is a large national provider of adult education. It is designated under the *Further and Higher Education Act 1992*, as eligible to receive funding from the FEFC for provision described in schedule 2 of the Act, together with non-schedule 2 provision. The association is a voluntary movement and is deeply committed to student democracy. Students are members of the association and many become actively involved in its governance. There are 13 districts of the association in England and a Scottish association. Only provision in England was inspected. Some 2,500 venues are used for teaching. The association aims to provide liberal education and to widen participation for 'working class adults and those who are socially, economically or educationally disadvantaged'. All students are part time and 89% are aged 25 or over. The association carried out its first self-assessment since 1995 in preparation for the inspection. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements made in the report. They found some additional strengths and weaknesses and attached more significance to some identified weaknesses.

The association offers courses in nine of the 10 FEFC programme areas. Most provision is non-schedule 2. The inspection sampled five curriculum areas which represented more than two-thirds of the provision. Most teaching is of

good quality and some is outstanding. Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is poor and its quality has declined since the last inspection. The 'learning outcomes strategy', where students assess their own learning in non-schedule 2 courses, is beneficial but not yet sufficiently rigorous. Guidance and aspects of support are effective. Classes are offered in centres convenient to students. Students' views are central to quality assurance and, since the last inspection, quality improvement strategies have led to the development of useful national systems and some better provision. The knowledgeable and committed voluntary members are a major strength. The clear mission, values and strategic objectives lead to successful widening of participation and significant contributions to lifelong learning. Extensive partnerships with other organisations are productive. There is effective communication and teamwork among staff and with voluntary members. If it is to continue to improve its provision, the association should: ensure consistently high quality in its provision nationally; improve provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities; and develop more rigorous assessment of students' learning. It should also: improve overall arrangements for quality assurance; monitor strategic plans and provision using comprehensive and reliable data; improve financial planning and management; address weaknesses in the audit committee; and establish standards, targets and performance indicators.

The grades awarded as a result of the inspection are given below.

<b>Curriculum area</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Cross-college provision</b>	<b>Grade</b>
Trade union studies	2	Support for students	2
Art, design, crafts and music	2	General resources	3
History, archaeology, philosophy and religion	2	Quality assurance	3
Personal development	2	Governance	3
Basic education	3	Management	3

## The Association and its Mission

1 The Workers' Educational Association was founded in 1903 by a conference representing trade unions, the co-operative movement and universities. Initially, provision was mostly university extramural lectures but the association soon began to develop its own local classes. In 1991, a national conference decided that the districts should combine to form one national association. The districts in Northern Ireland and Wales decided to become separate. The Scottish and English districts combined to form a single organisation, the association, which began operating in 1993.

2 The Workers' Educational Association is a large national provider of adult education with a strong commitment to widening participation and lifelong learning. The association defines itself first and foremost as a voluntary movement. Its many hundred voluntary members at branch, district and national levels are recruited primarily from the student body. The association is deeply committed to student democracy. It is a registered charity and is non-party in politics and non-sectarian in religion. The association is designated under section 28 of the *Further and Higher Education Act 1992* (the Act) as eligible for funding from the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) for provision defined within schedule 2 of the Act, together with non-schedule 2 provision.

3 Its charitable aims are:

- 'stimulating and satisfying the demand of adults for liberal education, through direct provision of courses and other activities
- providing, in particular, for the needs of working class adults and of those who are socially, economically or educationally disadvantaged
- providing educational programmes for appropriate organisations concerned with the collective needs of adults in the community and in the workplace
- generally furthering the advancement of education to the end that all children,

adolescents and adults may have full opportunities of the education needed for their complete individual and social development'.

4 The association's governance, including the scope for delegation of powers, is determined by the association's constitution, which is also its trust deed. The constitution's aims and objects provide the basis of the association's mission statement. Twenty-eight national organisations are affiliated to the association at national level. There are 13 districts in England and a Scottish association. Across the districts there are 615 local branches. Branch members, drawn mainly from the students enrolled on courses in the branch, plan and organise provision in their local area. Some branches offer only one or two courses each year in their village and others are larger and offer substantial provision, for example across a whole city.

5 In 1997-98, the association ran 8,433 courses in a wide range of subjects. All courses are part time and typically comprise 10 or 12 weekly classes lasting two or three hours. The largest programme areas are in art, crafts and music; history, archaeology, philosophy and religion; personal development; and literature, languages and communications. The number of enrolments has grown by about 20% since the last inspection. In 1997-98, there were 119,300 enrolments, of which 84% were in non-schedule 2 provision. Planned learning outcomes are specified for all non-schedule 2 courses and students assess their own learning against these. Most non-schedule 2 provision is organised by the branches. The majority of schedule 2 provision, and some non-schedule 2 programmes designed specifically for disadvantaged groups, is managed directly by districts. In the last few years, the association has increased the proportion of its schedule 2 courses. The association works in close partnership with many organisations at local, regional and national levels and offers some joint provision with universities. Other association activities include an international

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educational programme, often sustained through its membership of the International Federation of Workers' Education Associations. The association hosts the Secretariat of the European Regional Organisation of the International Federation of Workers' Education Associations (EURO-WEA). To support its international programme, the association leases a small office in Brussels serviced by a member of staff.

6 There are 17 senior managers at district and national levels; the general secretary is the association's chief executive. National senior managers are based in the London national office. At both district and national levels, other specialist staff are employed in information and communication technologies, finance, marketing, personnel and health and safety. There are 197 tutor organisers and project officers who are responsible for managing the educational programmes. Administrative and clerical staff are employed at national, district and subdistrict levels. Almost all teaching is carried out by part-time tutors. There are approximately 6,000 tutors registered on the districts' panels.

## The Inspection

7 The association was inspected over a two-week period starting on 15 March 1999. In the week beginning 15 March, curriculum areas and cross-college aspects were inspected in the association's 13 districts. In the week beginning 22 March, inspectors completed the inspection of cross-college aspects in the association's national office in London. The association was notified in December 1998 of the sample of provision to be inspected. The inspection was carried out by 24 inspectors and two auditors working for a total of 112 days. Inspectors observed lessons, evaluated students' work and examined documents. Meetings were held with voluntary members, governors, managers, tutors, other staff, students and representatives of various organisations that work in

partnership with the association. In addition, inspectors observed several meetings of voluntary members and governors at branch, district and national levels.

8 Before the inspection, inspectors reviewed the self-assessment report and considered information from other directorates of the FEFC. Inspectors also checked data against primary sources of evidence, such as registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies. Inspectors made two visits to interpret data on students' achievements and identified several problems with these data. These same problems have made it difficult for the association to monitor its own performance. Information for the years 1995-96 and 1996-97 was taken from the individualised student record (ISR) held by the FEFC. Information for 1997-98 was supplied by the association. The FEFC funds the association for schedule 2 and non-schedule 2 provision. Most of the provision is non-accredited. Before 1996-97, the FEFC did not require the association to record information about students' achievements on the ISR. The association does not have its own records of students' achievements for 1995-96 or 1996-97. The association's data in the FEFC ISR for 1995-96 and 1996-97 and those submitted by the association on students' achievements for 1997-98 were found by inspectors to be unreliable. Analysis of these data was difficult because of an inconsistent approach to recording withdrawals from courses and because of some incomplete recording of achievement rates on schedule 2 courses. No information is recorded for achievements on non-schedule 2 courses. For these reasons, it has not been possible to include tables of comparative data in the curriculum sections of the report or to present a table showing a three-year trend in retention and achievements for the association's provision. There is no systematic assessment of the value added to students' achievements by their courses of study, and the association does not collect comprehensive information about the destinations of students. Such procedures are

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difficult or inappropriate, given that many students are on short courses. Student retention and achievement targets are not set at national or district level. The association identified a number of problems relating to accuracy, and the appropriateness, of monitoring and recording of students' achievements on non-schedule 2 courses.

9 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1997-98. Of the 103 lessons observed, 74% were judged to be outstanding or good. This is above the national average recorded for all lessons inspected in 1997-98.

## Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
Lessons (No.)	27	49	19	4	4	103
Total (%)	26	48	18	4	4	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1997-98 (%)	19	46	29	6	0	100

Source for national average: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1997-98: Chief inspector's annual report*

10 The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1997-98.

## Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Workers' Educational Association	11.2	78
National average, all inspected colleges 1997-98	10.4	77

Source for national average: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1997-98: Chief inspector's annual report*



# Curriculum Areas

## Trade Union Studies

### Grade 2

**11 Inspectors observed 18 lessons across three districts, of which 17 were accredited through the National Open College Network. The provision included stages 1 and 2 of the Trades Union Congress courses in health and safety and those for workplace representatives. A small amount of other provision was also inspected. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report, although a few weaknesses were not identified.**

#### Key strengths

- well-planned lessons with clear objectives
- appropriately varied and effective teaching methods
- effective negotiation of the curriculum with students
- good retention rates
- good achievement rates on accredited courses
- highly supportive tutors
- relevant curriculum jointly planned with the Trades Union Congress and individual unions

#### Weaknesses

- lack of target-setting
- weak analysis of achievement data
- inadequate teaching accommodation and few teaching aids in some venues
- students' lack of access to information technology (IT)

12 Trade union studies accounts for almost 5% of the association's provision and a significant proportion of the accredited courses offered. It makes an important contribution to meeting the

association's mission 'to provide programmes which meet the collective needs of adults in the workplace'. Provision is carefully planned to meet the needs of trade unions. Inspectors agreed that courses are well planned and relevant. In addition to courses for health and safety and workplace representatives, there are three-day induction courses for newly-appointed representatives and a range of five-day courses on employment law and human resource management. There is a small amount of distance learning but no system for accrediting students' previous learning. Each district has built up effective links with local trade unions. Some courses are carefully designed to meet the needs of a particular trade union. Targets for enrolment, retention and achievement are not set. The self-assessment identified this weakness.

13 Inspectors agreed that the planning of courses and good-quality teaching are major strengths. Occasionally, tutors use ineffective methods and students are not encouraged to reflect on their learning. Weaknesses in teaching were not noted in the self-assessment. Working within a curriculum framework agreed nationally by the association, tutors negotiate thoroughly with students the content of the course and the teaching methods to be used to ensure that courses are relevant and suited to students' preferred learning styles. This strength was identified in the self-assessment report. Tutors are highly supportive of students' learning. They are skilled in working with students from diverse backgrounds and students who have little confidence as learners. Most lessons started with a useful meeting managed by students and designed to give practice in committee skills. In the most effective meetings, issues from the students' own workplaces were used as a focus for discussion. A strong feature of all courses is the emphasis given to reviewing students' work experiences and to using the findings to plan further skill development. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that

# Curriculum Areas

case studies and role-plays are used effectively. Occasionally, contributions from members are not used effectively and discussions are superficial.

14 Students are recruited by their own trade union or the Trades Union Congress. Many students have not received any formal education or training since leaving school. Most achieve well on these courses. Attendance rates are good and association data for 1997-98 show retention is high, at 96%. On stage 1 courses, students are able to achieve National Open College Network credits at levels 1 or 2, and on stage 2 courses at levels 2 or 3. The association does not analyse data to assess what levels of credit are achieved. The association figures for 1997-98 show that, as identified in the self-assessment, achievement rates are good; 83% of students who completed their course gained accreditation. Students speak with pride about their achievements and demonstrate how they apply newly-learned skills and knowledge at work and in their union. Several students described their successes in negotiating with employers about health and safety issues as a consequence of their studies. One district has a well-established system of cluster moderation meetings where four local providers, including the association, have joint moderation meetings to standardise accreditation.

15 Tutors are mainly part time and all have appropriate qualifications and a wealth of relevant experience. Tutors are required to attend appropriate induction and briefing days organised by the Trades Union Congress. Inspectors agreed that staff development for part-time tutors is effective and remedies a weakness identified in the previous inspection report. In one district, a process of class visiting for the purpose of checking on the quality of teaching and learning is well established and effective. Some teaching accommodation is of good quality whilst some is poor. The self-assessment stated that some teaching rooms are too small for the size of the groups and that

there is a lack of learning aids and inspectors agreed. Inspectors also agreed that students have too little access to IT. Plans have been made to increase provision of IT.

# Curriculum Areas

## Arts, Design, Crafts and Music

### Grade 2

**16 Inspectors observed 22 lessons across three districts in art, crafts and music. Almost all provision is non-accredited. Improvements have been made since the last inspection. Inspectors broadly agreed with the judgements made in the self-assessment report, although they placed a different emphasis on some strengths and weaknesses.**

#### Key strengths

- good-quality and some outstanding teaching
- high levels of student motivation
- a wide range of provision with some innovative new courses
- effective widening of participation
- highly committed tutors sensitive to the needs of adult learners
- students' effective development of skills and knowledge
- opportunities for students to exhibit their work

#### Weaknesses

- narrow range of teaching methods in music appreciation
- insufficient attention given to basic principles in visual arts
- underdeveloped arrangements for evaluating attendance, retention and achievement data
- poor teaching accommodation in some venues

17 Almost a quarter of the association's provision is in art, crafts and music. Overall, a diverse range of provision is offered, although the choice of specialist visual art and performing arts courses available to students varies between branches and districts. Courses are

usually well subscribed and significant numbers of students re-enrol. In many cases, students negotiate the content of courses and the teaching methods to be used on a termly basis to meet their needs and expanding interests. These negotiations lead to courses that are designed to give students opportunities for progression.

18 Some districts are increasing community-based provision to widen participation. Valuable initiatives have been introduced in response to the needs of particular local communities in areas with substantial levels of social and economic deprivation. Examples include IT-related design courses in desktop publishing, music technology and courses with a clear cultural focus, such as handloom weaving and African drumming.

19 Teaching is of a good standard and, in the sample of lessons observed, about one-third was judged to be outstanding. Inspectors agreed with the statements in the self-assessment report that most courses are planned effectively and are well organised. In some lessons, tutors provide enriching contextual information, by describing, for example, the social and economic conditions during the life of an artist and making references to the literature of the period. The use of informative printed learning materials further motivates students and extends their interests. Inspectors agreed that some tutors are particularly successful in inspiring students. Tutors generate a strong sense of shared commitment and an intense loyalty among students to their course of study. The range of teaching methods used in music appreciation lessons and some courses in crafts is narrow and lessons are not demanding enough for students. In some visual arts courses, tutors give insufficient attention to ensuring that students understand the key theoretical principles that underpin their practical work. These weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment report. Arrangements for co-ordinating curriculum

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developments at national level and identifying and disseminating good practice are underdeveloped.

20 Inspectors agreed that the 'learning outcomes' strategy has strengthened provision since the last inspection. The strategy provides tutors with a means to monitor the achievements of students on non-accredited courses. Students' evaluation of their learning also provides tutors and district managers with useful information for the review of provision. However, inspectors found that although the strategy is used well by tutors and students, the system does not provide an adequate record of students' progress and the measurable advances they make in learning. This weakness was not recognised in the self-assessment report. Students develop a range of new skills and knowledge. Some students benefit greatly from the opportunity to display their work in public exhibitions. Students' craft work shows a good level of practical skill and attention to detail but few students produce innovative pieces or work with strong personal expression.

21 The collection and use of appropriate data to monitor attendance, retention and achievement are not well developed. During the last year, some improvements have been made in the availability and use of performance data and management information for 1997-98. However, reliable data on achievements are not available nationally for consecutive years and this presents difficulties in compiling accurate comparative data. Attendance in the lessons observed by inspectors was good, and was particularly high in one district at 90%. Figures provided by the association showed low retention in non-schedule 2 long courses. Inspectors were not able to support the judgement in the self-assessment that overall retention is good.

22 Many tutors have a professional background and are well qualified, knowledgeable and experienced. They are sensitive to the needs of adult learners. The

quality of teaching accommodation ranges from excellent to poor in a few venues. For a few courses, there is a lack of specialist equipment. However, inspectors agreed with the evaluation in the self-assessment that locations based in the community positively encourage the participation of local people.

# Curriculum Areas

## History, Archaeology, Philosophy and Religion

### Grade 2

**23 The inspection covered a wide range of non-accredited courses in three districts. Inspectors observed 20 lessons. Inspectors agreed with the association's evaluation in its self-assessment report, although they identified some additional strengths and weaknesses.**

#### Key strengths

- highly knowledgeable and enthusiastic tutors
- students' involvement in planning their learning and their effective contributions in lessons
- extensive opportunities for study visits and field trips
- the expansion of students' knowledge and development of new interests
- students' original research and publications
- the extensive range of courses offered
- effective support of provision from branch members and district staff
- high rates of retention and attendance

#### Weaknesses

- failure of some tutors to vary their methods appropriately
- insufficient assessment of students' learning
- underdeveloped strategies for curriculum development
- some poor-quality accommodation and equipment

24 This curriculum area constitutes about 15% of the association's provision, and the range of courses offered is extensive. In 1997-98, some

1,330 courses were organised, typically consisting of 10 weekly lessons. Only 17 courses were accredited. Each branch selects the courses it wants to offer from a list prepared by the district and subsequently liaises with the tutor to decide on the content and style of the course. At its first meeting, the group discusses the proposed learning outcomes and has the opportunity to amend them in agreement with the tutor. In these ways, courses are well planned to meet the needs and interests of the students. A small but increasing number of courses are designed specifically to widen participation for adults who would not usually engage in education. These include local history courses for long-term unemployed adults and adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Courses involving reminiscence enable elderly people to recall, discuss and record their life experiences. The range of provision promotes lifelong learning and stimulates many older adults to develop new interests. Productive relationships and good communications between the branches, tutor organisers and district staff ensure that courses are effectively organised and supported by helpful documentation. The system for course evaluation is well managed. As the self-assessment report stated, there is scope for a more systematic approach to curriculum review and development. The association has made a good start in addressing this weakness; one district has produced a subject guide to history, another has appointed two history support tutors, and the association has developed an accredited local history course for use nationally.

25 Inspectors agreed that teaching is of good quality and that there is a high degree of enthusiasm and commitment from tutors and students. Tutors have extensive specialist knowledge and many are recognised experts in their subject areas. Most lessons consist of a lecture with appropriate opportunities for students' contributions. Students are highly responsive; they frequently ask questions, make

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comments and enter into a productive dialogue with the tutor. Sometimes, tutors do not check the extent of students' understanding. Tutors make good use of slides and overhead transparencies, and often supply maps, primary source documents and archaeological objects to bring lectures to life. Much teaching is imaginative and effectively encourages students to develop and apply their knowledge. For example, students in one archaeology class entered their findings, made from direct field observations and scrutiny of local maps, on to a local archaeology database. In a history lesson, students examined copies of original documents to work out weekly wages in imperial Rome and assess the effects of inflation. On a field trip to a medieval village, students were encouraged to generate hypotheses from a plan of the village and test them by observation. Field trips and study visits are a feature of most courses.

26 Students achieve their main aims of extending their knowledge and developing new interests. Most students are over 50 years old and many are retired. A high proportion are stimulated to continue their studies, and have been attending courses on related topics for several years. Students read widely to support their studies. Rates of retention and attendance are high. The attendance rate in lessons inspected was 84%. Figures provided by the association show a retention rate of 92% in 1997-98. Students develop study skills needed by historians. For example, on courses in family history students learn how to obtain information from the county record office. Some student groups publish their work. For example, one group is editing a nineteenth-century diary of a local girl, and another has published a book of medieval recipes. The self-assessment overestimated the effectiveness of assessment of students' learning. As part of the course, students assess their achievement of the planned learning outcomes. This process helps students to reflect on their learning. Most students consider they have made significant

progress. However, tutors do not assess students' learning nor validate students' self-assessment. Students are not required to produce written work, though some choose to do so. Few students take notes in lessons. On some courses, students are given insufficient opportunities to demonstrate what they have learned.

27 Classes take place in a variety of venues, such as schools, church halls and community centres. Most venues are of a suitable standard although the size and shape of some rooms restricts the teaching methods that can be employed. Most locations have access for wheelchair users. Inspectors agreed that a significant proportion of classrooms lack teaching resources such as whiteboards, screens and flipcharts. In some teaching rooms, blackout facilities and heating arrangements are inadequate. A class lending library is usually available, supplemented by the tutor's own resources, and is extensively used by students.

# Curriculum Areas

## Personal Development

### Grade 2

**28** Twenty lessons were observed in three districts. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses noted in the self-assessment report, but found that it overstated students' achievements, and did not adequately identify some weaknesses in teaching.

#### Key strengths

- well-designed courses to meet the range of students' needs
- good-quality teaching
- particularly positive relations between tutors and students and strong mutual support among students
- students' significant gains in confidence, knowledge, understanding and skills
- effective partnerships with relevant organisations

#### Weaknesses

- loss of focus and direction in some lessons
- lack of sufficiently detailed written comments on students' work
- some poor-quality accommodation and equipment

29 Personal development programmes account for 15% of the association's provision and most are non-schedule 2. There is an extensive range of courses designed to meet the needs of different students. Accredited courses such as the 'national foundation programme', and the 'women's learning programme' offer flexible pathways back into study. Other courses, such as 'return to learn', 'communications skills' and 'women, work and society' have been developed in partnership with the trade union, UNISON. They offer union members the opportunity to undertake general study, accredited through the

National Open College Network at levels 1 to 3, and pathways to continued study in further and higher education. Non-accredited programmes, for example, courses in yoga and exercise, women's health and active retirement, offer scope for other kinds of personal development. Accredited courses, in particular, are carefully planned and well documented. As identified in the self-assessment report, students are given guidance on how to learn, course content and assignment requirements. In many cases, programmes are taught by teams of tutors, and these courses benefit from regular meetings where tutors review and revise course materials.

30 As the self-assessment report stated, teaching is of high quality. Most lessons are well planned to meet students' needs. Tutors give clear explanations of the topic being studied, and provide suitable opportunities for students to practise and develop their skills. Lessons are often organised so that the tutor can give valuable learning support to individual students. Inspectors found a greater variety of teaching methods in use than was suggested in the self-assessment report. For example, in a well-managed 'second chance to learn' lesson one student chaired a meeting and guided the group's consideration and approval of the minutes taken by another student. The lesson also involved new work for students on note-taking skills using a range of texts and this was followed by students working in two groups to cover more advanced note-taking and practice in computing, whilst the tutor circulated to give individual guidance and support. In a few lessons tutors did not manage the learning effectively; discussion was poorly managed and lessons ended without a proper conclusion. These weaknesses in teaching were not identified in the self-assessment report. Many tutors provide extensive evaluative comment on students' assignment work and give helpful guidance on how students can make improvements, but others give little written

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comment. Tutors sometimes leave errors in standard English uncorrected. The self-assessment report did not identify these weaknesses.

31 The average attendance in lessons inspected was 70%, but rates varied considerably between lessons and districts. In most lessons, students respond well to tutors' enthusiastic and supportive teaching, and students help each other to learn. Both in lessons and in written work, students show significant gains in confidence, knowledge, understanding and skills. Inspectors agreed that systems are inadequate for collecting, monitoring and analysing statistical information on students' retention and achievements. Without accurate data, inspectors could not confirm that retention and achievement rates are high. Statistical information on some courses is not available, and where it is available, rates of retention and achievement are good or satisfactory. Data used in quality assurance processes are not presented in ways that enable the association to make accurate judgements about students' achievements. For example, a statistical report on an access to higher education programme does not state how many students obtained the full certificate, or how many progressed to higher education. Similarly, on courses where students can obtain a range of credits, the association's figures do not indicate the number of credits achieved or to what extent students have achieved the number and level of credits they intended. Systematic records of students' progress from one course to another are not kept. The self-assessment report stated that more effective monitoring and review procedures are needed.

32 Inspectors agreed that tutors are well qualified and knowledgeable in their subjects. Teaching takes place in an extensive range of premises. Some accommodation is of good quality whilst some is poor. The availability of teaching equipment varies. The self-assessment identified these weaknesses. A positive feature

is that courses are offered in locations convenient to students. Students benefit from a good supply of learning materials.



# Curriculum Areas

## Basic Education

### Grade 3

**33 Inspectors observed 23 lessons in three districts. The inspection covered English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), basic skills and provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Inspectors agreed with some of the judgements in the self-assessment report but found several additional weaknesses, particularly in the provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.**

#### Key strengths

- effective initial assessment of students' needs
- well-organised courses in ESOL and British Sign Language
- teaching of a high standard in British Sign Language and ESOL provision
- effective use of planned learning outcomes in some provision
- good students' achievements in British Sign Language, ESOL and some basic skills provision
- highly supportive relationships between tutors and students
- useful and effective reviews of courses in basic skills, ESOL and British Sign Language

#### Weaknesses

- poor-quality provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- underdeveloped curriculum frameworks
- poor achievements on programmes for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- insufficient equipment and learning materials
- tutors without relevant qualifications working on programmes for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities

34 Basic education accounts for some 12% of the association's provision. As the self-assessment report stated, the curriculum for this programme area is not yet sufficiently developed. Many tutors design their own courses with little or no guidance on curriculum requirements. An exception is the carefully-planned curriculum for British Sign Language. In provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, the requirements of accreditation are inappropriately used by tutors as the curriculum. As a result, courses lack clear learning objectives for students. While inspectors agreed that initial assessment of the students' learning needs is effective in this provision, the resulting information is not well used to plan appropriate individual learning programmes. The self-assessment did not identify these significant weaknesses. Programmes in basic education provide students with flexible ways into education. The teaching on these programmes often combines students working in groups with beneficial individual support. The evaluation of learning achievements of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is often subjective and descriptive and leads to inappropriate targets being set. These significant weaknesses were not recognised as weaknesses in the self-assessment, either nationally or at a district level. Courses in ESOL and British Sign Language are well organised.

35 Tutors are highly supportive and students benefit from their guidance. In ESOL, British Sign Language and some basic skills provision, most tutors plan their courses well and tutors keep effective records. Tutors clearly state the aims and objectives of courses and students understand the purpose of learning activities. Teaching methods are suitably varied and help to motivate students. Tutors carefully check students' understanding. Tutors effectively use students' evaluations of their learning, based on the association's learning outcomes strategy, to inform their teaching. Tutors assess students'

# Curriculum Areas

work and, where assignments are set, these are carefully marked and include useful comments on how students can make improvements. The good quality of the teaching on these programmes was not sufficiently recognised in the self-assessment report. Teaching is of poor quality in provision for students with learning difficulties. Many learning activities do not take into account the different learning needs of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

36 Students gain in self-confidence and self-esteem. Students on the stage 2 British Sign Language course complete practical projects to a high standard. Their portfolios are well organised and carefully managed. Students' achievements in ESOL are good and they are recognised with attendance certificates and imaginative publication of students' writing. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make insufficient progress in their studies. Their portfolios are often poorly organised and they have few opportunities to demonstrate their learning and celebrate achievements. These weaknesses were not recognised in the self-assessment report. Data on retention and achievements are not reliable. Some figures provided by the association indicate that there are some low rates of achievement. For example, in one area retention was 66%, and 63% of those completing courses achieved their learning goals. Attendance in lessons inspected was low at 69%.

37 Inspectors agreed that tutors on ESOL, British Sign Language and basic skills programme are suitably qualified and experienced. They could not agree with this assessment in relation to tutors working with students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The lack of specialist equipment and learning materials was identified in the self-assessment report. Little use is made of IT. Some teaching accommodation is inadequate. For example, in some primary schools parents sit on small chairs throughout the lesson.

However, venues are carefully selected to be easily accessible to students. Community-based settings, such as women's centres and schools, provide familiar and welcoming learning environments.

# Cross-college Provision

## Support for Students

### Grade 2

**38 Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. A significant strength relating to the supportive ethos of the association had not been included in the report.**

#### Key strengths

- the effective promotion of learning through a well-established ethos of mutual support
- positive outcomes from the educational guidance strategy
- innovative and creative approaches to the provision of guidance and support
- good links with agencies providing specialist guidance and support

#### Weaknesses

- the uneven quality of advice, guidance and support for students in a minority of districts
- the lack of a formal policy for learning support

39 The association's charter highlights its commitment to providing 'a culture of mutual support'. The association creates this by inducting staff and students into the association's values of mutuality, emphasising the importance of supportive relationships between tutors and students and between students, and by effective support arrangements. Since the last inspection, the association has funded a major research and development strategy to map the provision of guidance in the districts, identify good practice, produce an 'educational guidance entitlement statement' and support its implementation in the districts. The strategy has been successful in raising the profile of guidance and providing a framework which systematises the way in which guidance

is offered and monitored across the association. This strength was identified in the self-assessment report.

40 Many pamphlets and course leaflets are attractive, well designed and provide useful information about the courses offered. In some districts, course leaflets are translated into minority languages for students for whom English is not their first language. However, the quality of information given in publicity materials varies across districts; some locally produced leaflets advertising non-schedule 2 programmes are not sufficiently informative. Opportunities are provided for many students to sample courses, or to attend pre-course briefing sessions given by staff or voluntary members, to help them decide whether they want to enrol for the course. Most students can also attend the first lesson free of charge to help them understand the content of the course before enrolling. An earlier association national initiative resulted in the identification of 'learning outcomes' to describe students' intended achievements and these have also been used successfully to inform students about courses.

41 Many students speak highly of the welcome they are given when they start a course. The support given by tutors and voluntary members is particularly appreciated by those students who are returning to study after a significant break from education. This is a major strength of the association which was not included in the self-assessment report. Most districts provide effective induction and provide guidelines to help tutors with the process. In a minority of districts, induction to schedule 2 courses is not systematic and students do not receive induction to non-schedule 2 courses.

42 Responsibility for advice and guidance rests mainly with tutors. The national educational guidance strategy has resulted in the development of handbooks, guidelines and materials which have helped tutors to offer

# Cross-college Provision

more effective advice and guidance to their students. Some districts have appointed staff who have specialist adult guidance qualifications and have provided training for other staff to enable them to offer better-quality advice and guidance. Good links have been established with specialist guidance agencies and tutors or their link tutor organisers refer students, when necessary. A significant number of programmes are developed in partnership with other organisations, and responsibilities for the provision of advice, guidance and support are written into the submissions for funding and into the contracts of tutors. Advice and guidance for students on these programmes is of high quality.

43 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the lack of policies and guidelines for the provision of learning support is a weakness. However, in some districts successful support strategies have been developed. For example in one district, good use is made of 'co-tutors' or 'shadow' tutors to support large groups. Support tutorials are arranged when necessary and links with other agencies enable staff to arrange for students to receive specialist support. For example, effective support has been provided for students with visual and hearing impairments and in one district excellent academic and pastoral support has been provided for drug abusers and offenders in collaboration with the probation service.

44 Much of the support for students within branches is informal and well matched to the needs of students in particular groups. For example, arrangements are made for students to offer lifts to those who do not have their own transport and for babysitting services. Provision of free childcare and the possibility of having course fees waived are particularly important support mechanisms for students who come from areas of social and economic deprivation. In programmes which have been developed specifically for students from minority ethnic

groups, good use is made of people from the same communities to provide support, particularly as interpreters and as crèche workers.

45 Guidance about progression opportunities is an integral part of many courses, particularly those which are aimed at particular groups of students. A 'What Next' pack devised by the association provides useful information for tutors and helps them to alert their students to opportunities for further study. In some districts, tutors organise group visits to universities and these are particularly effective in raising the aspirations of students who would not have the confidence to contact universities themselves.

## General Resources

### Grade 3

**46 Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the association's self-assessment of general resources. They found some strengths and weaknesses that had not been stated in the report. The report contained judgements that applied unequally across the districts.**

#### Key strengths

- the location of courses in the community close to the point of demand
- action taken to improve the standard of accommodation
- appropriate learning environments for students' needs

#### Weaknesses

- some unsatisfactory teaching accommodation
- slow implementation of accommodation and equipment strategies
- underdeveloped use of IT to further develop learning on some courses

# Cross-college Provision

47 Almost all of the accommodation used by the association is rented from other organisations, including local authorities, universities, further education colleges and other voluntary organisations. In recent years, because many property owners have reduced the availability of their premises and increased rental costs, the association has decreased the number of venues it uses to about 2,500 in 1997-98. The accommodation strategy is considered at a national level by the finance and administration committee. Consultants have been employed to advise on accommodation. However, objectives in the self-assessment action plan have not yet been achieved and the accommodation strategy document does not have objectives, a timescale or costings. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report. The association is successful in providing courses in the community close to the point of demand. Partnerships with other organisations are used effectively to provide suitable accommodation and other resources for students. At both branch and district levels, the association is effective in responding to requests for courses in particular locations. Inspectors agreed with the association's self-assessment that this encourages participation by students who would not attend courses elsewhere.

48 Classes are provided in community centres, village halls, schools, rooms within district offices and other venues, and this reflects the wide range of different provision and types of student. Much teaching accommodation is fit for purpose. Care is taken to provide teaching rooms which meet the needs of students. Some teaching accommodation is not satisfactory and this weakness was recognised in the self-assessment report. For example, some rooms are too small for the number of students using them and some are poorly decorated and furnished. As a high proportion of the rooms are shared with other users, visual displays and storage facilities are generally lacking. In 1997, the association produced a useful checklist of minimum standards for teaching

accommodation but this has not yet been implemented nationally. Staff monitor the standards of the accommodation used in local areas by visiting classes and receiving feedback from tutors and students. In most instances, complaints about poor-quality accommodation are dealt with by requesting that landlords make improvements. In a few areas, staff have undertaken useful accommodation audits. Health and safety issues are given a high priority and care is taken to ensure students' safety. A high proportion of teaching accommodation is inaccessible to students with restricted mobility and some course publicity does not indicate which venues are accessible.

49 In addition to the national association office, each district has its own main office for managers and administrative staff. Some districts have subdistrict offices. The offices have storage facilities for equipment in addition to some office space for staff working locally. Mostly, tutors do not have space provided in which they can work. Some tutor organisers are home based and have computers and other office equipment to use at home. The majority of tutors have access to equipment such as whiteboards, flip charts and overhead projectors. Some tutors own their own projectors and other equipment which they take with them to classes. Tutors often compensate for poor facilities, for example, by taking equipment or blackout facilities to venues. The standard of general teaching equipment is usually adequate, but some tutors do not have access to sufficient audiovisual equipment. The association's system for keeping inventories of equipment costing more than £500 is not effective in some districts. Photocopying facilities are available in district and subdistrict offices. Students do not have access to library facilities, although some districts and branches hold small stocks of books which tutors borrow for use with students. The association relies on learning materials made or brought in by tutors themselves. These are often of a high standard. Inspectors agreed with the weakness identified

# Cross-college Provision

in the self-assessment report that the amounts and standards of learning resources are not of the same high quality across the districts and curriculum areas.

50 The association has an IT strategy for teaching and learning which it is beginning to implement. There are some innovative small-scale projects, including the 'Trailblazer Project' which has successfully supported students learning study skills at home. This project combines CD-ROM based self-directed study with some group teaching sessions. Another project, in collaboration with local authorities, has used information and communication technologies to support courses held in the community. Some students have access to computers in teaching rooms attached to district and subdistrict offices, and in computer suites in some other premises. Several districts have permanent resource centres with good-quality computer suites and multimedia equipment. Provision in some districts includes a stock of laptop computers which are moved from one venue to another by tutors. The strengths relating to IT developments were not clearly stated in the association's self-assessment. Many students, however, do not have access to IT facilities to further improve their learning and opportunities are missed to use IT more extensively to provide a valuable tool for learning on a wider range of courses.

## Quality Assurance

### Grade 3

**51 Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report. They found some additional strengths and weaknesses.**

#### Key strengths

- effective use of students' rights as voluntary members to assure quality of provision

- the adoption by districts of a common 'student entitlement statement'
- effective strategies for the improvement of quality
- effective training and staff development programme
- useful standards for quality developed in partnership with other agencies

#### Weaknesses

- lack of overall arrangements for quality assurance
- self-assessment processes at district levels
- weaknesses in arrangements for assessing individual students' progress in non-schedule 2 provision
- inadequate data on performance
- inadequate measures of performance

52 The association's constitution provides students, as voluntary members, the right to make decisions about and influence their teaching and learning in ways usually not available in other educational organisations. Inspectors agreed that student members' central involvement in reviewing and improving the quality of provision is a major and distinctive strength. For example, voluntary members in branches, in conjunction with staff, regularly review the quality of all courses offered in their locality and suggest changes needed to improve provision. Members make a thorough and wide-ranging contribution to national policy developments relating to quality assurance. Inspectors agreed with the weakness in the self-assessment report that, partly because of the time taken to reach a national consensus, the association has still to establish sufficient rigour in its quality assurance arrangements.

53 The association has not developed comprehensive procedures for quality assurance at a national level. The national executive committee has responsibility to assure quality.

# Cross-college Provision

It does not have sufficient arrangements to monitor the implementation of the quality assurance procedures, for example, course reviews, or to receive reports on the quality of provision. The association is taking action to address these weaknesses.

54 Inspectors agreed that the lack of common standards and performance indicators prevents effective reporting on performance. The components of reports and the data given on performance at branch, district and national level are variable and not compatible. This hampers effective overall reporting on performance. The association has not been able to analyse trends in retention and students' achievements over two or more years because of the lack of reliable data. The self-assessment identified this weakness. In 1997-98, the association significantly improved its collection and analysis of information about the retention of all students and the achievement of students on schedule 2 courses.

55 A number of well-established and productive strategies, both nationally and in districts, helps to assure quality. For example, staff and voluntary members review the quality of teaching and learning by observing lessons in a 'class visit system'. Inspectors agreed that in some areas of provision, for example, trade union studies and return to study programmes, the association makes effective use of its partnership arrangements with agencies such as trade unions to set standards and review the quality of provision. Since the last inspection, the association has developed a range of national quality assurance initiatives which include the adoption of a strategy for assessing students' learning outcomes in non-schedule 2 provision, internal verification processes for accredited provision, and the development of some coherent curriculum networks. Inspectors agreed that the implementation of 'the learning outcomes strategy' is a major addition to the association's quality assurance processes. It provides tutors with measures of students'

engagement in study, the assessment of students' opinions, and the evaluation of students' learning and personal achievements. The strategy in its present form does not give a good indication of students' developing expertise when they re-enrol on similar courses.

56 Inspectors agreed that staff and voluntary members strongly support the principles and commitments made in the charter. The adoption of 'the student entitlement statement' in the charter is a particular strength. This has brought about a common understanding at district level of the association's commitment to guidance and provides an audit framework to monitor provision and identify any gaps at district level. A summary of the full charter is readily available to most students. The association does not have a system at national level for reviewing performance against the charter commitments. The complaints procedure works well in the districts but a summary of complaints received and responses made are not collated and reported at national level.

57 The association recognises that its self-assessment process is not yet well established. In 1998, in preparation for the inspection, the association established a working group which met at monthly intervals and set up a clearly-structured programme for self-assessment. Voluntary members and staff at district and national level contributed but branches and part-time tutors were not much involved. The working group organised self-assessment at national level and the subsequent implementation of a common framework for self-assessment in the districts. The working group led developments and a consultation process, but did not establish procedures for monitoring and moderation of self-assessment reports produced at district level. Inspectors found that some judgements made in district self-assessments were not consistent with judgements in the national self-assessment report. Some aspects of the self-assessment

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process were superficial; districts tended to identify evidence to illustrate national judgements rather than analyse comprehensive evidence at district level to reach judgements. Useful action plans, aligned to both the national and district operational plans, are an integral part of the self-assessment reports. In most cases, they set clear objectives, target dates for completion and assigned responsibilities to particular staff.

58 Inspectors concluded that overall there is effective staff development and training. Inspectors agreed that some staff training, for example, induction and training for tutors, is particularly well developed. There is an excellent tutors' handbook. The association provides substantial staff development and training opportunities, for example, for defining and using learning outcomes and providing improved educational guidance to support strategic developments. The association has a range of research and development programmes, for example, piloting and developing IT-generated learning materials, which lead to improvements in quality. Following thorough consultation with staff and voluntary members, a staff development policy, drawing on existing practice, has recently been approved by the national executive committee. Practice in reviewing the performance of staff varies between districts and ranges from good to inadequate. The association is in the process of introducing a national staff review scheme.

## Governance

### Grade 3

**59 Inspectors and auditors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. They did not agree with other strengths and they identified weaknesses not included in the report.**

#### Key strengths

- committed and knowledgeable voluntary members
- active partnership of paid staff and voluntary members in decision-making
- good training of voluntary members
- effective lead on curriculum development provided by the education committee

#### Weaknesses

- lack of monitoring of educational performance and achievement of key objectives
- lack of monitoring of the overall financial position of the association
- failure to approve annual budgets within appropriate timescales
- deficiencies in the composition and operation of the audit committee

60 As a designated institution, the association does not have the standard instrument and articles of government for further education institutions. The association's governance is determined by its constitution and its status as a registered charity. The 26 members of the national executive committee are also the association's charity trustees. Sixteen of the national executive committee members are elected as representatives of districts and the Scottish association. The national executive committee is responsible for the overall governance of the association. Each of the



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association's 13 districts and 615 branches also has a constitution and well-established structures in place to allow participation in decision-making by voluntary members at local level. The national executive committee has established the following five main subcommittees: policy and resources; finance and administration; employment; education; and audit. In addition, there are several standing committees and working groups. The three national secretaries service the national executive committee and most of its subcommittees.

61 The association is developing national policies and systems while maintaining its commitment to local democracy and voluntary activity. Voluntary members involved in governance guide new developments whilst preserving the association's ethos and many valued traditions. Inspectors and auditors agreed that national executive committee members and other voluntary members are highly committed and give generously of their time to the association. Attendance is good at most national executive committee and subcommittee meetings. National executive committee members have a detailed knowledge of the association at national and local levels.

62 Inspectors found that national executive committee members have a good understanding of key curriculum matters. However, the national executive committee does not monitor the overall educational performance of the association. The education committee has led educational developments and has set clear priorities and budgets for these. It receives regular reports on the progress of the many separate projects it funds and regularly reports to the national executive committee on them. The national executive committee does not receive comprehensive information, for example, on students' achievements, to enable it to evaluate the educational performance of the association as a whole. The national executive committee has been involved in the development

of the key strategic objectives of the association. It has received, but not systematically considered, the district plans. It has not developed a system for monitoring performance against plans at national or district level. The weakness in monitoring the implementation of strategic objectives and plans was not identified in the self-assessment report.

63 Paid staff and voluntary members work well together for the benefit of the association. Voluntary members' involvement in both management and governance at branch, district and national level means that there is no clear demarcation between governance and management. Members and staff effectively advise each other and both help inform local and national policy decisions. This strength was identified in the self-assessment report. Voluntary members receive a range of useful training to support them in their roles. For example, following wide-ranging consultation, a training programme, 'cultivating a passion for learning', has been developed. It is being used throughout the association to develop voluntary members' understanding and expertise. Initial reactions have been highly positive. Every district has a member who is a trained co-ordinator and who will train other members.

64 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the association is weak. The association does not in a number of areas conduct its business in accordance with its national constitution. Compliance with the constitution was overestimated as a strength in the self-assessment report. The association plans to hold a special conference in 2000 to discuss constitutional issues, including the need for a revised constitution. A revised financial memorandum is being drawn up between the FEFC and the association.

65 The national executive committee does not consider comprehensive and timely financial information. As identified in the self-assessment report, financial monitoring reports show the

# Cross-college Provision

surplus or deficit for each district but do not show the consolidated position for the association as a whole. The association identified that the national executive committee does not consider medium-term financial forecasts. For example, it does not consider the three-year financial forecasts submitted to the FEFC. The constitution requires that each district shall submit to the national executive committee for its approval, prior to implementation, a periodic business plan covering income, expenditure, staffing levels and other matters at intervals prescribed by the national executive committee. However, the 1998-99 annual budgets were not approved by the national executive committee until five months into the financial year and a report on actual income and expenditure for 1998-99 was not received by the national executive committee until more than seven months into the financial year.

66 Weaknesses in the composition and operation of the audit committee were not identified in the self-assessment. Shortcomings include infrequent meetings, no system to monitor that agreed actions on internal audit recommendations have been implemented, and a lack of consideration of matters relating to external audit as required by the committee's terms of reference. The committee is not clerked by a national secretary. The arrangement for internal auditors to take minutes of the committee's proceedings does not demonstrate adequate independence. One member's joint membership of the audit committee and the finance and administration committee compromises the member's independence.

67 The association has well-established democratic procedures. While there is extensive involvement of voluntary members in the association and information is widely disseminated, the association has not yet adopted some elements of good practice in openness. There is no register of interests, code

of conduct or 'whistleblowing' procedure. The national executive committee's terms of reference require all its members to sign a statement of non-financial interest but this requirement is not enforced. There is no formal procedure for dealing with complaints by individuals about the governance of the association, although this is under review and a contact point is named in the association's charter.

## Management

### Grade 3

**68 Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the association's self-critical assessment of management. However, inspectors concluded that some strengths were overstated and that some weaknesses and strengths had been overlooked.**

#### Key strengths

- successful contributions to lifelong learning and widening participation
- clear mission, strategic objectives and values
- effective national co-ordination of key curriculum developments
- good communications
- many productive partnerships
- effective teamwork and good working relationships

#### Weaknesses

- lack of national procedures for monitoring plans and policies
- underdeveloped use of targets
- slow progress in addressing some weaknesses identified in previous inspection
- significant weaknesses in financial planning and monitoring

# Cross-college Provision

69 Since the last inspection, the association has responded effectively to demands made upon it by a range of internal and external changes. The management structure and its connections with arrangements for governance are well understood by staff and voluntary members. Some issues and tensions remain within the association about the best balance between local decision-making and national strategy.

70 Inspectors agreed that the mission, values and key objectives of the association are well understood and supported by staff and voluntary members. Thorough debate leads to an agreed strategic direction and most key decisions involve staff and members and are achieved through consensus. Strategic planning does not clearly link educational objectives and resources and there is significant variation in the quality of district plans. The self-assessment report understated the lack of rigour and consistency in arrangements for monitoring plans at both national and district level. Inspectors agreed that the use of targets and performance indicators is underdeveloped. Arrangements for monitoring the implementation of policies are not systematic. For example, equal opportunities and health and safety policy commitments are not fully implemented and monitored.

71 The association successfully provides education for many people from educationally and economically deprived backgrounds, as well as older adults wishing to develop their knowledge and skills. The association is increasing the emphasis given to widening participation in its workplace and community-based provision and has committed substantial resources for this purpose. As the self-assessment stated, the association is an advocate of lifelong learning and it effectively promotes citizenship education. Inspectors agreed that there are many productive partnerships with a wide range of organisations, at local, regional, national and international

levels. These serve as the basis for funding partnerships and help the association to meet the needs of specific student groups and to identify areas for curriculum development. Partners place a high premium on the association's specialist expertise in adult education and its flexibility in being able to respond rapidly to requests for new provision.

72 In response to the previous inspection, the association has established effective national co-ordination of key curriculum developments. There are many examples of carefully and thoroughly planned curriculum initiatives, including effective trade union studies provision organised in partnership with the trade union movement and the women's learning programme.

73 Effective teamwork among paid staff and voluntary members at national, district and branch levels is a major strength. The association values and supports its full-time and part-time staff and voluntary members. It makes good use of specialist consultants. Communications are effective. There is a planned cycle of formal management meetings at national and district level and regular reporting by staff to the national executive committee and to district committees. Branches receive direct mailings of key documents. Increasing use of electronic mail is supporting the development of networking and exchange of expertise. The association has its own informative website.

74 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the financial management of the association is weak. Within the highly devolved arrangements for financial management at branch and district levels, staff and voluntary members understand their roles and responsibilities. The association has diversified its funding sources; in 1997-98, FEFC funding represented less than 50% of its total income. However, significant weaknesses exist in financial planning, monitoring and the

# Cross-college Provision

adequacy and operation of financial information systems. The budgets of branches, the individual districts, the national office and the Scottish association are not consolidated to produce an annual budget for the association. Reports are limited to income and expenditure and do not include projected balance sheets and cashflows. At national level, the association does not have effective arrangements to set limits within which to operate to ensure solvency. The association's three-year financial forecast to the FEFC has not been updated to provide accurate information for 1998-99 and the remaining two years.

75 Similarly, financial monitoring has shortcomings. The absence of a cashflow forecast statement in the management accounts, in particular, makes it difficult for the association to assess future solvency. Both the internal and external auditors have identified control weaknesses in relation to the quality and reliability of financial monitoring reports at district level. Finance staff in some districts do not possess the skills and experience to meet the demands now being placed upon them. In its self-assessment report, the association recognised weaknesses in addressing the training needs of staff in relation to financial management.

76 There has been slow progress in addressing some weaknesses highlighted in the last inspection. The association recognises that unevenly developed market research remains a weakness. As the self-assessment report stated, the management information system, although improved since the last inspection, has limitations and is underused. In recognition of the deficiencies in the existing system and following extensive consultation, a major new integrated financial accounting and management information system is being implemented in 1999.

## Conclusions

77 The association prepared its first self-assessment since 1995 in preparation for this inspection. Currently, the association is reviewing the processes used and plans have been made to integrate self-assessment with overall arrangements for quality assurance. The association did not find it easy to identify suitable further education providers with which to make comparisons in performance, particularly in relation to governance and management. The inspection team found that the self-assessment report provided a useful basis for organising the inspection at district and national levels. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements made in the report. They found some additional strengths and weaknesses and attached greater significance to some weaknesses. The self-assessment reports prepared at district level were of uneven quality and accuracy. Some were not based on a rigorous analysis of evidence. There was a broad match between inspectors' judgements in the curriculum areas, although in two curriculum areas the association had overstated some strengths. There was greater disparity in judgements relating to cross-college aspects. In two aspects, the association significantly overestimated the strengths and inspectors awarded two grades lower to one area and one grade lower to the other. In another aspect, inspectors found that significant progress had been made by the time of the inspection and the quality was better than indicated in the self-assessment. Inspectors awarded a higher grade to this area than was given in the self-assessment report.

78 Strengths and weaknesses identified during the inspection are listed under each section of this report. The main strengths and weaknesses are identified in the summary.

# College Statistics

## Student numbers by age (July 1998)

Age	%
Under 16	0
16-18 years	1
19-24 years	2
25+ years	89
Not known	8
Total	100

Source: association data

## Student numbers by level of study (July 1998)

Level of study	%
Schedule 2	16
Non-schedule 2	84
Total	100

Source: association data

## Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (July 1998)

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	0	7,355	6
Agriculture	0	1,151	1
Construction	0	189	0
Business	0	9,297	8
Hotel and catering	0	367	0
Health and community care	0	22,434	19
Art and design	0	34,328	29
Humanities	0	40,683	34
Basic education	0	3,496	3
Total	0	119,300	100

Source: association data

## Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 18% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

## Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (July 1998)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	0	261	0	261
Supporting direct learning contact	97	66	0	163
Other support	129	0	0	129
Total	226	327	0	553

Source: association data, rounded to nearest full-time equivalent

# College Statistics

## Three-year Trends

### Financial data

	1996	1997	1998
Income	£13,424,401	£15,240,158	£16,439,919
Average level of funding (ALF) Out-turn to 1997; funded 1998	£9.54	£10.44	£11.66
Payroll as a proportion of income	62%	64%	67%
Achievement of funding target	115%	119%	104%
Diversity of income	52%	50%	54%
Operating surplus	£517,379	£224,981	-£332,155

*Sources: Income – 1997 audited financial statements which include a restatement of the 1996 figures (1996 and 1997), association (1998)*

*ALF – 1997 audited financial statements which include a restatement of the 1996 figures (1996 and 1997), association (1998)*

*Payroll – 1997 audited financial statements which include a restatement of the 1996 figures (1996 and 1997), association (1998)*

*Achievement of funding target – 1997 audited financial statements which include a restatement of the 1996 figures (1996 and 1997), association (1998)*

*Diversity of income – 1997 audited financial statements which include a restatement of the 1996 figures (1996 and 1997), association (1998)*

*Operating surplus – 1997 audited financial statements which include a restatement of the 1996 figures (1996 and 1997), association (1998)*

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