

Urban Learning Foundation

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

January 2000

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1999-2000**

***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.

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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 four-year inspection cycle of inspection, 25 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
4%	36%	44%	16%	0%

Source: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1996-97; Chief inspector's annual report. Grades were awarded using guidelines in Council Circular 93/28, Assessing Achievement*

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Summary

External Institution 4/2000 Inspection of FEFC-Funded Provision in External Institutions

Urban Learning Foundation, East London

Inspected January 2000

The Urban Learning Foundation, located in East London, was established in 1973. It provides educational opportunities for people who live and work in urban communities. The foundation is a charity and a company limited by guarantee. Four salaried staff, six part-time staff, acting as course managers, and five other part-time staff are responsible for the programme funded by the FEFC. The programme is aimed mainly at people from minority ethnic communities who wish to work towards professional and academic qualifications. Courses include English, community interpreting, bilingual health advocacy and courses for school secretaries and learning support assistants. The foundation provides for about 225 students each year and FEFC funding amounts to seven per cent of the institution's total income. A clearly written, concise and evaluative self-assessment was prepared for the inspection. The report provided a balanced analysis of the quality of provision for each aspect of the framework provided by circular 97/12, *Validating Self-Assessment*. Observations of teaching and learning contributed to the assessment of the quality of the FEFC-funded provision. There was insufficient analysis of students' achievements in the self-

assessment report. A statement of actions taken since the last inspection was provided but there is no action plan to address the weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. Inspectors did not agree with all the strengths identified in the self-assessment for the curriculum and considered that some weaknesses in planning and in teaching had been overlooked. Inspectors broadly agreed with the foundation's assessment of other aspects of provision but identified additional weaknesses in curriculum management and support for students. Inspectors agreed with the grade awarded in the self-assessment report.

The range of courses is well matched to the needs of students and their work in the local community. All lessons were at least satisfactory and slightly more than half were considered well organised and purposeful. There are good levels of achievement and progression to other courses provided by the foundation. The accommodation and learning resources for FEFC-funded courses and students are good. Teaching does not take sufficient account of individual learning needs and for some courses there is inadequate planning of teaching and assessment. Insufficiently detailed records of students' progress are maintained for most courses. The arrangements for identifying and providing additional support are not effective. Since the last inspection the foundation has improved the arrangements to inform the governing council about the FEFC-funded provision. Productive links

Summary

with other organisations help the development of the courses. Though a framework for managing courses is being developed there is insufficient oversight of the management of some courses and insufficient rigour in reviewing the quality of courses. The arrangements for providing advice and guidance to students are underdeveloped. The FEFC-funded provision was awarded a grade 3. It is satisfactory with strengths but also some weaknesses.

Context

The Establishment and its Mission

1 The Urban Learning Foundation began as the London base for students from the College of St Mark and St John when that college moved from London to Plymouth in 1973. It became a registered charity and company limited by guarantee in 1984. The foundation, located in Tower Hamlets in East London, is supported by the General Synod Board of Education and a consortium of five Anglican colleges of higher education: Canterbury Christ Church College; Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education; King Alfred's College, Winchester; the University College of St Martin, Lancaster; and the College of St Mark and St John. The foundation has a governing council and council members are the trustees of the charity.

2 In 1998-9, the foundation received £67,292 for 4307 units of activity; the average level of funding per unit is £13.95. The FEFC recurrent funding amounts to seven per cent of total income. The funding allocation for 1999-00 is for 3996 units of activity. During 1999-2000, 190 students had been FEFC-funded up to the time of the inspection and the foundation was planning to enrol a further 40 FEFC-funded students. At the time of the inspection the post of director was vacant and an acting director had been appointed. Three assistant directors report to the director, one of whom is responsible for the management of the FEFC-funded provision.

3 The provision falls into three main categories. The foundation continues to provide the London base for students on initial teacher training courses at the five consortium colleges. Between 70 and 80 of these are accommodated in London each term; about half of the students are in residence at the foundation's premises in East London and the remainder are resident in another foundation building in Newham. Secondly, another important part of the foundation's provision is its own initial teacher training courses for students intending to work in inner cities. About 70 newly-qualified primary and secondary school teachers graduate from the foundation each year and there are an increasing number of short courses provided for staff in local schools. Thirdly, during the last three years, the foundation has developed a number of the continuing education courses which are funded by the FEFC and it plans to expand this provision in the future.

4 The age of students on FEFC-funded courses ranges from 16 to over 60; more than half are aged between 26 and 45. In 1998-99, 70% were women and about 47% declared themselves to be from minority ethnic communities. Eight per cent of students did not declare a racial origin. Many students are unemployed or unwaged. Some are recent arrivals in England while others have lived here for many years. Many of the students bring with them a range of qualifications from other countries and aim to upgrade or utilise their existing qualifications by

Context

acquiring additional knowledge, skills and other accredited qualifications.

5 The foundation aims to provide educational opportunities for people who live and work in urban communities. Its mission is to 'promote the advancement of education in the sphere of higher and further education by maintaining a Church of England Urban Learning Foundation and promoting research in urban learning'. Equality of opportunity is integral to the mission of the foundation. An important objective is to develop courses that provide opportunities for people from minority ethnic communities to work towards professional and academic qualifications.

The inspection

6 The Urban Learning Foundation was inspected during January 2000 by two inspectors. Meetings were held with the acting director, the assistant director who is responsible for the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC)-funded provision, members of its governing council, the continuing education advisory group, and course managers. Discussions were held with teachers and students. Inspectors evaluated the self-assessment report provided by the Foundation for its work funded by the Council.

7 The inspection considered provision funded by the FEFC. Students' work and course documentation was examined. Nine lessons were observed. Of these 55%

were judged to be good or outstanding, compared with the national average of 60% for external institutions as quoted in the Chief Inspectors Annual Report: *Quality and Standards in Further Education 1998-9*. All lessons were at least satisfactory. The average level of attendance in lessons was 75% and the average number of students attending lessons was 10.

The Curriculum

Grade profile of sessions observed

Grade	1	2	3	4	5
Number of lessons	1	4	4	0	0

8 Inspectors did not agree with all the strengths identified in the self-assessment report and considered that some weaknesses in planning and in teaching had been overlooked.

Key strengths

- range of courses well matched to student needs
- well organised and purposeful lessons
- good levels of achievement and progression
- good-quality accommodation and learning resources

Weaknesses

- failure of teaching to take sufficient account of individual learning needs
- some inadequate planning of teaching and assessment
- insufficiently detailed records of students' progress
- lack of effective arrangements for additional support

9 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the curriculum is carefully planned to meet the needs of people from local minority ethnic communities who wish to work towards professional and academic qualifications. Courses include English, community interpreting,

bilingual health advocacy and courses for school secretaries and learning support assistants. The health advocacy courses make extensive use of speakers working in occupational areas of health. Changes have been made to the curriculum to provide better support for students in their work or to reflect changes in community needs. For example, NVQ based assessment has been introduced because of its acceptability with employers. The courses are accredited by the London Open College Network or the City and Guilds of London Institute (CGLI). Opportunities for progression are being developed within the programme of courses. Some courses are provided at the foundation's own premises and at other venues in East London.

10 Most teaching is effective in extending students' skills or knowledge and sustaining their interest. All lessons were judged to be satisfactory or better. Teachers prepare their lessons well. They are supportive of the students, while maintaining high expectations. In most lessons, teachers managed a variety of activities effectively and students' interest was sustained. A lesson on the development of English skills was well managed to develop students' comprehension of spoken English as well as their understanding

The Curriculum

of the grammatical structure of written text. Students in pairs were asked to describe their partner using dictionary definitions of words. They were then asked to consider the structure and precision of their descriptions, and this led to an understanding of the need for precision in language and also of how to make more effective use of dictionaries. The lesson was briskly conducted and made good use of group working. In another lesson a discussion of learning styles was well managed to enable students to understand different approaches to learning. Students conducted an investigation of their own preferences for learning methods by assessing themselves and discussing the extent to which the outcomes of assessment met their own expectations. This led to a greater understanding of pupils' learning needs.

11 There are some weaknesses in planning teaching and assessment. Some schemes of work are insufficiently detailed to provide guidance on teaching or learning activities. Most courses meet for a full day. In about half the lessons observed by inspectors teachers did not adequately share the aims and structure of the day with the student group. Where two teachers share a group of students, liaison is not always effective. Students and tutors do not fully understand the requirements of NVQ assessment. Tutors have not established appropriate recording systems to enable the effective management of assessment. Most courses do not have a defined assessment schedule which is related to

the scheme of work. Insufficient information is given in the student handbook about assessment procedures and in assignment specifications on the criteria for assessment. These weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment report.

12 The arrangements for initial assessment of students' learning needs are underdeveloped. Teachers determine the individual learning needs of students in a variety of ways. On some courses, students complete a written task which is assessed by the tutor. In other cases, an interview is used to assess student's command of English. For some courses there is no formal assessment of students' learning needs. Learning support is not effectively managed. A learning plan is not developed for individual students. The self-assessment report states that course teaching addresses the range of educational and linguistic experience in student groups. Inspectors did not agree. In some lessons teachers gave insufficient attention to the range of students' previous experience. In other lessons teachers talked for too long or used language that was too complex for the language comprehension of all the students in the group.

13 Students are well motivated and work co-operatively and effectively in lessons. Students' written work is of an appropriate standard. Teachers assess students' work accurately but they sometimes do not give adequate guidance to students on areas for improvement. On most courses, the teachers' records of

The Curriculum

students' progress and achievements are inadequate. The self-assessment report overstated the progress made since the last inspection in addressing these weaknesses in recording. However, some teachers provide appropriate support for students to record their own progress. Effective use is made of learning diaries by students on the 'challenges for healthy living' course to assess their own learning. In one lesson, students assumed the role of examiners to review their work and assess each other's comprehension. Appropriate support is given to students to manage the development and completion of portfolios of evidence for NVQ assessment.

14 Retention and achievement rates are generally good and improving, as stated in the self-assessment report. The proportion of students who complete their courses has improved steadily since the last inspection. Many students often progress to more advanced courses. In 1998-99, the average retention over all courses was good at 83%. However, retention for 'introduction to community interpreting' has remained unsatisfactory at below 70% and it declined last year for the C&G 7321-01 course for learning support assistants. The course team attribute this to the change to NVQ-based assessment. Pass rates have also improved. In 1998-99, 95% of students who completed their courses gained an award. The 'bilingual health advocacy' course is now very successful with both a high retention and pass rate.

15 Teaching rooms are well decorated, appropriately furnished, adequate for the size of the groups using them and well equipped with audiovisual resources such as video, overhead projector, whiteboard and curtains or blinds. Since the last inspection a network of 15 computers has been installed in the library. There are few learning resource materials specifically provided for the further education courses but the library contains a wide range of books and publications on educational matters, including aspects of health education and the needs of students with disabilities or learning difficulties. The library and IT resources are under-used by the continuing education students. Some students are being introduced to the use of the Internet. Further education students are given insufficient encouragement to use the library. The resource centre has insufficient specialist IT equipment designed to help students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. If such equipment was available it would enable learning support assistants to gain experience of such resources whilst studying at the foundation. Some poorly-reproduced handout materials were used in lessons. Insufficient use is made in teaching of IT-based learning materials and self-study packs. These weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment report.

Other Aspects of Provision

16 Inspectors broadly agreed with the foundation's assessment of other aspects of provision but identified additional weaknesses in curriculum management and support for students.

Key strengths

- improved arrangements to inform the governing council
- productive links with other organisations
- well-qualified and experienced staff

Weaknesses

- underdeveloped arrangements for providing advice and guidance
- insufficient oversight of the management of some courses
- insufficient rigour in reviewing the quality of courses
- lack of formal procedures to monitor the effectiveness of the equal opportunities policy

17 The foundation is governed by a council comprising a chair, currently the Bishop of Stepney, the director, two nominated representatives of the consortium of five colleges and up to five co-opted members. The chair and director are ex-officio members of the council. The council meets three times each year and has a finance and general purposes committee which also meet three times each year. Since the last inspection, a quality assurance committee has been established and the representation of further education on the council and the committee has been strengthened. The professional

advisory committee reviews the continuing education programme annually, reviews and comments on reports of courses, and provides a forum for discussion of local training and educational needs and potential curriculum developments.

18 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that productive links with other organisations support the development and management of the FEFC-funded continuing education programme. The foundation has extensive links with other agencies. These include higher education institutions, hospitals and health authorities, and local authority support services. The professional advisory committee enables staff to meet with staff of other colleges and voluntary organisations. Links with schools and other organisations assist the foundation in providing information about local training needs. Information from the local training and enterprise council is also used productively. Planning of the FEFC-funded programme has a clear set of objectives based on the aims in the foundation's development plan.

19 Courses are promoted by advertising and distribution of course leaflets. Some courses have open days. Teachers usually provide students with guidance on the appropriateness of courses at an initial interview following application. However late applicants are not always interviewed. Some students were unsure of the purpose of interviews. The content of initial interviews is determined by individual teachers and

Other Aspects of Provision

consequently is not the same for all students. Since the last inspection, some improvements have been made to ensure that students are on the most appropriate course. Effective use is made of induction sessions to provide an introduction to the course. A students' handbook is provided which gives information about the foundation, the facilities provided for students and the course. In some cases the level of English in the handbook does not take account of the wide range of English language skills in the student group. Insufficient guidance is provided to teachers on the management and content of induction sessions. For example, there is no introduction to the library and learning resource facilities as part of induction.

20 Teachers provide academic and personal support for students during their courses through tutorials. Tutorials concentrate on a review of academic progress but are not structured or guided by a policy or agreed procedures. Records of tutorial discussions lack detail and do not include a record of actions agreed between the student and tutor. There has been insufficient staff development on the management and recording of tutorials. Teachers also give advice about progression where it is appropriate. However, the advice and guidance provided within the foundation mainly relates to higher education and increasing participation in teaching. A recent appointment has strengthened the arrangements for providing more general advice on employment and career progression. There are effective arrangements for

referral to a counselling service. Students appreciated the education and support they were receiving and were clear that it was helping them to improve their understanding and their competence. Many students are relatively isolated in their work and appreciated the contact with colleagues. Some meet outside the course. One group of former students on a school secretaries course set up a local professional support group.

21 The director is the chief executive of the foundation and is supported by three assistant directors, who are responsible for initial teacher training, continuing education and professional development, and finance, respectively. This group meets regularly as a management team and determines strategy for the foundation. The FEFC-funded provision benefits from being within the structure of a well-established organisation. A strategic plan for the continuing education provision has been proposed and incorporated into the plan for the foundation but this has not been translated into operational targets. There are no links between course action plans and the strategic plan for the development of the continuing education programme. Progress made with action plans resulting from the review of courses is not regularly considered. There is no formal reporting of progress made in meeting strategic objectives.

22 Course managers have responsibility for organising and managing the teaching of courses. Since the last inspection, a course

Other Aspects of Provision

manager's handbook has been developed which provides some guidance on the responsibilities of the course manager and the use of standard documentation for recording information about students and their progress. Some course files are comprehensive. There is insufficient oversight of the management of some courses and few opportunities for managers to meet or to share good practice. The courses for learning support assistants are effectively managed. These courses are offered at three venues but staff meet regularly to plan and review the operation of the courses.

23 Course managers are responsible for recommending the appointment of part-time teachers and visiting speakers. Some courses make extensive use of such speakers. There are insufficient financial controls over the arrangements for issuing contracts and payments to part-time teachers. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report. Administrative staff make a significant contribution to the success of the FEFC-funded programme through the production of publicity materials, and a staff newsletter, as well as by ensuring that details of students are collected and that individualised student records are correctly completed.

24 Since the last inspection, the arrangements for quality assurance have been strengthened. The governing council has formed a committee with responsibility for monitoring the effectiveness of quality assurance procedures. The quality

assurance committee had its first meeting in June 1999 and has met frequently since then. Reports on the continuing education programme are a standing agenda item for each meeting. The committee reviewed the self-assessment report and the staff development plan. The quality assurance committee also receives minutes and reports from the professional advisory group. However as the self-assessment report recognises the council has not yet established fully effective arrangements to monitor the quality and effectiveness of the continuing education programme. The procedures for reporting are not yet well understood by staff. A cycle of quality improvement from evaluation to identification of actions and monitoring the effectiveness of their implementation is not yet in place. Action plans and targets for student retention and achievement are not formally set and there are no agreed performance criteria. There is insufficient reporting on the quality of collaborative provision to the council. However, since the last inspection such provision has been reduced and in the current year only two courses will be provided.

25 A programme of course monitoring visits was begun in response to the last inspection. Detailed reports of teaching observations are written. Course reviews, based on the framework provided by circular 97/12, are now formally conducted by course managers. The self-assessment report recognises that quality assurance

Other Aspects of Provision

procedures are not well established and have not yet had a significant impact upon the quality of teaching and learning. Course reviews take some account of students' views but do not include a thorough analysis of the effectiveness of teaching or of student achievements. The views of headteachers in schools and other employers are not systematically sought. Action plans are not well formulated and monitoring of progress throughout the year is inadequate. Equality of opportunity is integral to the mission of the foundation and staff are committed to implementing the policy on this. However, arrangements to monitor equality of opportunity in relation to gender or disability are not in place. This weakness was also identified at the previous inspection

26 In addition to the assistant director, three staff, one full-time and two who are 0.5 posts appointed since the last inspection, are directly responsible for the FEFC-funded programme. Five substantial part-time teachers are used to support the courses. An appropriate level of administrative support is provided. All staff are well qualified. All of the teachers are graduates and most are qualified teachers; many have additional relevant specialist or post-graduate qualifications. The need for more effective planning of training is recognised by the foundation. A staff development plan has been proposed but no budget has been allocated. Some teachers have had insufficient training to implement new methods of assessment, particularly for the recently introduced NVQ courses.

This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report.

27 The foundation occupies purpose-built accommodation, comprising a conference room which is also used for teaching, office accommodation and residential rooms for students on other programmes. The library and two further teaching rooms are located in temporary buildings. The foundation is in the early stages of planning a new building. FEFC-funded courses are also located at other venues, including the professional development centre in Tower Hamlets and the education resource centre in Southwark.

Conclusions

28 The Urban Learning Foundation prepared a clearly written, concise, evaluative self-assessment report which was prefaced by a helpful introduction. The report provided a balanced analysis of the quality of provision for each aspect of the framework provided by circular 97/12, *Validating Self-Assessment*. A statement of actions taken since the last inspection was provided but an action plan to address weaknesses identified by self-assessment has not been developed. Inspectors did not fully agree with the judgements made in the report. There was insufficient analysis of students' achievements. Inspectors disagreed with some strengths and identified additional weaknesses. The FEFC-funded provision was awarded a grade 3.