

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

**An Evaluation
of the Work
of the
Inspectorate
1993-94**

January 1995

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL**

The Further Education Funding Council has a legal duty to make sure that further education in England is properly assessed. The FEFC's inspectorate inspects and reports on each college of further education every four years. The inspectorate also assesses and reports nationally on the curriculum and gives advice to FEFC's quality assessment committee.

College inspections are carried out in accordance with the framework and guidelines described in Council Circular 93/28. They involve full-time inspectors and registered part-time inspectors who have knowledge and experience in the work they inspect. Inspection teams normally include at least one member who does not work in education and a member of staff from the college being inspected.

GRADE DESCRIPTORS

The procedures for assessing quality are set out in Circular 93/28. During their inspection, inspectors assess the strengths and weaknesses of each aspect of provision they inspect. Their assessments are set out in the reports. They also use a five-point grading scale to summarise the balance between strengths and weaknesses. The descriptors for the grades are:

- *grade 1 – provision which has many strengths and few weaknesses*
- *grade 2 – provision in which the strengths clearly outweigh the weaknesses*
- *grade 3 – provision with a balance of strengths and weaknesses*
- *grade 4 – provision in which the weaknesses clearly outweigh the strengths*
- *grade 5 – provision which has many weaknesses and very few strengths.*

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SUMMARY

In the six months prior to September 1993, the inspectorate in consultation with the sector established a framework for inspection which was agreed by the Council, recruited the majority of its full-time members and began training part-time inspectors. In the year from September 1993 to August 1994, the inspectorate achieved its targets of inspecting 78 sector colleges and the FEFC-funded provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in 29 independent colleges. It completed inspection work on five national surveys, one conducted jointly with OFSTED, published reports on further education in Denmark and Sweden, and began work on this evaluation report. In addition, the inspectorate reached its target of recruiting 600 part-time inspectors into its training programme. Colleges have responded positively both to the prospect and the experience of being inspected. Evaluations by inspected colleges have provided helpful feedback to the inspectorate, and led to improvements in working methods. By developing procedures for monitoring and reviewing performance, the inspectorate has established a quality assurance mechanism which promotes consistent working practice. The lessons learned will be used to inform the inspectorate's work during 1994-95. In particular, the inspectorate acknowledges that the teams allocated to college inspections should be more consistent in size, and that it needs to meet the revised targets for the production of inspection reports. In completing its programme of work for 1993-94, the Council's inspectorate has fulfilled its terms of reference, met the requirements set out in the secretary of state's letter of guidance to the Council, and met the Council's general objective of operating in ways which are open and easily understood.

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INTRODUCTION

1 This report is about the evaluation of the inspectorate's performance in its first year of operation. It covers the appropriateness of the inspection framework, *Assessing Achievement*; the recruitment and training of both full-time and part-time inspectors and college nominees; college inspections; the inspection of provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in independent colleges; the programme of national surveys; the development of the inspectorate's own quality assurance arrangements; and the inspectorate's response to the tasks set for it by the Council and by the secretary of state. It is intended that a similar evaluation report becomes a regular feature of the inspectorate's activities in the future.

BACKGROUND

2 The Further and Higher Education Act 1992 requires that the Further Education Funding Council shall:

- a. 'secure that provision is made for assessing the quality of education provided in institutions within the further education sector; and
- b. establish a committee, to be known as the "Quality Assessment Committee", with the function of giving them advice on the discharge of their duty under paragraph a. above and such other functions as may be conferred on the committee by the Council.'

3 In order to fulfil its responsibilities with respect to quality assessment, the Council has established an inspectorate. The inspectorate's terms of reference are shown in annex 1. The quality assessment committee, required by the Act, has also been established and its terms of reference are shown in annex 2.

4 In his launch letter of guidance in July 1992 the then secretary of state asked the Council to ensure that:

- a. as soon as is practicable the outcomes of assessment visits are able to inform funding allocations; and
- b. a quality assessment report on the provision in each institution should be published every four years.

In a subsequent letter in March 1993 the secretary of state gave the Council additional guidance relating to quality assessment which is summarised in annex 3.

THE INSPECTORATE

5. In the 93-94 session, the inspectorate achieved a full-time establishment comprising a chief inspector, 12 senior inspectors and 60 inspectors, and a part-time inspectorate providing approximately 27 full-time equivalent posts.

6 The chief inspector and two senior inspectors are based in the Council's Coventry office. The remainder of the full-time inspectorate is organised on both a regional and subject basis, reflecting other aspects of the Council's organisation. A senior inspector based in each of the Council's nine regional offices leads a regional team of inspectors, all of whom are home based.

7 Senior inspectors have national responsibility for a range of subjects which match the Council's ten programme areas (annex 4). In addition, one senior inspector carries responsibility for curriculum matters. All inspectors carry national responsibility for a specialist subject area or a cross-curricular theme.

8 The inspectorate's annual budget when it is up to strength will be £8 million. This represents 33 per cent of the Council's annual running cost budget of £24.7 million and 0.3 per cent of the sector's budget of £2.7 billion. The average cost of an inspection is about £35,000. This represents just over 0.1 per cent of the average allocation of funds by the Council to each college over a four-year period. In 1993-94, the inspectorate spent only £4.7 million because it had not achieved its full staff complement.

9 The inspectorate's main tasks in the first year of operation were:

- to develop a framework for inspection
- to recruit and train 73 full-time and 600 part-time inspectors
- to begin a programme of college inspections which would enable it to meet its target of inspecting and reporting on all the 460 colleges in the sector over a four-year cycle
- to begin to inspect Council-funded work for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in independent colleges
- to undertake national surveys to enable the inspectorate to report on aspects of the curriculum and qualifications
- to develop its own quality assurance arrangements.

An evaluation of each of these aspects of the inspectorate's work is provided in the following sections of the report.

THE FRAMEWORK FOR INSPECTION

10 In the spring of 1993, a group comprising college representatives and others with an interest in the sector met under the chairmanship of the chief inspector to consider how quality assessment in further education might be carried out. A proposed framework, based on the recommendations of this group, was issued to the sector for consultation in April 1993. Over 95 per cent of the responses supported the proposed approach to quality assessment. The responses were considered by the Council in July 1993 and by the consultative group chaired by the chief inspector. A number of modifications were made to the original proposals and a revised framework for inspection was issued in Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*.

11 *Assessing Achievement* was issued in September 1993 in sufficient time for it to be used in college inspections, which started in October 1993. This is the inspectorate's main working document. It has proved sufficiently flexible to deal with the diversity of institutions in the sector and the working methods it describes have been widely accepted by colleges.

12 *Assessing Achievement* is kept under constant review, with changes made to the framework for inspection as the need arises. The following developments have taken place during 1993-94:

- the category for assessment entitled 'resources' has now been replaced by three categories: one each for staffing, equipment and learning resources, and accommodation
- the format of the summary page of published reports has been revised to help colleges to meet their obligations under the Charter for Further Education to provide a summary of inspection reports for prospective students
- a commitment has been made to include performance indicators in published reports when a standard set first becomes available in 1995
- before each inspection report is printed, a final draft copy is sent in confidence to the principal and the chair of governors of the college concerned. This normally occurs eight working weeks after the presentation of inspection findings to college governors. The final printed version is normally distributed after a further two weeks
- it has been confirmed that inspection grades represent the collective judgements of all those involved in inspection. Initial assessments arrived at by individuals are subject to moderation throughout the inspection process
- in most inspections a grade will be assigned to each of the Council's programme areas in which the college has a substantial amount of work. Only in exceptional cases will grades be assigned to two or three individual subjects within a programme area
- a commitment has been made that any programme areas judged to have more weaknesses than strengths (grades 4 or 5) during the period before the 1994-95 funding round will be re-inspected in time for the 1995-96 round.

RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING

13 The recruitment of full-time and part-time inspectors took place throughout 1993-94. Over 8,000 applications were received for full-time posts and about 3,750 people applied to be part-time inspectors.

14 Over 200 candidates were interviewed for full-time inspector posts by panels normally comprising two Council employees and two college principals. The chief inspector and 12 senior inspectors were in post by the end of January 1994 and the number of inspectors built up gradually throughout the year so that, by the end of the summer term 1994, 57 out of 60 inspector posts were filled.

15 In its first year, the national training programme for full-time inspectors was based on three two-day conferences. The conference programmes included:

- sessions focused on implementing the inspection framework
- seminars on the work of other divisions within the Council
- presentations and workshops on a variety of specialist topics given by external speakers
- feedback from principals of inspected colleges
- opportunities for regional and programme teams to meet and develop working practices.

The third conference also included a review of the inspectorate's performance during the year, highlighting organisational trends and the outcomes of the inspection programme.

16 The use of a conference format for training helped achieve three important objectives:

- to ensure a uniform interpretation of the inspection framework early in the inspection programme
- to develop a strong team spirit within the newly-recruited workforce
- to broaden each inspector's knowledge.

17 More focused training has been carried out in small groups. All full-time inspectors have received information technology training to enable them to make best use of the Council's facilities. Each inspector has also attended one of a series of writing courses, tutored by the Council's editorial team, designed to improve the quality and accuracy of inspectors' reports and heighten inspectors' awareness of issues associated with writing reports for a wide readership. Inspectors have also participated as tutors in regional and national training events for part-time inspectors.

18 The inspectorate set the following targets for the training of part-time inspectors:

- to plan and deliver residential training courses for 600 part-time inspectors by July 1994 and for a further 400 by July 1995
- to ensure that sufficient part-time inspectors successfully completed their training during the session 1993-94 to enable the inspectorate to meet its target of 78 college inspections by July 1994

-
- to recruit and train sufficient part-time inspectors from outside the world of education to allow each college inspection team to include at least one such inspector
 - to involve sector colleges in the training of inspectors.

19 A panel of full-time inspectors selected candidates for training to become part-time registered inspectors. Of the 3,750 applicants, 750 have been accepted for training and a further 950 were designated as possible candidates for future training.

20 A two-stage training programme has been developed comprising a residential training course, followed by two supervised inspection visits to colleges. At each stage, a candidate's performance is assessed by experienced full-time inspectors.

21 The three-day residential training course sets out the context of inspection and aims to develop in candidates the skills and knowledge required by an inspector. Particular emphasis is paid to the observation of teaching and learning, the formulation of judgements, and reporting back to colleges both orally and in writing. Candidates who are not familiar with the further education sector are invited to an additional half-day orientation programme at the start of the residential training. In 1993-94, the training courses were staffed by full-time inspectors and professional tutors from the Further Education Staff College. Each candidate's performance is closely monitored through a series of analysis, writing and feedback exercises. At the end of a course, the quality of work is assessed by a panel of tutors who decide whether each candidate should proceed to further training.

22 Those who successfully complete the residential training programme are required to make two supervised inspection visits to colleges. The first of these is a one-day visit designed to provide an introduction to the inspection of cross-college provision. Typically, a candidate will examine documentary evidence, interview members of college staff and prepare and deliver feedback on their findings to a senior manager in the college.

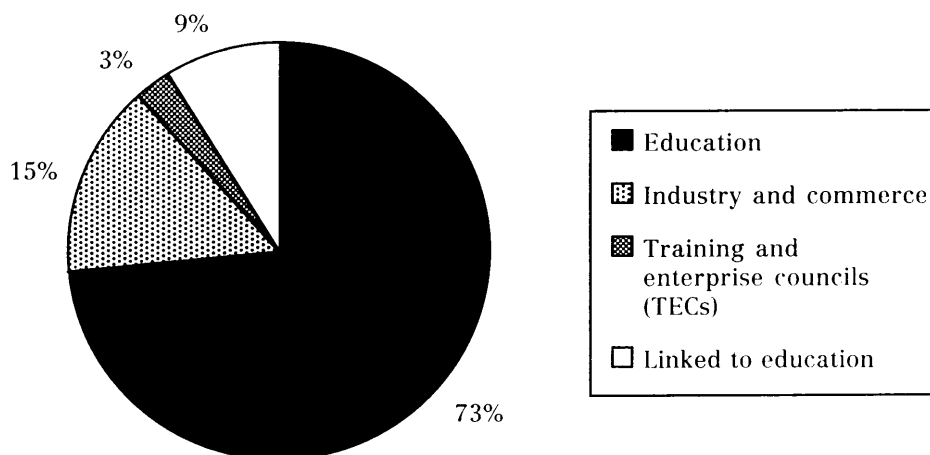
23 The second supervised inspection focuses on a candidate's specialist skills. During this two-day event each candidate inspects curriculum delivery in one of the Council's ten programme areas. The candidate is required to plan the inspection, organise an appropriate schedule of meetings, observe teaching, assess students' achievements and feed back judgements to appropriate college staff. The candidate also prepares a written report of the inspection which is assessed. More than 120 colleges have participated in this aspect of training.

24 By July 1994, over 250 part-time inspectors had successfully completed their training and had been placed on the register of part-time inspectors. A further 300 are currently in training and 200 await training. Approximately 10 per cent of candidates who started training have withdrawn or have been rejected at some stage in the programme.

The inspectorate is on target to have approximately 1,000 part-time inspectors trained and registered by July 1995.

25 The employment backgrounds of part-time inspectors are shown in figure 1. Seventy-three per cent of the candidates accepted for training in 1993-94 currently work in the further education sector. Most are employed in positions which involve significant management responsibilities for a curriculum area or a broader aspect of a college's work. Nine per cent of the candidates are from outside the sector but working in related professions, for example as educational consultants, or education officers. Three per cent are employees of the training and enterprise councils. The remaining 15 per cent are employed in industry or commerce, enabling the inspectorate to fulfil its commitment to include one person with experience outside the world of education in each college inspection team.

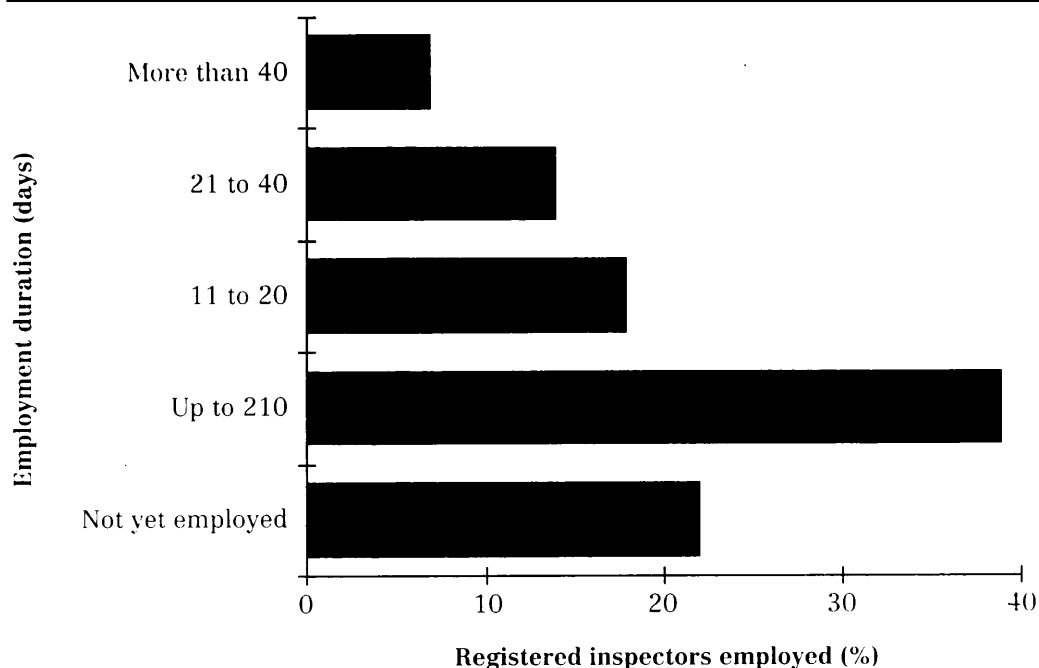
Figure 1: Employment background of part-time inspectors



Source: Part-time inspectors' applications (May 1994)

26 Nearly 80 per cent of the part-time registered inspectors have participated in college inspections (figure 2). Those who entered the register early in the session have been employed more frequently than those who achieved registration later.

Figure 2: The employment of part-time registered inspectors



Source: Part-time inspectors' register (July 1994)

27 An innovative and successful aspect of the new inspection arrangements is the inclusion on the inspection team, of a nominee from the staff of the college being inspected. College nominees may participate in any aspect of the inspection including visiting classes with an inspector, joining discussions with college staff, students, governors, employers and others interested in the work of the college, and attending all meetings held by inspectors before, during and after the inspection. All but one of the colleges inspected in 1993-94 elected to have a nominee on their inspection team and 84 per cent of the nominees attended a briefing event at which their role was explained and discussed. Responses to the briefing events have been positive, and nominees found them helpful in enabling them to discharge their role during the inspection. Nominee briefing events held during the summer 1994 were attended by 130 of those nominated by their colleges to serve as college nominees in the 1994-95 college inspection programme.

COLLEGE INSPECTIONS

28 During 1993-94, 78 further education sector colleges were inspected and the work of 150,000 students was observed in over 11,000 lessons. All work inspected was assessed in terms of strengths and weaknesses, and grades were awarded on a scale of 1 to 5, as described in *Assessing Achievement*. Grade 1 represents provision which has many strengths and very few weaknesses; grade 5 represents provision which has many weaknesses and very few strengths.

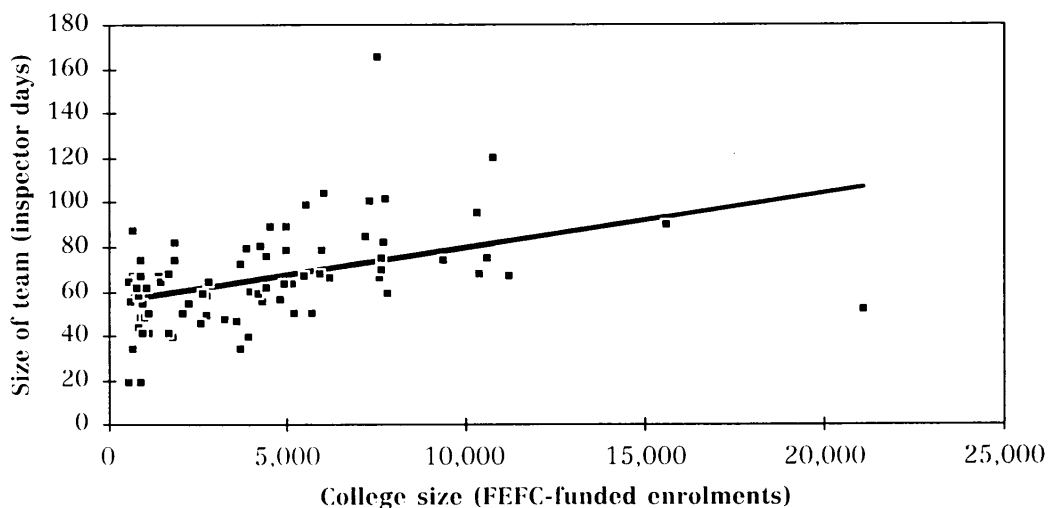
29 Seven aspects of college inspections are considered in this evaluation report:

- the management and organisation of inspections
- colleges' responses to inspections
- lesson observation grades
- programme area inspection grades
- the regional dimension
- inspection reports
- follow-up to inspections.

The Management and Organisation of Inspections

30 The responsibility for agreeing an appropriate inspection sample which reflects the work of a college rests with the reporting inspector. Since colleges differ so much in their size and range of work, there can be no hard and fast rules about the appropriate amount of time devoted to each inspection. On average, the inspectorate devotes about 80 inspector days to a college inspection, with a lower limit of about 50 days and an upper limit of about 150 days. The data presented in figure 3 show the relationship between the time taken for each inspection (as represented by the number of inspection days devoted to a college inspection) and college size (as represented by Council-funded enrolments). The regression line shown in figure 3 indicates an approximately linear relationship between college size and the inspector days devoted to inspections. The spread in the allocation of inspection time to colleges of similar size is too large. This stemmed, in part, from the fact that throughout 1993-94 the inspectorate was not up to its full strength. The inspectorate is now well on the way to achieving its target establishment and will ensure that colleges are treated more consistently in the academic year 1994-95.

Figure 3: Plot of the size of inspection teams against size of college



Source: Inspection reports (July 1994)

Colleges' Responses to Inspection

31 All inspected colleges are invited to complete an evaluation questionnaire and, in the first ten months of the 1993-94 programme, 60 per cent of inspected colleges did so. The questionnaires are set out under the three broad headings:

- communications and planning
- inspection
- feedback and reporting.

32 The great majority of colleges expressed support for the process of inspection and a high degree of satisfaction with the professionalism of inspectors. Questionnaire respondents commented favourably on the openness of the inspection process, the valuable opportunities to engage in dialogue with inspectors and the fact that inspection encouraged teachers to develop skills in self-assessment. The addition of a college nominee to the inspection team has been particularly well received. This is seen as a means of promoting efficiency, preventing misconceptions and assisting staff in their understanding of inspection and in the interpretation of inspection findings.

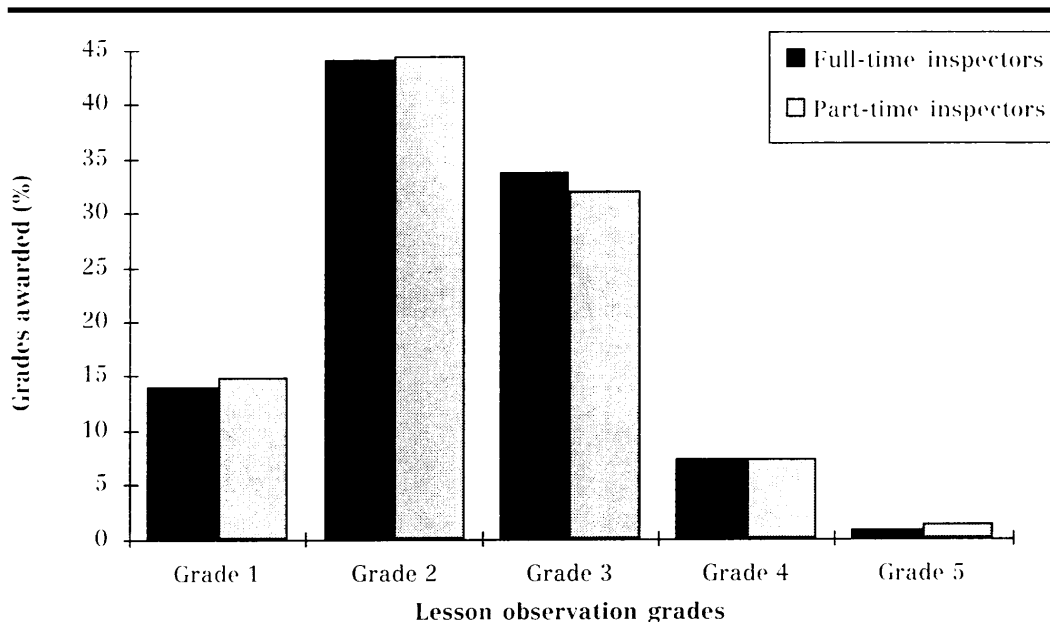
33 Respondents commented on the amount of time taken to collate information requested by inspectors prior to an inspection and the fact that the format of information used within their college did not, in some cases, match the format requested by the inspection team. To minimise the risk of duplication and to avoid needless reorganisation of information, the inspectorate is working with the Council's research and statistics division to enable it to use statistical returns prepared by colleges for the Council and other bodies.

34 Thirty per cent of the colleges inspected commented on the variations in the frequency and style of inspectors' feedback to teachers following lesson observations. This is a matter to which the inspectorate has already given some further attention in its training programme for both inspectors and college nominees. The inspectorate's general position on this is that inspectors are expected to speak briefly to teachers after observing them teach. If it is inconvenient to do this at the end of a lesson, the inspector should feed back later. This feedback is not teacher appraisal, which is a matter for the college. Nor can a busy inspector provide the kind of detailed debriefing which a teacher might expect of a teacher-training programme. The intention is that the inspector should comment on the main strengths and weaknesses of the lesson. Inspectors inspect teaching not teachers. The lesson grades are used only in aggregated form and so inspectors do not feed back individual lesson grades, either to teachers or their managers. Grade profiles of all lessons seen in a particular programme areas are provided during feedback to college managers.

Lesson Observation Grades

35 The only inspection grades which are not directly moderated by inspection teams are lesson observation grades which rely on the judgement of an individual inspector observing a particular class. This allows a comparison to take place between the grades awarded by full-time and part-time inspectors (figure 4). The almost identical profile of grades awarded by full-time and part-time inspectors is encouraging and reflects favourably on the inspectorate's training programme.

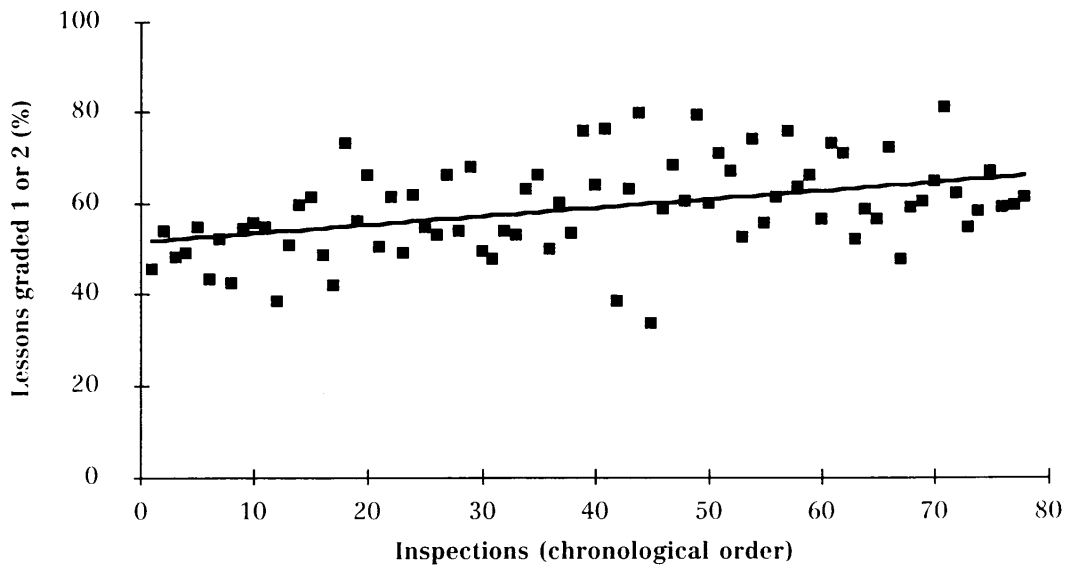
Figure 4: Lesson observation grades awarded by full-time and part-time inspectors



Source. Inspection database (July 1994)

36 Throughout the year, there has been a noticeable increase in the amount of time and effort colleges devote to preparing for inspection. Staff-development programmes focused on *Assessing Achievement* and the process of inspection, regular newsletters informing staff of issues related to quality, guidance from college staff employed as part-time inspectors and the services of external consultants have all featured in colleges' preparatory programmes. Such initiatives, and a growing tendency for colleges to share their experiences of inspection, have contributed to a general improvement in the quality of provision inspected during the year. This is illustrated in figure 5 which shows the chronological trend of the lesson observation grades awarded in which strengths outweigh weakness.

Figure 5: Lessons graded 1 or 2 (%) plotted against inspections arranged in chronological order

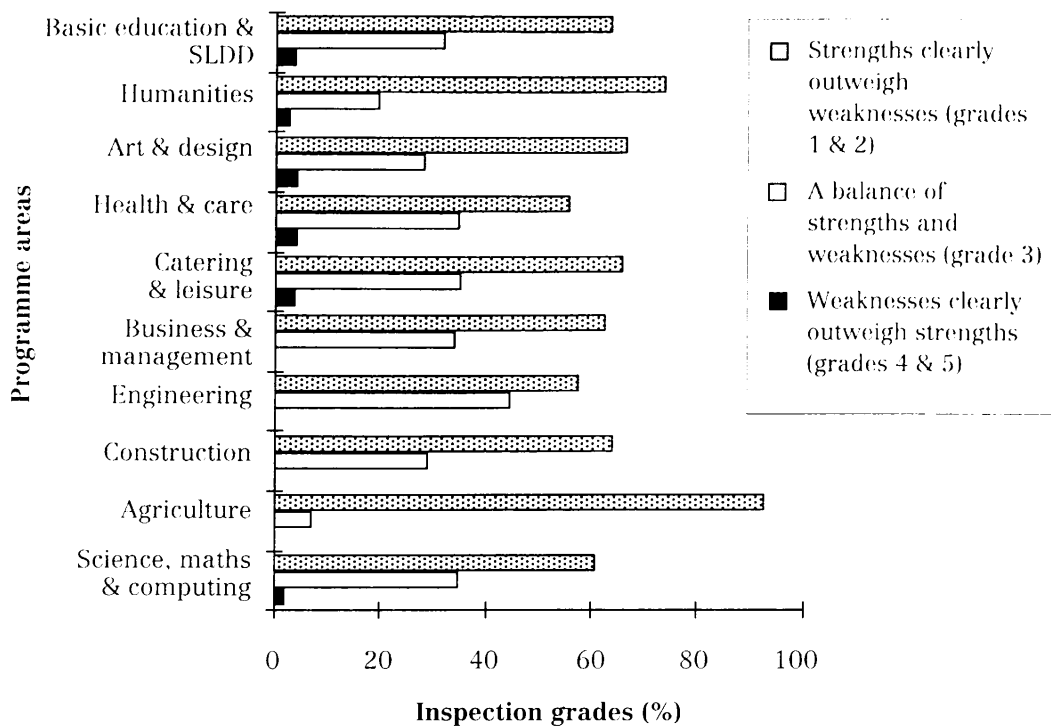


Source: Inspection reports (July 1994)

Programme Area Inspection Grades

37 The inspection grades awarded to provision in the Council's ten programme areas are shown in figure 6. In all cases, strengths outweighed weaknesses in more than 50 per cent of provision while weaknesses outweighed strengths in less than 10 per cent. Agricultural provision has been particularly highly graded, with more than 90 per cent judged to be grade 1 or grade 2. In most cases, inspections took place in dedicated and well-resourced agricultural colleges attended by highly-motivated students. In contrast, health and community care, with just over 50 per cent of provision judged to be grade 1 or grade 2, is a diverse area of provision embracing health and social care, hairdressing and beauty therapy. It is often poorly resourced and staff have difficulty in obtaining work placements for students, many of whom are poorly motivated and fail to complete their course of study. Similar characteristics prevail in engineering, with its wide range of disciplines where, in many instances, teaching is supported by outdated equipment and carried out in poor accommodation.

Figure 6: Inspection grades by programme area



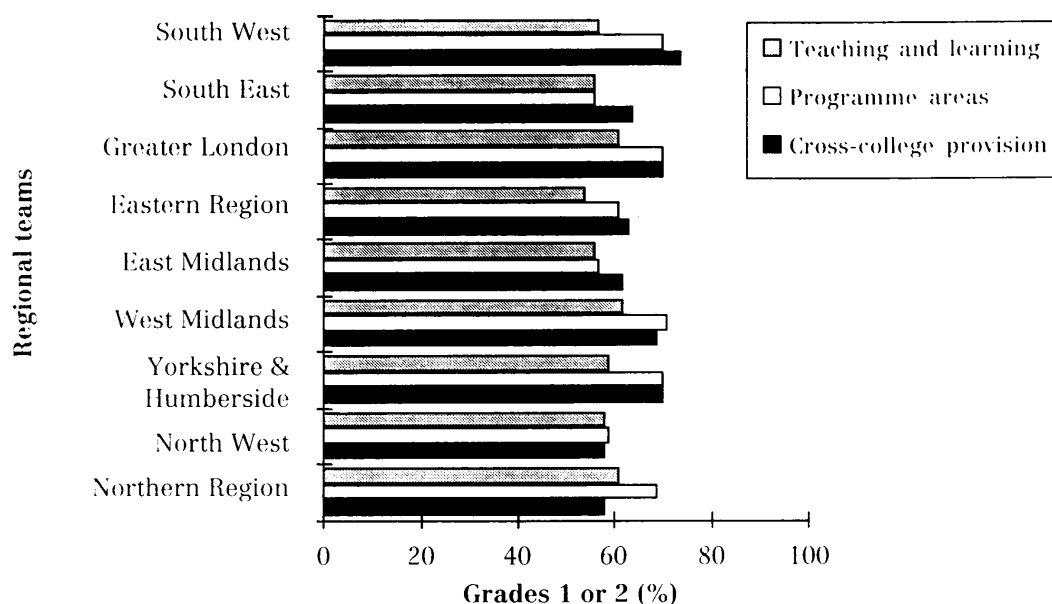
Source: Inspection reports (July 1994)

The Regional Dimension

38 In the college year, 1993-94, each regional inspection team completed between eight and twelve college inspections. Most teams awarded more than 1,000 lesson observations grades, about 90 programme area grades and about 65 grades for cross-college aspects of provision. A comparison by region of the provision in which strengths outweigh weaknesses (grades 1 and 2) shows that the grades awarded for lesson observations are similar across the nine regions (figure 7). Grades awarded to programme areas and cross-college provision are more variable. This probably stems, in part, from the smaller samples. At this stage in the four-year inspection cycle it is too early to draw conclusions about regional grading patterns.

39 Programme area grades are based mainly on assessments of the quality of teaching and students' achievements, but they are also influenced by factors such as the appropriateness of the resources and accommodation used for teaching and the organisation of courses. Generally, programme area grades are higher than those derived solely from lesson observations (figure 7).

Figure 7: Provision awarded grade 1 or grade 2 by regional inspection teams



Source: Inspection reports (July 1994)

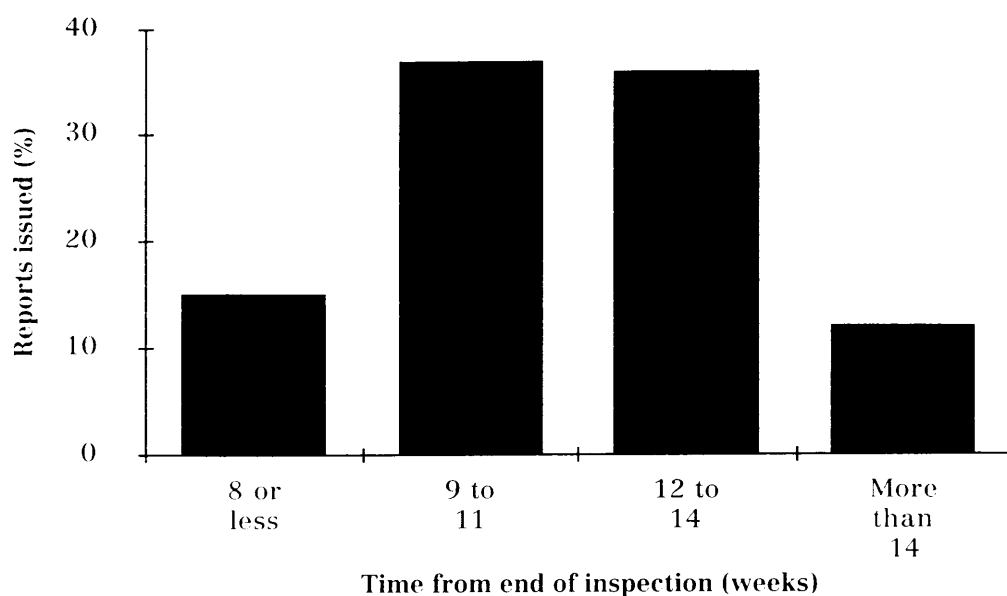
Inspection Reports

40 In the nine months from January to September 1994, the inspectorate published 78 college inspection reports and two reports on further education in Denmark and Sweden. There were 29 reports on FEFC-funded work in independent colleges providing for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Subsequently, a further five national survey reports and the first annual chief inspector's report have been published. The inspectorate's publications are widely circulated and have received favourable comment from colleges, the press and government departments. Establishing robust standards and procedures from drafting to publication has been a major undertaking in the inspectorate's first year.

41 Assessing Achievement sets out an intention to publish institutional reports within six working weeks of the completion of a team inspection. This has proved to be an ambitious target and, as figure 8 shows, the publication of most reports has occurred between nine and 14 working weeks after the end of inspection. Some reports have been delayed at the request of an inspected college. However, the majority of delays have been caused by:

- the amount of editorial work required to turn draft reports into publishable documents
- difficulties in obtaining accurate statistical data from colleges
- lack of staff in the inspectorate's editorial team.

Figure 8: Turnround of 78 college inspection reports



Source: Publications (September 1994)

42 Early in 1994 it became clear that action was necessary to reduce delays in report publication. Writing courses for inspectors, clarification of the statistical data required from the Council's research and statistics division, and additional recruitment to the editorial team are expected to improve the turnround of reports during the 1994-95 inspection programme. The Council has set the inspectorate targets of publishing 70 per cent of college inspection reports within 10 working weeks of the end of the inspection in 1994-95; 80 per cent in 1995-96; and 85 per cent in 1996-97.

Follow-up to Inspections

43 Following an inspection, colleges are asked to develop an action plan to address any weaknesses in their provision which are identified in the published report. Under normal circumstances this is received by the Council's educational programmes division within four months of the report publication date. Copies of the action plan are circulated to the appropriate regional office and to the college inspector to enable the Council to assess its appropriateness. Colleges' progress in meeting action plan targets is monitored during regular visits to the college by the college inspector. Arrangements are made for the re-inspection of curriculum area provision which has been judged to have more weaknesses than strengths (grades 4 or 5), in time for the next funding round.

STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES AND/OR DISABILITIES

44 The Council supports sector colleges in making provision for about 100,000 students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. In addition, the Council has a legal duty to provide suitable specialist education for individual students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in England where sector colleges cannot make such provision. When it does this, the Council makes a contract with the establishment making the provision which includes the right of inspection. The Council currently funds approximately 2,000 students who are resident in more than 100 specialist independent colleges. The level of funding for this group of students is in the region of £30 million each year.

45 A specialist team of full-time and part-time inspectors has specific responsibilities for reporting on the quality of provision for those students placed in independent colleges. The same team also contributes to the inspection of sector colleges.

46 The inspectorate applies the same degree of rigour in monitoring the quality of provision in independent colleges as it applies to sector colleges. In 1993-94, the inspectorate allocated 200 days to report on 29 independent colleges catering for more than 1,000 students funded by the Council.

47 Reports on independent colleges are not published by the Council but are made available to the colleges to circulate as they see fit. The Council consults such colleges through the National Association of Independent Colleges and this provides a forum for feedback on inspection and other matters related to the Council's support for students.

NATIONAL SURVEYS

48 In 1993-94, the inspectorate undertook national surveys of National Vocational Qualifications, General National Vocational Qualifications, General Certificate of Education advanced supplementary and advanced level qualifications, and assessment in vocational courses. A survey of guidance for 16-19 year old students was conducted jointly with inspectors from the Office for Standards in Education. A survey of colleges' responses to the Charter for Further Education and the development of college charters was started and will continue in 1994-95. In devising its programme of national surveys, the inspectorate takes advice from the quality assessment committee.

49 The first reports on National Vocational Qualifications and General National Vocational Qualifications were published in Autumn 1994. The reports were welcomed by the government, by colleges and by the examining and awarding bodies and were regarded as influential reports which had significance for policy development. The messages contained in the reports have stimulated a range of follow-up conferences and staff-development events.

50 In 1994-95, the inspectorate will start a programme of national surveys focusing on each of the Council's 10 programme areas. There will also be surveys of a number of broader curriculum issues and of other aspects of further education provision.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

51 The inspectorate's first year of activity was guided by a draft operating plan approved by the chief inspector in September 1993. Since then, the Council has approved its first corporate plan covering the period from April 1994 to March 1997 and an accompanying Council-wide operating plan for 1994-95. This has enabled the inspectorate to establish clear links between its own operating plan for 1994-95, which includes named inspectors who are responsible for delivering specific elements of the plan, and the Council's aims and objectives.

52 The inspectorate has developed a computerised database to record the evidence and judgements arising from its inspection programme. This permits regular monitoring of grading trends and comparative studies of the work of regional and national teams. The work of individual inspectors can also be monitored with the aim of identifying those who consistently award high and low grades.

53 Through its monitoring, analysis and review of working methods, the inspectorate is starting to eliminate variations in inspection practice. Improvements have already been achieved through:

- the formation of three cross-regional committees which share the objective of achieving consistent inspection practice
- the establishment of programme area teams charged with the task of moderating inspection grades within a curriculum area and entering into dialogue with other curriculum areas about grading criteria
- the establishment of a review body to investigate the inspectorate's methods of awarding grades and its grading criteria
- the establishment of regular in-service training events for full-time and part-time inspectors at which grading issues are identified and appropriate action is initiated.

CONCLUSIONS

54 A key factor in evaluating the work of the inspectorate is the extent to which the inspectorate has fulfilled its terms of reference and assisted the Council in meeting its objectives and carrying out the tasks embodied in guidance issued by the secretary of state.

55 In response to the requests made by the secretary of state in July 1992, the Council established an inspectorate committed to a four-year cycle of inspections for all colleges in the sector. The 78 college inspections carried out in 1993-94 represents the first phase in this cycle.

The Council also agreed that colleges with programme areas judged by the inspectorate to have more weaknesses than strengths (grades 4 or 5) will be required not to increase the number of new students enrolled in the first year of the relevant programme area or areas until the Council is satisfied that the weaknesses identified have been addressed satisfactorily. This mechanism came into effect for the 1994-95 funding round.

56 The inspectorate's programme of work has met the requirements set out in the secretary of state's guidance to the Council issued in March 1993 through:

- publication of survey reports, including those on National Vocational Qualifications and General National Vocational Qualifications, and the chief inspector's annual report
- joint inspection work with the Office for Standards in Education
- assessments of provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in its published reports on sector colleges and the launching of a programme to inspect provision for students funded by the Council in independent establishments.

57 The inspectorate has fulfilled its terms of reference agreed by the Council by:

- publishing inspection and survey reports which assess standards and identify good practice and trends in educational provision in sector institutions and abroad
- ensuring that verbal and written feedback is given to college staff both during and after inspections
- assigning college inspectors to visit all colleges on a regular basis.

58 In completing its 1993-94 work programme, the inspectorate has also met the Council's general objective of operating in ways which are open and easily understood by:

- consulting the sector throughout the process which resulted in *Assessing Achievement*
- including college principals on appointment boards for full-time inspectors
- recruiting and training part-time inspectors, including a proportion who work outside the sector
- including a college nominee in each inspection team and providing training to help nominees develop their role
- involving colleges in evaluations of inspection and responding to their comments
- publishing this evaluation of its own inspection activities

59 The lessons learned during the first year of inspection will be used to inform the inspectorate's work during 1994-95. In particular, the inspectorate intends to:

- achieve greater consistency in the allocation of inspection days to quadrennial college inspections
- continue to moderate inspection grades and monitor trends in grading
- promote consistent working practices amongst both regional and curriculum area inspection teams
- meet revised targets for the production of published reports
- continue to monitor and review its own working methods and practices.

60 Additionally the inspectorate will:

- carry out 130 quadrennial college inspections
- inspect Council-funded provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in 28 independent establishments
- ensure that each college in the sector receives a termly visit from the college inspector
- begin to inspect provision funded by the Council outside the sector
- carry out five national surveys on the following aspects of further education provision: college responsiveness; the development and implementation of college charters; GNVQ provision; the progression and destination of students; and extra curricular activities in sector colleges
- review three curriculum areas: art and design; engineering and technology; and humanities
- publish the chief inspector's second annual report by December 1995
- provide an ongoing programme of training for full-time and part-time registered inspectors
- report on post-16 vocational education and training in the United States of America and Germany
- continue to work with sector colleges and others to disseminate good practice.

ANNEX 1

THE INSPECTORATE'S TERMS OF REFERENCE

The inspectorate's terms of reference, as agreed by the Council are:

- a. to assess standards and trends across the further education sector and advise the Council, its committees and working groups on the performance of the sector overall;
- b. to prepare and publish reports on individual institutions;
- c. to identify and make more widely known good practice and promising developments in further education and draw attentions to weaknesses that require attention;
- d. to provide advice and assistance to those with responsibilities for, or in institutions in the sector, through its day-to-day contacts, its contribution to training, and its publications;
- e. to keep abreast of international developments in post-school education and training.

ANNEX 2

THE QUALITY ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE'S TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Quality Assessment Committee's terms of reference are:

- a. to advise the Council on the quality of education provided:
 - i. in institutions within the sector
 - ii. in institutions for whose activities the Council provides, or is considering providing, financial support (in which respect, it will be necessary to have regard to advice from local education authorities, the Office of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools and the Higher Education Funding Council for England);
- b. to recommend to the Council and keep under review the methods for assessing quality;
- c. to receive assessment reports on the quality of education and advise on any necessary action;
- d. to report annually to the Council, including an evaluation of the overall quality of education in the sector;
- e. to advise on other matters as requested from time to time by the Council.

ANNEX 3

A SUMMARY OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE'S GUIDANCE TO THE COUNCIL ON QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIS LETTER OF MARCH 1993

- in developing its work on quality assessment, to take account of the complementary roles of inspection, curriculum development and staff development
- to provide an annual report commenting on the quality and standards in further education
- to report from time to time on aspects of the curriculum and qualifications, and on particular areas of work
- in the interests of securing consistency of standards across the sectors, to develop effective liaison with the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) and the local authority associations
- to cover the provision made for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in its reports on individual colleges and provide survey reports on provision for such students from time to time.
- to inspect and publish reports on GNVQs and NVQs.

ANNEX 4

THE COUNCIL'S 10 PROGRAMME AREAS

- Programme area 1: Sciences
(including mathematics and computing)
- Programme area 2: Agriculture
- Programme area 3: Construction
- Programme area 4: Engineering
(including manufacturing industries)
- Programme area 5: Business
(including administration and management)
- Programme area 6: Hotel and catering
(including leisure and tourism)
- Programme area 7: Health and community care
- Programme area 8: Art and design
(including performing arts)
- Programme area 9: Humanities
(including education and social studies)
- Programme area 10: Basic education
(including programmes of study in basic numeracy, literacy and English for speakers of other languages; discrete provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities such as courses to teach independent living, numeracy and communication skills; programmes of study for adults, such as 'return to learn', which do not focus on a particular curriculum area and cannot therefore be placed in one of the other nine programme areas).