

London Electronics College

**Inspection of FEFC-funded provision
in external institutions**

May 2000

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1999-00**

THE FURTHER EDUCATION FUNDING COUNCIL

Inspection of FEFC-funded provision in External Institutions

London Electronics College

Inspected February 1999

Re-inspected May 2000

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. 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.

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.

*Cheylesmore House
Quinton Road
Coventry CV1 2WT
Telephone 024 76863000
Fax 024 76863100
website: <http://www.fefc.ac.uk>*

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GRADE DESCRIPTORS

The procedures for assessing quality are set out in the Council Circulars 97/12 and 97/22. During their inspection, inspectors assess the strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum and other aspects 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*

In the first two years of the current four-year cycle of inspections, 26 external institutions were inspected. A single grade was awarded for the overall quality of FEFC-funded provision in each institution. The grade profile is shown below.

Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
8%	31%	46%	11%	4%

Source: *Chief inspector's annual reports for 1997-98 and 1998-99. Grades were awarded using guidelines in Council Circular 97/12, Assessing Achievement*

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Context

External Institution 31/2000

Inspection of FEFC-funded provision in External Institutions

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- the underdeveloped arrangements for providing support to students with language difficulties
- the lack of an appropriate framework for careers education and guidance
- the underdeveloped arrangements for directors to monitor performance
- the poor quality furnishings and fittings in most teaching rooms

1 The London Electronics College is an external institution located close to the Earl's Court Exhibition centre in London. The majority of students are unemployed adults from minority ethnic backgrounds. The main aim of the college is to provide vocational training in engineering and IT to enable students to progress to employment or higher education. Approximately 70% of the centre's work is funded by the FEFC. The college has a principal and eight teachers. The principal is responsible to a board of two directors for the operation of the college. The college is housed in a large six storey Victorian terraced house.

3 Provision at the time of the previous inspection was judged to have weaknesses which clearly outweighed the strengths and was awarded a grade 4.

2 The main weaknesses identified during the previous inspection were:

- course programmes not effectively planned to provide an adequate level of support for students to learn on their own and to manage their own schedules of work
- the high proportion of students who withdraw from courses
- the low numbers of completing students who gain a qualification
- the lack of tutorial provision
- the lack of effective monitoring and review of students' progress

The Re-Inspection

4 The re-inspection took place in May 2000. For 1999-00 the college expects to achieve 36,000 FEFC-funded units for approximately 200 students with 250 qualification aims. All FEFC-funded students are aged 19 or over. There are approximately 100 students on engineering courses and 100 students on IT courses. Enrolments to engineering courses are declining, while enrolments to IT courses are increasing. Two inspectors held meetings with the directors, the principal, and the teachers. Relevant documentation was examined, including information about the courses and students' achievements. The inspectors observed 8 lessons, held discussions with students, and examined students' work. Five of the lessons were judged to be good, 3 were satisfactory and none were unsatisfactory. The attendance rate of the students in the observed lessons was 71%, and the average class size was 6.

5 During the previous inspection, strengths were found which were confirmed during the re-inspection.

6 The college has been receptive to acting on feedback from the last inspection. It produced a detailed action plan. Good progress has been made in some areas but other areas are still underdeveloped. The following actions have been taken:

- teachers' duties have been expanded to include a personal tutor role
 - all students have been assigned to a personal tutor
 - each student has an action plan which is updated regularly
 - specialised support periods have been introduced for technical subjects and for students with specialist diagnosed needs
 - the incentives for students to improve punctuality, retention and achievement have been extended
 - a summer school providing support for key skills was organised and run in 1999
 - annual targets are set as part of the college management process
 - recruitment, retention and achievement targets are reported on regularly
 - assessments of the quality of teaching have been included in the appraisal process. An external consultant has evaluated the quality of teaching
 - improvements have been made to the learning environment and some equipment has been updated
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- an intermediate GNVQ in engineering has been introduced
 - detailed lesson plans have been produced for all courses

Conclusions and Issues

7 The college produces some useful initial induction documentation. However, the contents are not always discussed with students so that they understand its purpose. Learning support arrangements have improved. Every student is assessed for mathematics, English language and IT. Additional diagnostic assessment is available through an arrangement with a local further education college. The college has introduced classes to provide support in study skills, mathematics and other engineering topics, ESOL and IT. Where support is matched to course content it is very effective and valued by students, but in some classes the support is not well matched to students' individual learning needs. Students' attendance at support classes is infrequent and irregular. The college operates a 'recovery plan' for at risk students. Students are helped to identify the work they have to complete. However, there is no formal monitoring or reviewing of these plans. All teachers now have a personal tutoring role. A programme of staff development activities has helped to implement the tutorial role. All students now have personal action plans. These are at an early stage of development and it is not always clear who is responsible for reviewing the overall progress of students. Some tutoring practice is underdeveloped, particularly in relation to pastoral matters. Responsibility for pastoral support still resides mainly with the principal. Students receive useful informal careers advice from college staff but there is still no systematic arrangement

for careers education and guidance. Some careers information is available in the college resources area, but teachers do not routinely make students aware of it.

8 The college now offers an intermediate engineering GNVQ for students who would initially find the advanced GNVQ difficult. A number of students on the first course have progressed on to the advanced GNVQ. Detailed lesson plans have been produced for all courses. The plans vary in style and format. There are no course handbooks. Such handbooks would be a particularly useful aid for students on NVQ courses. Assignments have been reviewed and their presentation improved and requirements made clearer. The retention rates on a number of courses have improved. However, overall, the retention of students remains a problem especially on NVQ courses in IT. Achievement rates are generally close to or above national averages on engineering courses but are below average on most NVQ IT courses. The academic board meets regularly to discuss a range of academic matters, including student progress and achievement. At their fortnightly meetings, the directors and principal discuss a range of matters relevant to the operation of the college. These meetings include the regular review of student recruitment and retention targets. The directors, the principal, and all teachers attend an annual review meeting. A wide range of topics is considered such as staff development, quality assurance and

Conclusions and Issues

students' achievements. The directors have little further involvement in assuring the quality of the work of the college. Improvements have been made to the quality of the learning environment and to the commonly used areas of the college. A better use of contemporary display material would further improve the quality of the environment. Computer hardware and software has continued to be upgraded.

9 To improve the quality of FEFC-funded provision further the college should:

- continue to improve the induction arrangements for all students
- continue to improve the operation and effectiveness of the personal and pastoral tutoring system
- match learning support more closely to students' individual learning needs
- continue to improve the action planning process for students
- introduce systematic arrangements to provide careers education and guidance
- continue to improve students' retention and achievement rates, especially on IT courses
- involve the directors further in assuring the quality of the work of the college

10 The FEFC-funded provision was judged to have a balance of strengths and weaknesses and was awarded a grade 3.