

Elfrida Rathbone

**Inspection of FEFC-funded provision in
non-sector establishments for students with
learning difficulties and/or disabilities**

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
2000-01**

***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 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*

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Summary

External Institution 03/2000 Inspection of FEFC-Funded Provision in External Institutions

Elfrida Rathbone (Camden) – The Leighton Project London

Inspected November 2000

Elfrida Rathbone (Camden) is an external institution sponsored by Westminster Kingsway College. It is a company limited by guarantee. The Leighton Project is one of four projects of Elfrida Rathbone (Camden), a voluntary sector agency established to promote and advance the welfare and education of people with learning difficulties and children with special educational needs. The FEFC provides 17% of the institution's income. A management committee oversees the institution's activities. The Leighton Project is a further education project for young adults with moderate learning difficulties. Two teachers, working together, teach all the curriculum. In 1999-2000, nine full-time students were funded by the FEFC. Students follow a programme designed to promote further learning, employability and independent living. The college produced a self-assessment report for the first time in preparation for the inspection. The process followed was inadequate and the report did not give a detailed and accurate view of the provision. Inspectors agreed with some judgements in the report but identified some significant weaknesses not stated in the report.

The inspection focused on FEFC-funded provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and other general aspects of provision. Most students complete their studies. They value the help and support of their teachers. Teachers work well together. They are skilled at promoting positive attitudes about learning. Students' personal development is well-supported. Displays of students' work make it a pleasant and stimulating place in which to learn.

To improve the quality of FEFC-funded provision, the project should: revise its curriculum to match the needs and abilities of individual learners; improve initial assessment and use it to create individual learning plans with clear outcomes; regularly monitor and review individual learning; improve basic skills teaching; increase the provision of careers advice and education; improve student accommodation; introduce strategic planning and a quality assurance system; improve the management of the project; and increase teachers' and managers' awareness of current educational practices and issues.

FEFC-funded provision at Elfrida Rathbone (Camden) is less than satisfactory, with weaknesses that clearly outweigh the strengths. It was awarded a grade 4.

Context

The Establishment and its Mission

1 Elfrida Rathbone (Camden)'s Leighton Project is a community based further education project for young adults with moderate learning difficulties. The Leighton Project is one of four projects of Elfrida Rathbone (Camden), a voluntary sector agency established in 1982 to promote and advance the welfare and education of people with learning difficulties and children with special educational needs. The Leighton Project was established in 1983 with the aim of providing learners with the skills for independent living to enable them to move into either paid work, employment training or further education courses. Elfrida Rathbone (Camden) is part of the Camden Family Resource Centre, a consortium of voluntary sector agencies who will be moving in 2001 to a purpose built centre in Kentish Town. It is a company limited by guarantee. The premises are used by other Elfrida Rathbone (Camden) projects and are shared with Camden Family Services Unit. A management committee, whose members represent the interests of the users and professionals working in the field of further education for adults with learning difficulties, oversees the institution's activities. A project manager, reporting to the director, supervises the project's two full-time teachers. At the time of the inspection, the project manager's post had been vacant since May 2000 and the director had been in post for one week, following the departure of the previous director in July 2000.

2 In 1999-2000, the institution received FEFC funding of £63,978 for 3,462 planned units of activity. The average level of funding per unit was £16.50 compared to the median level for external institutions of £11.61. The institution has failed to meet its target for units in all of the last three years. The FEFC provides 17% of the institution's income; most income is derived from the London Borough of Camden, supplemented by other grants and donations. In 1999-2000, institution data show that nine students were FEFC-funded. At the time of the inspection, nine students were enrolled. The Leighton Project offers a two-year programme of educational, personal and social development. This includes basic skills, art, drama, personal health and hygiene, independent travel skills and IT. The small group approach encourages learners to develop their communication and interpersonal skills in preparation for more independent lifestyles. Each student also receives regular supervision with a named keyworker. External assessment and accreditation was obtained from the London Open College Network (LOCN) until 1998-99, but since then there has been no external accreditation of learning.

The inspection

3 Elfrida Rathbone (Camden) was inspected during November 2000. Three inspectors held meetings with members of the management committee, the director, the former acting director and teachers. Inspectors had discussions with

Context

students and examined their work. Relevant documentation was reviewed and the institution's self-assessment report was evaluated. The inspection focused on FEFC-funded provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, together with other general aspects of provision. Inspectors observed a sample of 10 lessons and one tutorial. Of these lessons, four were judged to be good and three were judged to be less than satisfactory. The average level of attendance in the lessons inspected was 84% and the average class size was eight.

4 Prior to the week of inspection inspectors examined the institution's student achievement data for 1999-2000 and data for previous years where the individual student records (ISR) indicated that there were anomalies. Inspectors concluded that:

- the ISR data is unreliable and could not be used for the purposes of inspection
- the institution has good paper records, including registers, student files and returns from the awarding body
- teachers and managers are unfamiliar with the operation of the ISR system.

The Curriculum

Grade profile of sessions observed

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

5 Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report. Some strengths were overstated and additional weaknesses were identified.

Key strengths

- effective teaching, promoting positive attitudes about learning
- productive working relations between staff and students
- clear guidelines for classroom management
- effective reviewing of students' personal development.

Weaknesses

- ineffective initial assessment of learning needs
- lack of individual learning plans
- insufficient recording of students' progress
- failure to match learning activities to the needs of individual learners
- insufficient distinction between first and second year of the programme.
- insufficient measures of students' progress.

6 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that there are productive personal relationships between teachers and learners. Teachers are

very skilled at recognising spontaneous opportunities to build students' confidence and self-esteem. Students' comments and contributions are taken seriously. Teaching methods are used which encourage a sense of identity and self-worth. Students are actively encouraged to make decisions and to recognise the needs and feelings of others. They are encouraged to learn together and to give each other constructive feedback. Regular student tutorials are well-used to promote and support personal development. Teachers show great sensitivity in responding to individuals and in managing groups. Potentially difficult situations are effectively defused through care, tact and well-developed interpersonal skills. Students are encouraged at the Leighton Project to feel positive about themselves as learners. Students value the support and help of their teachers. Sometimes students are over-supported. The comfortable and secure environment sometimes prevents students from learning on their own.

7 Inspectors do not agree with the self-assessment that teaching and learning is planned effectively to meet the needs of students and awarding bodies. All students follow the same curriculum irrespective of aspirations and interests. Some schemes of work follow an accreditation scheme that is no longer used. Learning programmes

The Curriculum

are not derived from the student's initial assessment. All Leighton Project students undertake a ninety minute assessment which includes an interview at the start of their programme. The results of the assessment are unreliable and do not contribute to individual learning plans. The lack of detailed individual learning plans prevents teachers' from extending each student's learning. Students' learning is not regularly recorded and reviewed. Tutorials focus on personal development issues rather than issues about learning and achievement. Some lessons lack variety and teachers do not provide opportunities for students to plan and reflect on their learning, particularly at the beginnings and ends of lessons. In most lessons students work on similar activities. There is little differentiation either in learning activities or learning materials. Some lessons are well-planned and sustain high levels of student involvement. A mobility skills lesson very effectively encouraged students to plan, collaborate and make decisions about a journey. A women's group meeting dealt sensitively and effectively with the subject of menstrual periods. There was a wide variety of activities, students were actively engaged, and teachers successfully encouraged them and used their contributions to the discussion. In basic skills lessons the worksheets used were uninspiring. Skills practice is insufficiently related to learners' interests or experiences. Opportunities to teach basic skills through other lessons and activities are frequently missed. Students following the second year of the programme follow the same

content as first year students. The institution's mission emphasises the importance of employment skills, but arrangements for work experience are unsystematic. Many students do not take up work experience placements. Work experience is not regularly reviewed and evaluated within students' overall learning programmes.

8 Retention has been consistently high. In 1997-98, 94% of students completed their course. This figure fell to 86% in 1998-99 and rose again to 100% in 1999-2000. The institution does not have a clear view of student achievement. In 1998-99, the admissions policy was revised to restrict entry to learners with moderate, rather than moderate and severe, learning difficulties. Communication and mobility skills were then accredited through LOCN. LOCN accreditation was discontinued for 1999-2000 students. Currently, there is no external accreditation of learning. Inspectors disagreed with the self-assessment that external accreditation is a strength. The Leighton Project uses no other measures of student achievement. Student folders, lacking regularly reviewed individual learning plans, do not clearly indicate student progress or achievement. There is an overemphasis on the use of worksheets as a way of learning. Progress is not mapped against agreed individual targets. Students feel that the Leighton Project is a place that enables them to learn. They value the support they receive and can give examples of gains they have made. All students who complete the course receive a Leighton Project Certificate in Life Skills.

The Curriculum

9 Teachers have extensive experience of working with young adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Working together, they teach all of the curriculum offered. One has a teaching qualification and the other is working to achieve one. The teachers work well together and informally plan and review their work. There are no technical or curriculum support staff. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that teachers are professionally isolated. There are few books available to learners. There is a ratio of computers to students of 1:5. Computers are loaded with a useful range of software and are used for a variety of activities. However, because students do the same activities at the same time, one student spent most of one IT lesson waiting to use a computer. There is a good selection of materials for art classes. These are well-used to produce bright and attractive work.

10 The curriculum currently offered does not match the needs of learners. It is based on the old admissions policy and is not sufficiently demanding for the current group of learners. The scope of the curriculum has diminished. The curriculum lacks variety and learning activities do not match the aims of the project. This is a weakness recognised by the institution, but not identified in the self-assessment report. The curriculum does not provide an integrated and individualised programme which will promote independence and most effectively enable learners to progress. The

project is not managed well. The curriculum is not routinely reviewed and evaluated. Team meetings are irregular. There are no extra-curricular activities, though Leighton Project students can attend a youth club, another Elfrida Rathbone (Camden) project, which operates for three evenings a week at the same premises.

Other Aspects of Provision

11 Inspectors considered that in the self-assessment most strengths had been overstated and identified additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- strong formal and informal personal support for students
- attractive displays of students' work.

Weaknesses

- lack of strategic planning
- insufficient monitoring of the project's activities
- inadequate quality assurance arrangements
- inadequate management of teachers
- unsatisfactory accommodation for students
- underdeveloped careers education and advice
- failure to relate publicity and induction materials to students' abilities.

12 Most students are referred to the project by local agencies, including colleges. Prospective students are invited to visit the project. This is supplemented by open days. An information sheet is available, but inspectors did not agree with the self-assessment that publicity material is appropriate for both professionals working in the field and students. All students receive an induction pack, but the reprographic quality is poor and the language is not matched to students' reading abilities. Some materials are photocopies of other colleges' materials. The fire safety sheet is

general and does not indicate fire escape routes and procedures at the accommodation used by the Leighton Project. All students receive an initial assessment of their levels of literacy and numeracy, but the assessment is not used to produce an individualised learning programme. There are no arrangements for additional learning support. Teachers offer students a high level of personal support, both through formal sessions with key workers and informally. This is recognised and valued by students. The institution has access to support from other agencies through the community resource team. Arrangements for careers advice are underdeveloped and there is no careers education programme.

13 The centre occupies accommodation on the second and third floors of a three-storey 1930s office building owned by the London Borough of Camden. Some second floor accommodation is shared with Camden Family Service Unit. The accommodation is not accessible for people using wheelchairs at the main entrance nor in the toilet, a weakness recognised in the self-assessment. Leighton Project teaching accommodation uses three rooms on the third floor, with adjacent staff room, kitchen and toilets. Classrooms are too small for some activities; students sometimes choose to work on the floor. There are no social or recreational areas for students. One classroom contains six computers, one with Internet access. There is no library or learning resources area. These weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment. In the evening

Other Aspects of Provision

the classrooms are used by a youth club, another Elfrida Rathbone project. In the absence of adequate storage space, youth club equipment is stored in one of the classrooms, reducing further the space available for learning. Wall space is used well with bright and attractive displays of students' work and useful information. The accommodation is clean, but much is in need of redecoration and refurbishment. Plans are well-advanced for a move to fully accessible purpose-built accommodation nearby. The move, originally intended to take place during August 2000, has now been scheduled for April 2001.

14 As the self-assessment recognises, no formal quality assurance system is in place. There are no arrangements for the appraisal of staff, nor are there staff development policies or procedures. Teachers cannot easily be released for staff development work with the result that they are professionally isolated. This reduces their effectiveness when working with students. External moderators have expressed concerns about the operation of the internal verification process. Other than student enrolment numbers, there is no use of targets or performance indicators. The project has failed to meet its enrolment targets for the past three years. Inspectors did not agree that there are regular team meetings which are used to review performance. Other Elfrida Rathbone projects have steering committees to offer feedback and guidance; although plans are underway there is not one yet in place

for the Leighton Project. There is a clear and accessible complaints procedure which states response times and gives advice on whom to complain to. The student charter is out of date. The project commissioned a survey of students' views from an external organisation, but it did not prepare an action plan in response to the findings. The process of self-assessment is new to the project. The project prepared its first self-assessment report for this inspection. The former director and teachers contributed to its production. It uses the quality statements in *Circular 97/12, Validating Self-Assessment* but lacks rigour. Evidence to support judgements is not clearly identified, only its location. The management committee did not review the self-assessment report and there was no process to validate the grade given. The self-assessment report is accompanied by an action plan. It lists a number of proposals intended to address weaknesses. Many of these actions had not been achieved by their intended completion dates.

15 The project is not managed effectively. The relationship between operational and strategic management is in need of review. Some management functions are currently not being carried out. There is no regularly updated strategic plan or strategic planning process. Recruitment targets have not been met and audit returns to the council were not received by the scheduled dates. The project will significantly underachieve on its funding agreement for 1999-2000. Many management weaknesses identified at the previous

Other Aspects of Provision

inspection still remain. There is little use of market research to identify local needs. The project is overreliant on recruitment through referrals from social services or other colleges. There is still a lack of clarity about whether the project aims to prepare young people for college or to provide a bridge to work. Inspectors agreed that the project has good relationships with other relevant support agencies but there is still little contact with further education colleges or other providers. There are few formal project management meetings. The project has yet to find ways of releasing staff for development activity, although better use could be made of time before and after the short teaching day.

16 The project has experienced staffing difficulties in recent months. The previous director left in July and the project manager for the Leighton Project left in May. An acting director has been in post since July and, at the time of the inspection, a new director had just been appointed. At the time of inspection the project manager post had not yet been filled.

17 Elfrida Rathbone staff show a high level of awareness of equal opportunities issues. The equal opportunities policy is very detailed but has not been revised since 1994. It is not widely circulated. It states that each project will develop an equal opportunities action plan, but the Leighton Project does not have such a plan.

18 A management committee of six members oversees the work of all

Elfrida Rathbone (Camden) projects. Members represent professional and service user interests. Some members are not clear about their roles and responsibilities. Currently, there is no chair of the management committee. The committee meets approximately every six weeks. It recognises the need to recruit additional members with experience of education, but so far there is no clear method for doing this. The committee receives reports from the director, but the absence of clear targets and performance indicators makes it difficult for them to review effectively the quality of the work. Members are insufficiently aware of specific issues and difficulties facing the Leighton Project.

Conclusions

19 The process of self-assessment is new to the project and is not yet fully developed. The self-assessment report does not present a detailed and accurate view of provision at the Leighton Project. Inspectors considered that the project had overstated many strengths and failed to identify some significant weaknesses. Some aspects of the work identified as strengths were considered by inspectors to be weaknesses. No judgements were made about some important areas of activity. Inspectors did not agree with the project's judgement that the provision, overall, was satisfactory.

20 The FEFC-funded provision at Elfrida Rathbone (Camden)-The Leighton Project, was judged to be less than satisfactory with weaknesses that clearly outweigh strengths. It was awarded a grade 4.