

Open Door Adult Learning Centre

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

May 2000

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1999-00**

***THE FURTHER EDUCATION
FUNDING COUNCIL***

The Further Education Funding Council has a legal duty to ensure that further education in England is properly assessed. Where the arrangements for the assessment of the quality of provision in the external institution are not the legal responsibility of the LEA, the Council reserves the right to inspect the quality of the provision funded by the Council. This condition is set out in the Council's funding agreement with such institutions.

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 institutions 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.

*Cheylesmore House
Quinton Road
Coventry CV1 2WT
Telephone 024 76863000
Fax 024 76863100
Website www.fefc.ac.uk*

© FEFC 2000 You may photocopy this report. A college may use its report in promotional material provided quotes are accurate, and the findings of the inspection are not misrepresented

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.*

Contents

	Paragraph
Summary	
The establishment and its mission	1
The inspection	4
The curriculum	6
Other aspects of provision	18
Conclusions	29

Summary

External Institution 08/2000 Inspection of FEFC-Funded Provision in External Institutions

Open Door Adult Learning Centre Sheffield

Inspected May 2000

The Open Door Adult Learning Centre is a voluntary sector, autonomous external institution sited to the south east of Sheffield. The organisation was founded in 1985 as a community resource centre. More recently, it has made the transition to providing training courses in Information Technology (IT) and a range of craft subjects to the local adult population. The FEFC provides over 88% of its income. The centre offers some leisure courses, but over 88% of its students are following FEFC-funded training courses. The centre produced its first self-assessment report in preparation for the inspection. The process of self-assessment is not yet fully developed. The report did not match the format of Circular 97/12 *Validating Self-Assessment*. However, the process of self-assessment did enable the centre to provide an overall grade. It incorporated strengths and weaknesses identified through curriculum reviews. The management committee and staff were consulted during its production. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weakness recognised in the self-assessment report but identified additional strengths and weaknesses.

The inspection covered the FEFC-funded provision in business and IT,

and crafts, together with other general aspects of provision. Well-planned programmes enable students to progress onto higher level courses or into employment. Students are provided with good opportunities to develop practical skills. Some of the teaching of Information Technology is outstanding. Student work in pattern cutting and garment making is of good quality. There is some good student achievement in examinations. The centre provides good informal pre-enrolment advice and guidance and good support for students while on their course. The situation of the centre, in a convenient community location, affords good physical access to all areas for students with restricted mobility and wheelchair users. The centre is managed by an active management committee. Members demonstrate commitment to supporting the centre's activities and to working to further the mission. The work of the centre is organised through regular, structured and purposeful meetings. Effective communication and consultation procedures ensure the active involvement of committee members, users of the centre and all staff. The established classroom observation scheme is carried out conscientiously. Improvements to the provision are made in response to termly student feedback questionnaires. To improve the FEFC-funded provision further the centre should: address the underdeveloped initial assessment of learning support and basic skills needs; improve the underdeveloped careers education practices; ensure emergency exits are kept clear; improve drab and

Summary

unattractive areas of the centre and make more effective use of displays to stimulate and inform students; improve strategic planning to implement the mission; clarify the respective roles and responsibilities of the management committee and of staff; increase systematic monitoring of the effectiveness of provision; introduce clear arrangements to ensure quality; address identified weaknesses speedily and introduce staff appraisal to inform organisational development.

The provision funded by the FEFC was judged to be satisfactory, with some strengths but also some weaknesses, and was awarded a grade 3.

Context

The Establishment and its Mission

1 The Open Door Adult Learning Centre is situated in a housing estate to the south east of Sheffield. The organisation began as a community resource centre. Now it provides training courses to the local adult population. The centre's mission is to provide up-to-date training in Information Technology (IT) and a range of craft subjects to the adult population of south Sheffield and the surrounding districts. It seeks to do so in a friendly atmosphere in which adult learners feel comfortable. It aims to provide a learning environment which offers opportunities for learning irrespective of a person's ability or disability. Since 1993, the centre has been recognised as a Royal Society of Arts (RSA) registered centre enabling students to study wordprocessing, Computer Literacy and Information Technology (CLAIT), Information Business Technology (IBT), desktop publishing and typing skills. The centre has also developed craft courses which concentrate on giving learners skills to help them to progress into small businesses and self-employment.

2 The decision making body of the organisation is the management committee comprised of users of the centre. Financial management is the responsibility of two voluntary treasurers who are members of the management committee. The day-to-day running of the centre is undertaken by the centre co-ordinator who is the only full-time member of staff. The co-ordinator is supported by a part-time administrator who is also the

internal verifier and the examinations officer. The teaching is done by part-time tutors.

3 In 1998-99, there were 236 FEFC-funded students, of whom 178 were enrolled on foundation level courses and 58 on intermediate level courses. A further 30 students were enrolled on non-FEFC funded leisure courses. Of the students in the college, 76.5% were female, 9.3% had a disability and 34.75 % claimed fee remission. The centre's recurrent funding from the FEFC for 1998-99 was £64,514 and the centre's total income for that year was £77,067. In the year ending 31 March 2000, the centre's total income was £75,994. The drop in income reflects a fall in income from Sheffield City Council.

The Inspection

4 The Open Door Adult Learning Centre was inspected for two days in May 2000 by a team of four inspectors. Meetings were held with members of the management committee, centre staff and teachers. Inspectors had discussions with students and examined their work. Relevant documentation was reviewed and the college's self-assessment was evaluated.

5 The inspection focused on FEFC-funded provision in business and IT, and crafts, together with other general aspects of provision. Inspectors observed a sample of six learning sessions from all of the courses being provided at the time of the inspection. Of these, 67% were

Context

judged to be good or outstanding. This is better than the national average of 59% for external institutions, based on figures in *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1998-99: Chief inspector's annual report*. The average level of attendance in lessons inspected was 75% and the average class size was 7.8.

The Curriculum

Grade profile of sessions observed

Grade	1	2	3	4	5
Number of lessons	2	2	2		

6 Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths identified in the centre's self-assessment report. They also identified additional strengths and weaknesses. Some weaknesses identified at the previous inspection had not been addressed.

7 Key strengths

- well-planned programmes for student progression
- good opportunities for the development of practical skills
- good student achievement
- good teaching of IT
- good-quality student work in pattern cutting and garment making.

8 Weaknesses

- ineffective individual action planning
- some poorly reproduced worksheets and handbooks
- poor use of display material to stimulate students' learning
- insufficient development of theoretical and design skills in craft subjects

9 In IT, effective lesson plans are closely linked to good schemes of work. As the self-assessment report recognised, this process is well established. Most teachers use a range

of appropriate teaching methods. Most of the teaching is good and some is outstanding. Students speak positively about the help and support they receive from their tutors. In one lesson, the teacher used every opportunity to teach individuals, small groups or the whole class, as appropriate, and as new learning points arose. Praise and encouragement was offered to the slower learners. The physical skills needed in order to use the equipment were skilfully demonstrated to a new student. Students generally work at their own pace using well-structured manuals developed and produced by centre staff. The content of the manuals is good but many are poorly reproduced. This weakness was identified in the self-assessment report. There are lesson progress sheets to which both the student and the tutor contribute. Some teachers provide full and helpful comments on these sheets but the comments made by others are too brief to be useful. This ineffective action planning with individual students was not identified as a weakness in the self-assessment report.

10 Inspectors agreed with the strength identified in the self-assessment report that achievement rates in IT are good. Most students achieve their learning goal in a reasonable amount of time. Oxford, Cambridge and RSA (OCR) Word

The Curriculum

Processing Stage 2 and Stage 3 show a strongly rising trend in achievement over 3 years to pass rates of 92% in 1998 and 96% in 1999. CLAIT results are above the national average. A high proportion of students achieve passes at distinction level. Retention rates have been very high, although there was a sharp decline in 1998-99. An upward improvement is signalled for 1999-2000. There are good progression opportunities from beginner's entry level to level 3. An increasing proportion of students who complete their course find related employment.

11 Courses are well planned to take account of the needs of the students. There are regular, structured opportunities for tutors to meet to discuss curriculum issues. Teachers are suitably qualified and experienced. Teaching materials are developed jointly and are centrally available in order to ensure consistency in the student experience. Arrangements for internal verification are sound.

12 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that IT resources are of high quality. The IT room has been up-graded recently. The facilities comprise a high-quality networked suite of thirteen Pentium computers all running industrial standard software. These are adequately supported by sufficient printers. Good technical support is provided by the centre co-ordinator.

13 Craft courses are offered in a good range of subjects. Opportunities for students to gain qualifications are

available from level one to level three. This strength was identified by the centre. The areas covered by the qualifications include needlecrafts, garment making, pattern cutting and soft furnishing. Craft courses are well planned. Teaching group requirements are outlined week by week in detailed lesson plans. However, specific action planning is not undertaken to effectively outline strategies for developing groups of students' theoretical skills. Opportunities to develop theoretical skills alongside practical skills during group lessons are not taken. No tutorial time is allocated to enable this aspect to be undertaken on an individual basis. The development of the theory and design aspects of crafts were identified as a weakness in the last inspection report but self-assessment did not identify this continuing weakness. Teachers prepare lessons effectively. They plan carefully in order to meet the individual needs of all the students in any one group who are studying at different levels of difficulty within the overall programme. Students are provided with useful handbooks which contain the aims and objectives of the course, unit specifications and lesson handouts. However, some handouts are handwritten, have poor-quality diagrams and are difficult to read. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report.

14 Inspectors agreed that a supportive and productive atmosphere is established in craft lessons. New techniques are introduced through demonstration. The practical aspects of the programmes are covered

The Curriculum

particularly well. While students are performing practical tasks, teachers use appropriate technical language to reinforce what they are learning. They also consolidate students' knowledge effectively by their comments to individuals and inputs into group discussions. Students value the teachers' extensive knowledge and experience. They have benefited from this and have made considerable progress in developing good practical skills. The good standards in pattern cutting and garment making are exemplified by the relevant industrial finish on garments. These result from the use of well-constructed, adapted patterns and the adoption of finishing techniques such as overlocking. The high level of students' skills is evident in the work on display in the communal entrance room. There is thorough and conscientious completion of records to monitor work produced for credits and units gained by the students. However, some of these records are not dated and they are not used for action planning for improvement with individual students. On occasion, during lessons, teachers miss opportunities to consolidate what students are learning. In one lesson, the practical demonstration was not formally introduced and one student was not participating. Handouts were not provided to support and supplement the activity and students were not asked to make notes. The development of theoretical and design skills, as required for the assessment of competence at level three, is insufficient and of a poor quality. Internal verification is conducted conscientiously. Craft skills are

assessed but there is no rigorous checking of their development against the evidence and standards required by the awarding body. Candidate's records of achievement show design research and evaluation aspects signed off by the teacher. However, little evidence is provided in the portfolio to support the standard stated as having been achieved.

15 Inspectors agreed with the centre's assessment that students' achievements on the practical crafts course for the last two years are good, with 100% achievement at level one and 86% achievement at level two in 1999.

16 The classroom where the crafts course are taught has adequate lighting levels, a sink and sufficient access to electrical sockets. As stated in the self-assessment, there is some industrial standard machinery available, and the equipment is suitable for the range of activities undertaken. The classroom is small and it is difficult for the teacher to circulate and interact with the group. For some activities this affects the quality of the learning. Insufficient space on tables prevents full-scale pattern work or garment cutting out to be undertaken by all students at the same time. Poor use is made of display materials in the classroom to stimulate students' interest in design. These weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment report.

Other Aspects of Provision

17 Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the centre's self-assessment report. They also identified additional strengths and weaknesses.

18 Key strengths

- good informal pre-enrolment advice and guidance
- good informal personal support for students
- convenient community location
- good physical access to all areas
- the commitment and active involvement of the management committee
- regular, structured and purposeful meetings
- effective communications and consultation procedures
- effective classroom observation scheme
- termly student feedback questionnaires leading to actions.

19 Weaknesses

- underdeveloped initial assessment of students' learning support and basic skills needs
- underdeveloped careers education practices
- dangerous and blocked emergency exits
- drab and unattractive areas with ineffective use of displays to stimulate and inform students
- underdeveloped strategic planning to implement the mission
- lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities

- insufficiently systematic monitoring of the effectiveness of provision
- the absence of clear arrangements to ensure quality
- slow progress in taking action to address weaknesses identified
- no staff appraisal to inform organisational development.

20 Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report relating to support for students but considered that many strengths had been overstated and some significant weaknesses missed. The centre places great emphasis on its friendly and welcoming atmosphere. Inspectors agreed that good informal personal support is provided by both teachers and administrative staff. Enquiries from potential students are responded to in a positive and encouraging manner. Induction arrangements for new students are informal. They are guided by a checklist for teachers. However, the effectiveness of the induction process is not evaluated. There are no strategies in place to ensure that the learning support needs of individual students are identified and met.

21 There are no systematic arrangements for assessing students' individual learning needs. A form exists for this purpose, but it is not used. The centre relies too much on students themselves requesting support. Arrangements for supporting dyslexic students are not effectively understood. Some students' additional

Other Aspects of Provision

support needs are met, for example, the provision of a trackball for a physically impaired student. Inspectors agreed with the centre's assessment that insufficient attention has been given to the development of student's basic skills. Opportunities to identify and support basic skills needs in crafts and IT lessons are missed. This weakness was identified in the previous inspection and in the centre's self-assessment report.

22 Arrangements to provide careers education and to support student progression are poor. This weakness was identified at the last inspection but was not identified in the self-assessment report. There are now a number of ways in which students may gain careers information, but they are not routinely encouraged to do so. Careers leaflets are displayed and one computer serves as a Training Access Point. Careers advisers do not visit the centre to talk with students. The centre does not offer job-seeking workshops to its students. Course leaflets do include progression information. However, student progression from courses at the centre is not routinely monitored. The centre does not effectively publicise welfare information and advice offered by other agencies and providers. Personal advice and support for individuals is offered informally by centre staff.

23 Written documentation intended to inform students is often poor. Complex vocabulary and sentence construction prevents information from being communicated easily to students, for example, in

guidelines for the use of the Internet. Some documents use imprecise or inaccurate language in describing, for example, crèche provision or counselling arrangements.

24 The centre is conveniently located adjacent to a shop in the middle of a residential area. It is close to bus and tram routes. Students speak positively about the centre's convenient location. Access to all areas is good for students in wheelchairs. Many areas of the centre are confined and cluttered. Best use is not made of the space available. Storage facilities are underused. Some areas of the centre are drab and unattractive. Directional signs at the centre are poor, particularly in relation to emergency exits. Emergency exits are sometimes blocked or bolted. Accommodation is clean and well maintained. Hot, freshly cooked meals are provided on three days a week. Some notice boards are well used and show photographs of staff but opportunities to display materials and artefacts are missed. Course information leaflets are clearly displayed. Other notice boards display collections of uninspiring written documents. There is a particular weakness in the display of careers information. The centre benefits from four large windows which open onto the street. This display space is poorly used. Some posters are faded and out of date and some information is not relevant to passers-by. The display does not support the promotion of the centre's mission statement to attract new learners and widen participation. The centre has recently developed its

Other Aspects of Provision

own web site. It is clear and simple and provides a useful introduction to the centre. However, there are no links to other related sites and opportunities are therefore missed to enable potential students to consider progression opportunities from other support networks. Some text is over complex. Some graphics give confusing messages about learning at the centre.

25 Inspectors agreed that a strength of the centre is the commitment shown by management committee members and their active involvement in its work. The co-ordinator reports regularly to the management committee at its frequent and regular meetings. Meetings are structured and purposeful. Issues are discussed in some detail and decisions are taken. Targets for the improvement of retention and achievement have been set and agreed by the committee. Members are also active in contributing to fundraising activities. However, strategic planning to implement the mission is underdeveloped. The co-ordinator's reports to the committee are not informed by effective market research. Curriculum reviews contain insufficient analysis to effectively inform development planning. Few strategic objectives have yet been met. A major objective in the strategic plan to extend the provision to attract younger students has not been translated into a plan for action.

26 There are effective communications throughout the organisation, as stated in the self-assessment report. There is good

communication between the co-ordinator and the management committee. The co-ordinator and the administrative assistant work closely and effectively together. There is good two-way communication with tutors formally through the structured tutor meetings and informally on a day-to-day basis. However, there is a lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities. The management committee is the decision making body but it is heavily involved in operational matters and planning. The co-ordinator does not have a clear remit in the job description to manage the centre. There is little clear operational management overview and control. This leads to insufficiently systematic monitoring of the effectiveness of the provision. A lot of management information is gathered but it is not used effectively to inform planning and management decision making or to direct day-to-day operations.

27 The self-assessment report was prepared by the centre co-ordinator. The production process involved consultation with all staff and the management committee. The self-assessment report did not match the format of Circular 97/12 *Validating Self-Assessment*. It did provide an overall grade.

28 The centre has developed many useful procedures for the assurance of quality. However, their overall effectiveness is hampered by the absence of a clear and simple framework for their implementation and analysis which is well-understood by all staff. There is much useful

Other Aspects of Provision

documentation, which has been carefully developed. However, information gathered is not brought together effectively to inform curriculum review. It is not clear how all the elements relate to self-assessment and initiatives for planned improvement. Action planning is underdeveloped. Plans are insufficiently specific. Timescales and milestones are not defined clearly. The centre has made slow progress in addressing weaknesses identified during the last inspection and through its own review and self-assessment procedures. The classroom observation scheme is established and conscientiously carried out and the grading is generally accurate but its outcomes are not linked to staff development or staff appraisal. There is no system of staff appraisal to inform organisational development. The centre achieved Investors in People in April 2000.

Conclusions

29 The process of self-assessment is new to the centre and is not yet fully developed. The self-assessment report was produced by the centre co-ordinator after consultation with staff and the management committee. The self-assessment report did not match the format of Circular 97/12 but the process did provide an overall grade. The report incorporated strengths and weaknesses which had been identified through curriculum reviews produced for reporting to the management committee. The wording of some of the strengths and weaknesses was insufficiently concise to be of use to the centre in taking action to improve quality. The report contained little quantifiable evidence. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weakness identified in the self-assessment report but found additional strengths and weaknesses.

30 The FEFC-funded provision at the Open Door Adult Learning Centre is satisfactory with some strengths but also some weaknesses and was awarded a grade 3.