

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

**An Evaluation
of the Work
of the
Inspectorate
1994-95**

June 1996

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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

College inspections are carried out in accordance with the framework and guidelines described in 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.

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GRADE DESCRIPTORS

The procedures for assessing quality are set out in the Council 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 very 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.*

By June 1995, some 208 college inspections had been completed. The grade profiles for aspects of cross-college provision and programme areas for the 208 colleges are shown in the following table.

College grade profiles 1993-95

Activity	Inspection grades				
	1	2	3	4	5
Programme area	9%	60%	28%	3%	<1%
Cross-college provision	13%	51%	31%	5%	<1%
Overall	11%	56%	29%	4%	<1%

SUMMARY

In the college year 1994-95, the inspectorate achieved its targets of inspecting 129 sector colleges and the Council-funded provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in 25 independent colleges. A programme of national surveys was completed and provision in 11 external institutions and one higher education institution was inspected. The inspectorate also: continued its programme of training to build up the national register of part-time inspectors; successfully implemented the reinspection of curriculum areas graded 4 or 5; met the publication target for college inspection reports set by the Council's quality assessment committee; and improved operational consistency through its developing quality assurance arrangements. The inspection framework has proved to be a robust and effective means of assessing the quality of provision in colleges; no major modifications have been made to the framework in 1994-95. Colleges have responded well to inspection. Their evaluations confirm that the process is open and fair. However, colleges have drawn attention to issues which the inspectorate will address through regional and programme area team meetings, and staff development events. The inspectorate will, in addition, aim to improve its record of training part-time inspectors; continue to develop its quality assurance systems; reduce regional variations in inspection practice; and meet its publication targets for 1995-96.

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INTRODUCTION

1 This report provides an evaluation of the inspectorate's performance during the college year 1994-95. It covers changes in the staffing of the inspectorate; the recruitment and training of part-time inspectors; the application of the inspection framework, *Assessing Achievement* (Council Circular 93/28); the inspection programme, including the organisation of college inspections and colleges' responses to inspection; procedures for the reinspection of curriculum areas graded 4 or 5; and matters of quality assurance within the inspectorate, including grade consistency and the production of accurate and concise inspection reports to agreed deadlines.

BACKGROUND

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

- a. ensure 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 the Council advice on the discharge of its 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 for quality assessment, the Council established the inspectorate. The inspectorate's terms of reference are shown in annex A. The quality assessment committee's terms of reference are shown in annex B.

4 In February 1995, the Council submitted its first annual report to the secretary of state on quality and standards in further education. The secretary of state's response commended the work of the Council in establishing its inspection programme and in promoting quality within the sector; it also noted the contribution made by teachers in the colleges and highlighted the need for colleges to improve:

- retention and students' achievements on some courses
- quality assurance arrangements
- management information systems.

THE INSPECTORATE

5 In 1994-95, the inspectorate achieved its target staffing of 79 full-time inspectors, including the chief inspector. The full-time inspectors are supported by part-time registered inspectors, providing the equivalent of approximately 27 full-time equivalent posts. The majority of inspectors are home based. They work in regional teams

managed by senior inspectors who are based in the Council's regional offices. Each inspector is also a member of a national team of specialists in a specific curriculum area. During the course of the year, the number of regionally-based senior inspectors has been reduced from nine to eight through the amalgamation of the Yorkshire and Humberside and the Northern regional inspection teams.

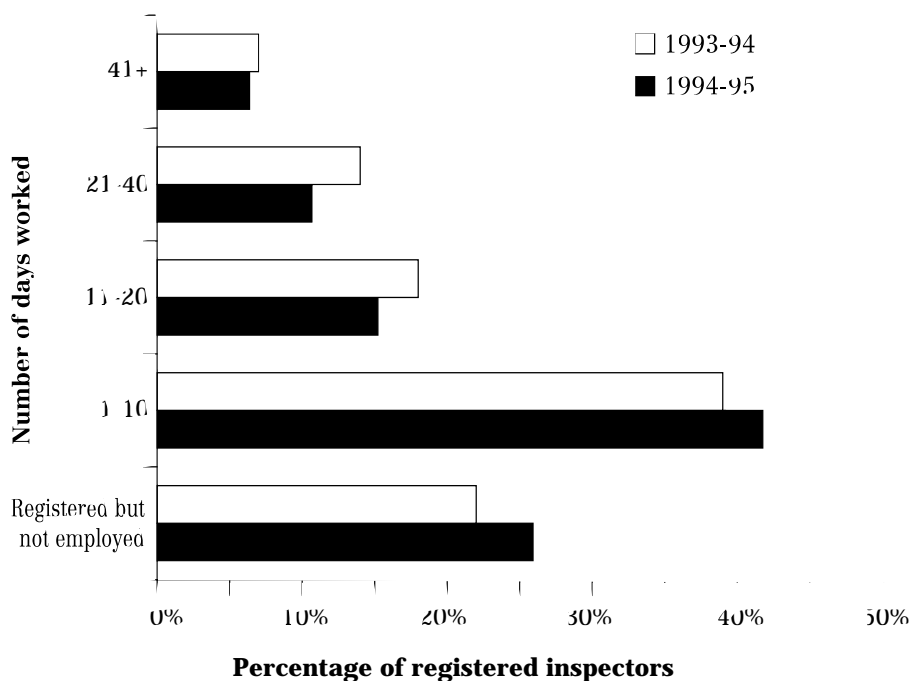
6 The inspectorate has continued its programme of training events for registered part-time inspectors and briefings for college nominees. Overall, 1,209 candidates have been offered training since the programme began in September 1993. Excluding 181 candidates who withdrew, 55 per cent of candidates have achieved registration. A further 14 per cent have not achieved the required standard during training.

7 Training for part-time registered inspectors occurs in three phases. The initial phase comprises an intensive three-day residential training course which establishes the context of inspection and aims to develop in candidates the skills and knowledge required by an inspector. Candidates are continually assessed during this phase. In the year to August 1995, eight courses were run for 378 candidates, of whom the majority were staff from colleges. On average, 86 per cent of candidates on each of the courses said that the event had met their expectations well. Over 92 per cent of candidates completed the course successfully. The programme of initial residential training is now being drawn to a close; only three courses are scheduled for 1995-96.

8 The second and third phases of training comprise inspection activities carried out in selected colleges. The performance of trainee inspectors is observed and assessed by full-time inspectors. Of those candidates who started training in 1994-95, the majority have either successfully achieved registration or are awaiting the third phase of their training. During 1994-95, an average of 22 candidates a month completed their training and achieved registration. This is similar to the rate of registration in 1993-94, but falls short of the target the inspectorate set itself. The priority for training activities in the coming year will be to ensure that the majority of those who have successfully completed phase one of their training are given an opportunity to achieve registration.

9 It is increasingly the case that the work of part-time registered inspectors is scheduled up to a year in advance. This sometimes causes a considerable delay between the registration of inspectors and their involvement in an inspection. In 1994-95, 360 part-time registered inspectors were employed. This represents 74 per cent of those who had achieved registration by 1 June 1995. Figure 1 shows that the pattern of employment of part-time registered inspectors was similar in 1993-94 and 1994-95.

Figure 1. Pattern of employment of part-time registered inspectors, 1993-94 and 1994-95



10 An annual review of the register of part-time inspectors was introduced in 1994-95. The work of individual inspectors is reviewed annually by the regional senior inspector. This involves appraising their writing and the inspection grades they award, and noting any comments made by colleges on their work. In 1994-95, the Council declined to renew contracts for 31 registered inspectors whose work was not satisfactory, who withdrew their availability for work or whose skills were not required. Their names have been removed from the national register.

11 The inclusion of college nominees on inspection teams has continued to be a successful aspect of the inspection arrangements. College nominees may participate in any aspect of an inspection including visiting classes with an inspector and joining discussions with college staff, students, governors, employers and others interested in the work of the college. They may attend all meetings held by inspectors before, during and after the inspection. There were six training events for college nominees held in 1994-95. Nominees from all but four colleges inspected in 1994-95 were trained and 96 per cent of nominees from colleges to be inspected in 1995-96 received training before 1 September 1995.

THE INSPECTION PROGRAMME

12 The inspectorate achieved its target of carrying out 129 college inspections in 1994-95. Each college inspection led to the publication of a report. In addition, the inspectorate carried out the following programme of activities, fulfilling intentions stated in the 1993-94 evaluation report:

- inspection of 25 independent colleges making provision, funded by the Council, for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- inspection of 11 external institutions and one higher education institution funded in part by the Council
- national surveys of college responsiveness; the achievements of colleges on their charter commitments (continued from 1993-94); General National Vocational Qualifications; students' destinations: college procedures and practices; and the enrichment of the curriculum
- curriculum area surveys of art, design and performing arts, engineering, and humanities
- international visits (in conjunction with the Department for Education and Employment) to study post-16 education in France, Germany and the United States of America.

13 The inspection programme also included three visits a year to each college by a designated college inspector. These visits assist colleges in preparing for inspection and in following up action plans formulated after inspection has been carried out.

14 The majority of an inspector's time is spent preparing for and carrying out college inspections. Table 1 shows that, in 1994-95, over 76 per cent of inspectorate time was allocated to involvement in college inspections or visits to colleges by college inspectors, while about 5 per cent was allocated to national exercises.

Table 1. Time allocation by type of inspection activity, 1994-95

Inspectorate activity	Percentage of time
College inspections (including preparation and reporting)	70
College inspector visits	6
National exercises (including curriculum surveys and international work)	5
Training (including part-time registered inspector and college nominee training)	6
Other (including general administration, external liaison and staff development)	13

15 The inspectorate's costs in the financial year 1994-95 were £8 million. This represented 33 per cent of the Council's annual running costs of £24.4 million and 0.28 per cent of the sector's budget of £2.8 billion. Based on the time allocation shown in table 1, the average cost of each college inspection in 1994-95 was £43,500, including all support costs.

THE FRAMEWORK FOR INSPECTION

16 The framework for inspection, *Assessing Achievement*, has proved to be a robust and flexible means of assessing both the standards achieved by students and the quality of college provision. There have been no major changes to the framework in 1994-95. However, guidance on the following topics has been issued to inspectors in order to make working practices more consistent:

- **feedback to teachers (September 1994).** It was confirmed that all inspectors would speak briefly to any teacher whom they observe teaching, either during the teaching session or at a later time. Feedback to teachers should not be confused with teacher appraisal, which is an internal college responsibility, or teacher training, which requires detailed feedback. Grades for individual lessons are not given to teachers or to college managers. However, grade profiles for all lessons seen in a particular subject or programme area are provided during feedback to college managers

-
- **the treatment of college self-assessment reports (November 1994).** Inspection reports include an evaluation of the college's self-assessment report with reference to the following questions:
 - was the report clear and concise?
 - did it provide a realistic evaluation of the college's strengths and weaknesses?
 - were the judgements adequately supported by evidence?
 - how did the judgements compare with those of the inspection team?
 - **the use of Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) performance tables of examination performance for students aged 16 to 18 (November 1994).** Provided there are more than 20 entries for General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level) or vocational qualification, inspection reports use a standard form of words to indicate whether a college lies within the top 10 per cent, the top third, the middle third, the bottom third or the bottom 10 per cent of the performance tables published by the DfEE. Where appropriate, reports of college performance are set within the context of other examination performance data provided by the college, such as the performance of older students in vocational and GCE A level examinations and any value-added analysis which has been carried out
 - **reporting on students' attendance (January 1995).** Inspectors record the number of students present and the number enrolled in classes they observe. Inspection reports include a statement about the level of students' attendance.

COLLEGE INSPECTIONS

17 Inspection is focused on the experience offered to students and the efficacy, robustness and management of systems to support the delivery of that experience. An important aim of inspection is to help each college to identify areas for improvement and establish an agenda for action which will achieve that improvement.

18 In the 129 inspections of further education sector colleges in 1994-95, inspectors observed 22,000 lessons involving about 250,000 students. All the work inspected was assessed in terms of its strengths and weaknesses, and grades were awarded on a scale of 1 to 5. Grade 1 represents provision which has many strengths and very few weaknesses; grade 5 represents provision which has many weaknesses and very few strengths.

19 Seven aspects of college inspections are evaluated in this report:

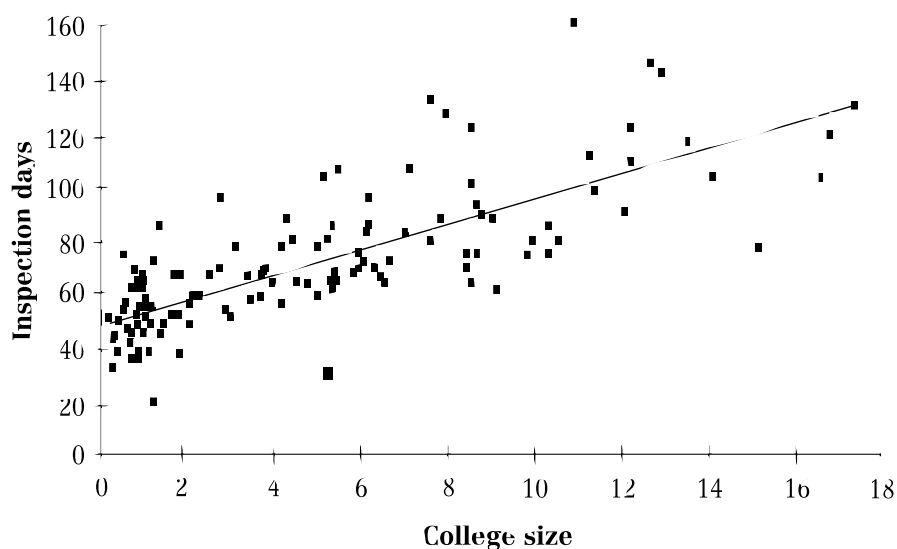
- the management and organisation of inspections
- lesson observation grades
- programme area inspection grades
- regional grading profiles
- publication of inspection reports
- college responses to inspection
- follow-up to inspections.

THE MANAGEMENT AND ORGANISATION OF INSPECTIONS

20 The inspection programme is managed within a budget of working days allocated to each region. This allocation is influenced most significantly by the proposed inspection programme of each regional team and the size of the colleges to be inspected. Responsibility for agreeing with the college a sample of provision which appropriately reflects its work generally rests with the college and reporting inspectors. The extent of this sample subsequently determines the number of inspection days allocated to the college. Normally, there is a correlation between the amount of work in the college which is funded by the Council and the number of days allocated to inspection. However, the inspectorate has not adopted a mechanistic approach to the allocation of days; a flexible approach ensures that the particular circumstances and range of work of a college can be taken into account.

21 In 1994-95, the inspectorate devoted an average of 68 inspector days to each college inspection. This excludes time spent in preparatory visits and in writing up inspection findings. This was 12 days less than the average allocation during the 1993-94 inspection programme, reflecting an improvement in the efficiency of the inspectorate in its second year of operation. The data presented in figure 2 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 2 indicates the broad relationship between college size and the number of days devoted to inspections. In the 1993-94 evaluation report, the inspectorate set itself a target of achieving greater consistency in the allocation of inspection days to college inspections. Compared with the data presented for 1993-94, there has been a marked improvement; the correlation coefficient between Council-funded enrolments and inspector days has moved from 0.42 to 0.72.

Figure 2. Allocation of inspection days, 1994-95

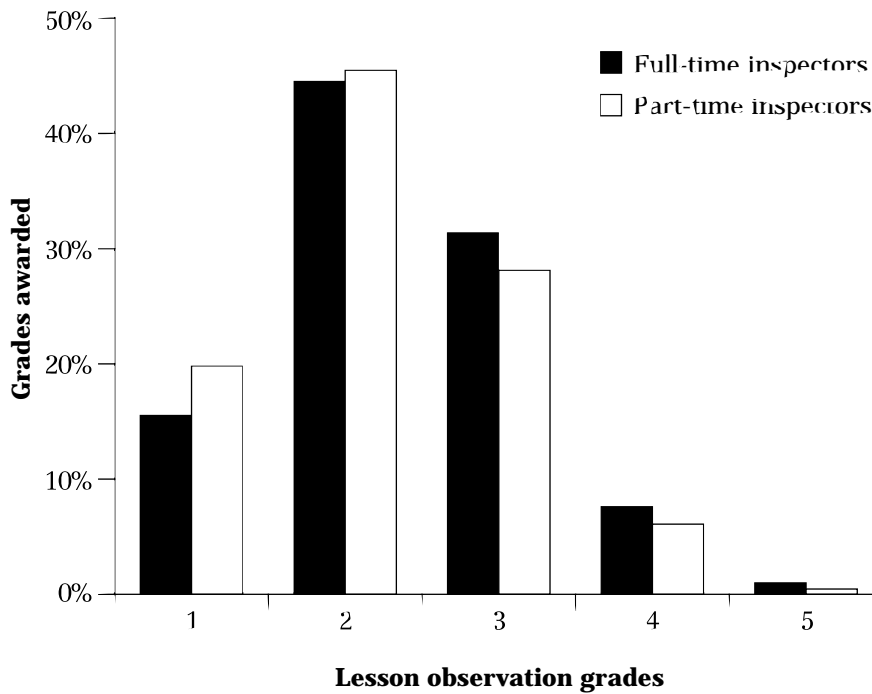


Note: College size measured in FEFC-funded enrolments (000s)

LESSON OBSERVATION GRADES

22 All published grades awarded by the inspectorate are subject to moderation. The data recording system used by the inspectorate enables comparisons to be made between the observation grades awarded by individuals, by regional teams and by part-time and full-time inspectors. Figure 3 presents a comparison between the lesson observation grades awarded by full-time inspectors and those of the part-time inspectors who carry out most of these observations. Although the grade profiles are similar, there is a tendency for part-time registered inspectors to award higher grades than their full-time colleagues. At present, this divergence represents only a few percentage points. Nevertheless, grade analysis is a standing agenda item at programme area team meetings to help ensure that all inspectors adopt a consistent approach to grading.

Figure 3. Lesson observation grades, 1994-95



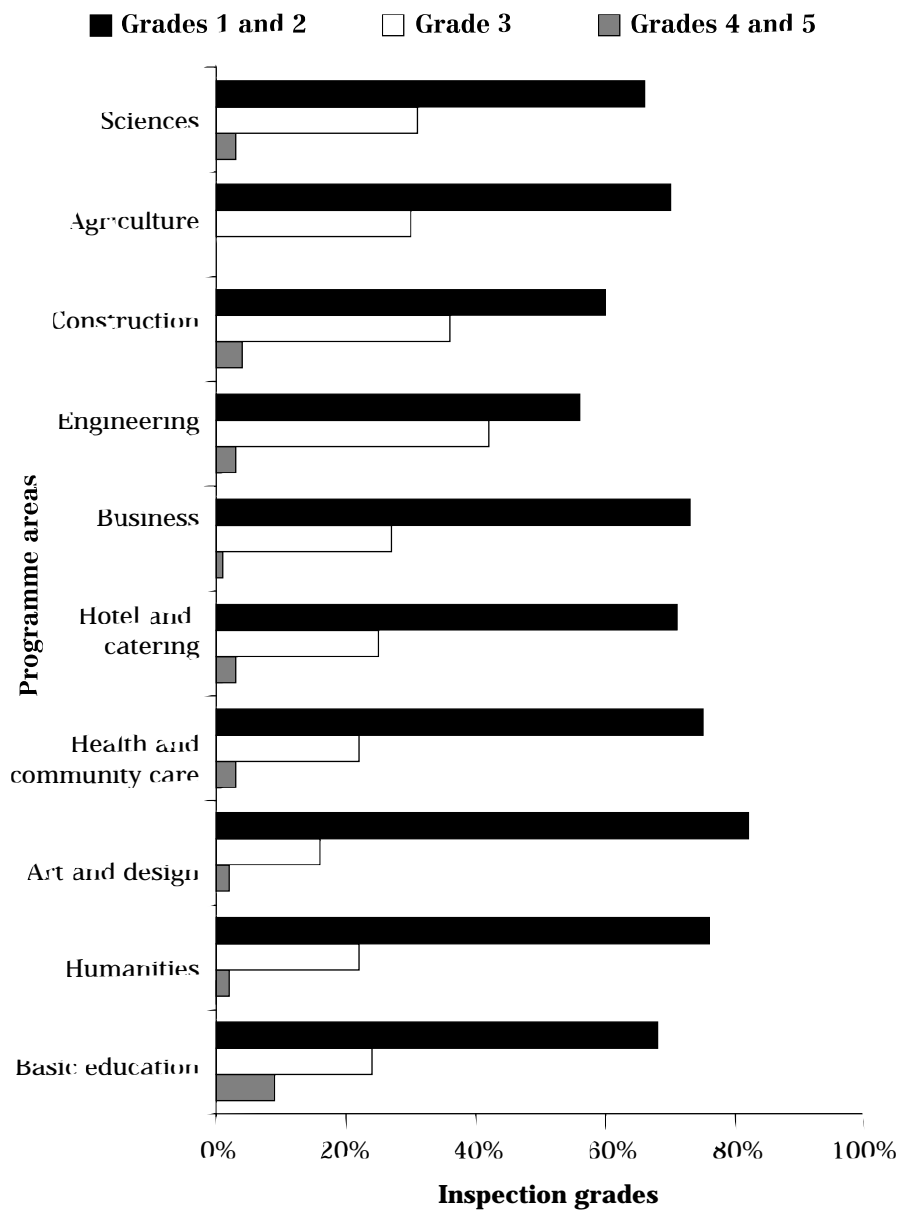
23 The 1993-94 report noted a trend towards an improvement in lesson observation grades throughout the inspection year. This trend has continued in 1994-95, although to a lesser extent. Charted over two years there has been an upward trend of approximately 11 per cent in the proportion of lessons graded 1 or 2. This is seen as a realistic indication of improvement in the quality of provision for students, reflecting a growing awareness amongst teachers of the importance of planning and of well-structured activities which effectively promote learning.

PROGRAMME AREA INSPECTION GRADES

24 The general improvement in lesson grades is matched by a similar improvement in programme area grades. Aggregated across all programme areas, provision graded 1 and 2 has increased from 65 per cent in 1993-94 to 71 per cent in 1994-95; there has been an increase of 6 per cent in provision graded 2 while provision graded 1 has remained constant at 9 per cent. The inspection grades awarded in 1994-95, disaggregated into the Council's 10 programme areas, are shown in figure 4. The profile of grades is consistent with the profile for 1993-94 in that strengths outweighed weaknesses in more than 50 per cent of inspected provision in all programme areas, while weaknesses outweighed strengths in less than 10 per cent.

25 A significant improvement in art and design grades is due partly to the fact that specialist art and design colleges were included in the inspection programme for the first time in 1994-95. These institutions, with their more specialist focus, achieved grade 1 or grade 2 for 87 per cent of graded provision. Nevertheless, there has also been an increase of 6 per cent in the grade 2s awarded to other colleges' art and design provision. This is mainly attributable to the inclusion of more performing arts provision in inspection programmes, much of which is of high quality. A similar marked shift from grade 3 to grade 2 in health and community care provision reflects an improvement in quality after a period of rapid growth and curriculum development. In contrast, engineering remains an area of concern; ageing equipment and low student retention rates on many courses continue to depress grades. Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has the highest proportion of grades 4 and 5.

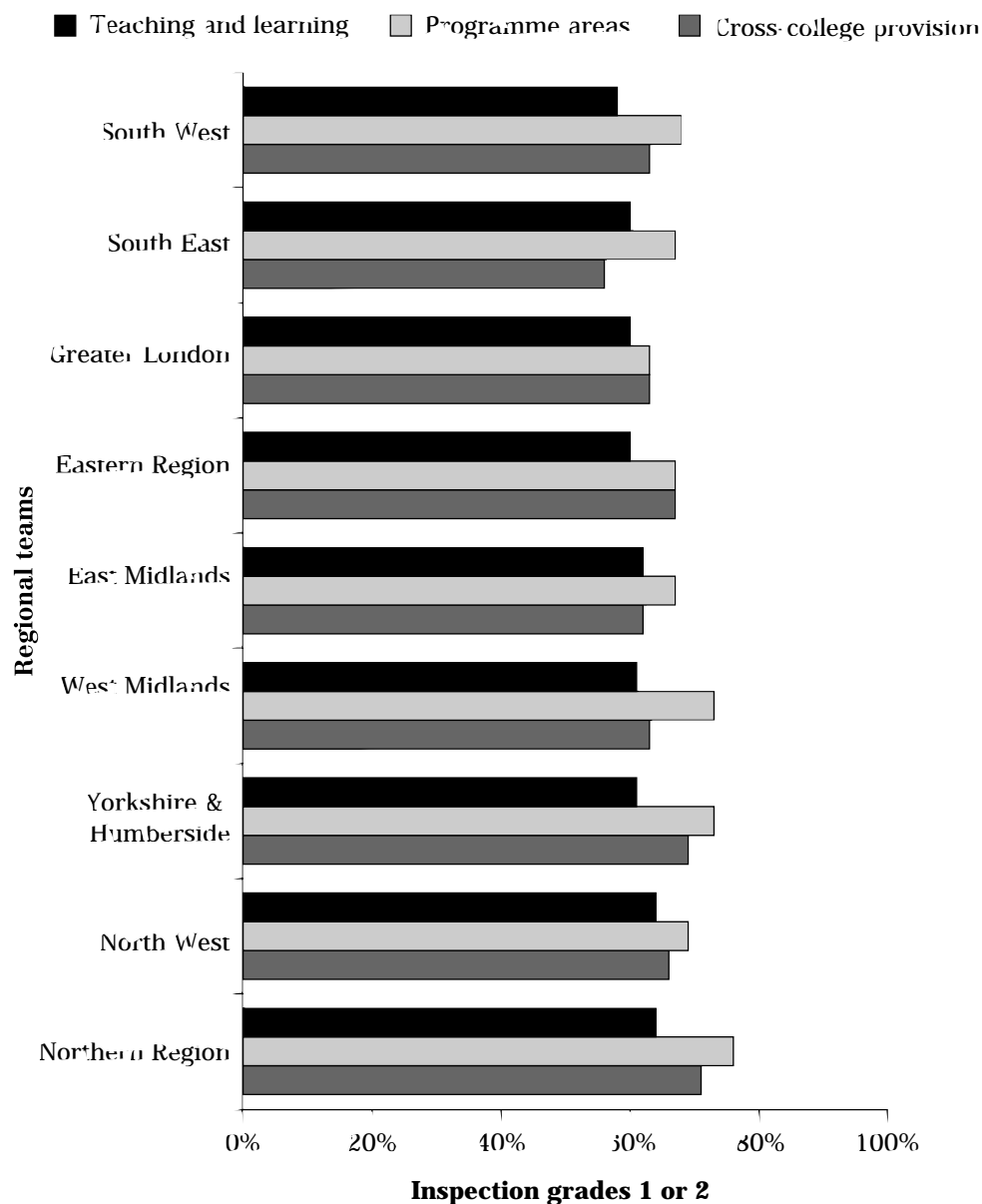
Figure 4. Inspection grades by programme area, 1994-95



REGIONAL GRADING PROFILES

26 In 1993-94 it was considered too early in the quadrennial programme to carry out a meaningful analysis and comparison of grades awarded by regional teams. The emphasis on monitoring regional performance has increased with the progress of the quadrennial cycle. After two years of inspection, the number of inspections carried out by regional teams varies between 14 in the Northern Region and 31 in the South East and the North West regions. Figure 5 shows the percentage of lessons, programme areas and aspects of cross-college provision which were awarded grades 1 and 2 by each of the regional inspection teams during the period September 1993 to July 1995.

Figure 5. Provision awarded grades 1 or 2 by regional inspection teams, 1993-95



27 The most consistent grading between regions is for lesson observations; there is a variation of no more than 6 per cent between regions. Programme area grades are less consistent, although the variation between regions is slightly less than it was after only one year of inspection. Conversely, variations in the award of cross-college grades are slightly greater than after one year of inspection. To some extent these differences reflect the sample of colleges inspected. For instance, colleges inspected in the northern regions of England included a significantly higher proportion of sixth form and tertiary colleges, which tend to achieve higher programme area grades. The inspection

grade profile of the Yorkshire and Humberside region also uniquely includes three colleges for which all provision was graded 1 or 2. Action has been taken which should strengthen consistency. Inspectors now spend some time working in other regions. In addition, clusters of three regions, called consortia, regularly meet to review the application of grading criteria in an attempt to eliminate variations in working practice.

PUBLICATION OF INSPECTION REPORTS

28 The quality assessment committee set the inspectorate a target of publishing 70 per cent of college inspection reports within 10 working weeks of the end of an inspection. During 1994-95, the inspectorate published 72 per cent of its 129 reports within this timescale. Of the 28 per cent which were delayed, 23 per cent were published within two working weeks of the target. This represents a significant improvement over figures for 1993-94, reflecting the benefit gained from an increase in the size of the inspectorate's editorial team.

29 An analysis of the reasons for the late publication of reports shows that in 10 cases, reports were held up either at the request of the college or because of action to clarify inspection findings. In last year's evaluation report, problems with the quality of the data provided by colleges were noted; this has improved in 1994-95.

30 In most cases, late publication has been attributable to delays in the editorial process due to the build-up of inspection reports towards the end of the college year. This has been exacerbated by the steadily increasing length of inspection reports. Since the inspection programme started in September 1993, the average length of reports has more than doubled. Sections dealing with teaching and the promotion of learning and students' achievements have become more detailed, reflecting an increased emphasis on these aspects of inspection. However, there has also been a general increase in the amount of descriptive information included in reports.

31 Longer reports and the need to achieve publication targets prompted a review which revealed some regional variations in drafting and inconsistency over the inclusion of topics not explicitly identified in *Assessing Achievement*. While it is recognised that reports must be influenced by the provision inspected and the particular outcomes of each inspection, clearer guidance has been issued to inspectors on the length and content of reports. In addition, changes in editorial procedures have been made for 1995-96 in order to meet the more demanding publication target set by the quality assessment committee. Preparation for these changes, which involve greater responsibility for editing at regional level, has included editing workshops for all regional senior inspectors. Additional staff development workshops are scheduled for 1995-96.

32 It has become apparent that the timing of the publication of reports, and the subsequent use which colleges make of reports for advertising,

can be contentious issues. The inspectorate has received a small number of letters from colleges objecting to neighbouring institutions' highly selective use of inspection findings for marketing purposes. However, it is not feasible for the Council to impose and monitor restrictions on the use of inspection reports. It is the Council's view that the promotion of fair practice should be a matter for the sector itself, perhaps through the offices of its associations. Colleges may also approach the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) in cases of gross misrepresentation. One college which is known to have taken such action has already had its complaint upheld by the ASA.

COLLEGE RESPONSES TO INSPECTION

33 Colleges are increasingly recognising the significance of inspection and its outcomes. Some colleges make extensive preparation for inspection, often including staff development exercises and practice inspections carried out by college staff and external consultants. Such activities demonstrate a constructive approach to inspection which helps raise the quality of provision for students. Inspectors themselves frequently contribute to the preparations for an inspection by briefing college staff and governors on the inspection framework and the process of inspection.

34 The requirement that each college prepares a self-assessment report is a constructive feature of the inspection framework which has as its main objective the development of a self-critical culture within sector colleges. Increasingly, colleges make the report central to their preparation for the inspection. The best reports reach conclusions about the college's provision which are well founded. However, many are too descriptive and lack accurate or focused judgements. In 1994-95, each inspection of a college's quality assurance arrangements included judgements on the quality and accuracy of the self-assessment report prepared by the college.

35 All colleges are invited to submit an evaluation of their inspection after publication of the inspection report. Evaluations are considered by regional inspection teams prior to their collation in a national report which is presented to all senior inspectors at the end of the college year. The 82 college evaluations received by August 1995 confirm that inspection is well received by colleges. The great majority consider that inspection arrangements are satisfactory and that clear guidance is provided prior to inspection. There is equally strong approval for the conduct of inspections. Most colleges consider that: the process is thorough and open; meetings are well-structured and productive; and inspectors' communications with students and staff are effective. Inspectors' judgements are generally considered to be fair and the feedback they provide informative. The inclusion of a college nominee in the inspection team continues to receive a high level of support.

36 College evaluations of inspection activity also bring issues to the attention of the inspectorate and the Council. In 1994-95 the most commonly identified issues were:

- variations in the feedback given to teachers, college managers and governors
- the need for clarification of the format and amount of documentation required from colleges
- the sufficiency of the time allocated to inspections
- the categorisation of subjects into Council programme areas where the academic organisation of the college does not correspond to these
- the lack of preparation and experience displayed by a few part-time inspectors
- the protracted nature of inspection, particularly when it spans two college years.

37 It is clear that the effective organisation of inspections within available resources, and the ability to formulate and convey sound judgements, must remain priorities for staff development within the inspectorate. The inspectorate will continue to address these issues through regional and programme area team meetings and training events.

38 The reporting inspector arranges feedback to senior managers and governors following an inspection. The main emphasis is on the presentation of key points and issues. However, this should not prevent a fuller discussion of the underlying evidence if it is required or requested. College inspectors should provide assistance in interpreting the guidance on documentation contained in *Assessing Achievement* during the preparation for an inspection. It is important that inspectors and college staff maintain a dialogue throughout the planning and reporting phases of the inspection.

39 Some issues raised by colleges, such as the aggregation of subject assessments into grades aligned to the Council's programme areas and the protracted nature of inspection, cannot be addressed in the short term. Nevertheless, these and other comments contained in correspondence with the inspectorate will be considered during the review of the inspection framework which is currently under way.

40 From time to time, colleges challenge the judgements made by inspectors. These challenges generally arise where new evidence is brought to the attention of inspectors, where there is a perceived lack of clarity in reporting, or where the moderation of inspection findings is disputed. The most contentious issue is often the grade awarded by inspectors to some aspects of cross-college provision such as range and responsiveness, quality assurance or governance and management.

Challenges can occur:

- after grades have been reported to the college but before the chief inspector has approved the grades and the Council has issued its inspection report
- after the inspection report has been issued by the Council.

41 The majority of challenges to inspection grades are resolved in an amicable and professional manner. In 1994-95, the inspectorate awarded 1,060 grades for programme area provision and 903 grades for aspects of cross-college provision. Challenges made after grades have been reported to the college but before the publication of the inspection report are generally the subject of written communication between the college and the regional senior inspector but also, on occasion, between the college and the chief inspector. The inspectorate received written challenges:

- from 23 colleges (18 per cent of the total inspected)
- concerning 17 programme area grades (1.6 per cent of the total awarded)
- and 15 cross-college grades (1.7 per cent of the total awarded).

42 In all cases the evidence supporting the awarded grade was reviewed as a result of a challenge. In seven cases the review incorporated additional inspection activity. The grade was changed in 10 cases after completion of a review. This figure represents 0.5 per cent of all grades awarded for programme area and cross-college provision. The majority of changed grades were associated with programme areas. No programme area stands out as having frequently been the subject of a challenge, nor does any region stand out as having been associated with a large number of challenges.

43 Challenges to cross-college grades have been exclusive to three of the seven areas graded during each inspection: responsiveness and range of provision, governance and management, and quality assurance. Experience has shown that colleges are especially sensitive to grading in these areas because of the significant efforts made by college staff to increase enrolments, make gains in efficiency and improve quality in response to the demands of the Council's funding methodology. The inspection of governance and management will be the focus of inspectorate staff development in 1995-96.

44 Most challenges bring additional evidence to the attention of inspectors. This underlines the importance of the college nominee's role in ensuring that all pertinent evidence is made available during inspection. Equally, it highlights the need for inspectors to keep the college informed of preliminary findings during the course of an inspection, so that staff are alerted in cases where important evidence has been missed. This 'doctrine of no surprises', and the need for inspectors to list sources of evidence more thoroughly, has been the

subject of guidance for inspectors issued early in the 1995-96 inspection programme.

45 Challenges occurring after an inspection report has been published fall within the scope of the complaints procedures included in the Council's codes of conduct, published in its *Annual Report 1994-95*. These set out procedures and targets for dealing with complaints concerning the Council's administrative decisions.

FOLLOW-UP TO INSPECTIONS

46 After the Council has published a college inspection report, the secretary to the Council writes to the college asking for a response to the report in the form of an action plan. The college is given up to four months to respond to the request. Subsequently, each action plan is assessed by the relevant college inspector on the basis of whether it realistically addresses issues identified in the inspection report. The implementation of action plans is monitored as part of a general monitoring programme established in 1994, and involves other Council divisions. Only two of the action plans received by July 1995 were considered inappropriate. College inspectors, during the course of their termly visits to colleges, are charged with recording progress against action plans.

47 The Council requires reinspection of curriculum areas graded 4 or 5 because a funding penalty is applied by the Council which prevents growth in areas of provision in which weaknesses outweigh the strengths. The Council requires that colleges are given an opportunity to have curriculum provision graded 4 or 5 reinspected before the next funding round. In 1994-95, 15 areas of curriculum provision in 12 colleges were reinspected. In 14 cases, reinspection resulted in an improvement by at least one grade. As a result of the first experience of reinspection, revised guidance on reinspecting curriculum areas graded 4 or 5 was issued to all inspectors in October 1995 for introduction during 1995-96. This incorporates suggestions received from colleges. The main features of the guidance (annex C) are that:

- judgements leading to the allocation of a reinspection grade must take into account the whole of the provision originally inspected, not just progress in those areas of weakness identified in the original inspection
- the college inspector should set up a timetable for reinspection at the earliest opportunity. It should be made clear to the principal that reinspection may be delayed if the college does not expect to improve its provision sufficiently before the deadline of the next funding round
- during the feedback following reinspection, it should be made clear that the grade awarded is indicative only. The grade will be subject to moderation at national level and will be confirmed in writing

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- the senior inspector who co-ordinates inspection of the relevant programme area has the responsibility for moderating the reinspection grade and must confirm the grade before a letter informing the principal of the outcome of the reinspection is sent by the college inspector
 - a report of the reinspection must be written to a standard format.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

48 During the summer of 1995, an internal review of the inspectorate's quality assurance arrangements was carried out. The review drew on the experience of 18 months of inspection, took account of developments elsewhere within the Council and considered existing models for quality assurance. This resulted in the adoption of a formal policy enabling the inspectorate to build on existing practices to assess and improve its performance. Throughout the year, the development of quality assurance has focused on three aspects of inspectorate work: the management of inspectors and inspections; monitoring and reviewing inspectors' judgements; and staff development.

49 A management structure for the inspectorate has been established. A policy group chaired by the chief inspector is supported by two working groups: a management group which deals with operational matters such as the allocation of resources; and an inspection group which moderates inspection practice. These groups meet according to a calendar which co-ordinates with meetings of the quality assessment committee and the annual timetable of Council business. Membership of the policy group includes the chairmen of the two working groups and three senior inspectors, each of whom has a responsibility for co-ordinating aspects of the work of a consortium of three regions. Regional teams of inspectors and consortia meet on a regular basis to discuss operational matters and review inspection findings. Regional teams also work closely with other Council divisions, attending briefing meetings at which they gain factual information which is helpful in preparing for inspections. Programme area team meetings, which include part-time registered inspectors, enable judgements and grading to be reviewed regularly.

50 Information systems for monitoring the outcomes of inspection have been improved during 1994-95. Each full-time inspector has access to a regional database of inspectors' notes and grades and to any of 10 national databases which categorise inspectors' notes under the Council's programme areas. Regional office staff can also access the national database of inspectors' notes. Comparative data are provided at least three times a year to feed into programme, regional and consortia meetings. A review of the inspectorate's performance is presented to an annual conference for all full-time inspectors.

51 The Council operates a pay-related staff development and appraisal system which has been fully implemented by the inspectorate. The programme includes formulating an individual job development programme with each inspector. Additional staff development has focused mainly on the development of writing and editing skills. This has been stimulated by an assessment of the quality of each draft inspection report by the inspectorate's editorial team. A programme of staff development at the inspectorate's 1995 annual conference included sessions on: the work of training and enterprise councils; quality assurance in higher education institutions; libraries and resource-based learning; the individualised student record; the development of technology to support learning; and consistency in inspection and reporting. Inspectors have also benefited from liaison with other organisations. Senior inspectors, responsible for the national co-ordination of programme area teams, regularly attend specialist professional committees and advisory groups. Inspectors have also contributed to training events and a wide range of conferences which often provide opportunities to share good practice with staff from sector colleges.

52 Co-operative work with external organisations is an important factor in developing the quality of the inspectorate's activities and enabling it to fulfil its terms of reference. During 1994-95, links were maintained with organisations such as the DfEE, the National Council for Vocational Qualifications, the further education awarding bodies, the Higher Education Quality Council, the Higher Education Funding Council for England and the Office for Standards in Education. In addition, the inspectorate contributed to the review of 16 to 19 education undertaken by Sir Ron Dearing and to the strategic planning of the Further Education Development Agency (FEDA). The inspectorate is keen to forge productive links with FEDA and has established a steering group to carry this forward.

CONCLUSIONS

53 A primary task of the inspectorate is to fulfil its terms of reference. It has achieved this in 1994-95 by:

- publishing over 135 reports based on college inspections and a range of national surveys focused on aspects of cross-college and curriculum provision
- inspecting Council-funded provision in 25 independent institutions, 11 external institutions and one higher education institution
- fulfilling the Council's requirement to reinspect curriculum areas with weaknesses which outweigh the strengths, in order to inform funding decisions
- including accounts of good practice in its reports and contributing to staff development activities within the sector
- maintaining a programme of college inspector visits, assisting colleges in their preparations for inspection and monitoring their progress after inspection has been carried out
- reporting on post-16 education in France, Germany and the United States.

54 In addition, the inspectorate has met its own targets and those set by the quality assessment committee by:

- improving the consistency in the allocation of inspection days to college inspections
- achieving the publication of over 70 per cent of inspection reports within 10 working weeks of the end of each college inspection
- developing operational consistency through the establishment of cross-regional consortia
- enhancing access to inspection data for inspectors and ensuring that comparative data are available for the moderation of grades and the improvement of inspection practice.

55 In carrying out its work, the inspectorate has contributed to the development of the sector by maintaining links with external bodies associated with curriculum development and quality assessment. The inspectorate has also continued to support the Council's general objective of operating in ways which are open and easily understood, by:

- training sector staff to become part-time registered inspectors
- including college nominees on inspection teams and helping to train them to develop their role
- inviting colleges to evaluate inspections

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- responding to challenges over its judgements
 - publishing this evaluation of its activities.

56 Inspection is only one of the strategies being adopted by the government, the Council and the sector to raise standards and improve quality. Developing quantitative measures of the impact of inspection on quality and standards is as elusive as the development of value added measures of students' achievements. However, there are indications which suggest that the various strategies being employed to raise standards and improve quality are working. These include: higher participation rates in further and higher education; improved examination performances by young people and adults; improvements in retention rates in further education; and indications, from college inspection grades, that quality and standards are being maintained at a time when the sector is growing rapidly and at the same time achieving year-on-year efficiency gains.

57 During 1995-96, the inspectorate aims to:

- improve its record of training part-time registered inspectors
- continue to develop its quality assurance systems
- reduce regional variations in inspection practice
- meet publication targets set by the quality assessment committee.

58 These targets will be achieved in a work programme which includes:

- inspection of 121 colleges within the sector
 - inspection of Council-funded provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in 28 independent institutions
 - termly visits to each college by college inspectors
 - inspection of Council-funded provision in two institutions of higher education and nine external institutions
 - national surveys of these aspects of further education: GCSE in further education colleges; higher education in further education colleges; standards and their assurance in vocational qualifications
 - reviews of three curriculum areas: agriculture; business; and construction
 - publication of good practice reports on: sport in colleges; careers education and guidance; provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities; quality assurance; collaborative work (including franchising); and core skills
 - publication of the chief inspector's third annual report
 - visits to assess post-16 education in Canada and Italy.
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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 attention to weaknesses that require attention;
- d. to provide advice and assistance to those with responsibility for, or in, institutions in the sector, through day-to-day contacts, its contribution to training, and its publications;
- e. to keep abreast of international developments in post-school education and training.

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 the 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, 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.

PROCEDURES FOR REINSPECTING CURRICULUM AREAS GRADED 4 OR 5

The following guidance has been issued to all inspectors:

- 1 Reinspection should assess:
 - a. whether the college has met targets for improvement that it has set itself;
 - b. whether, in making progress against targets, there has been a sufficient improvement to shift the overall balance of strengths and weaknesses to justify a grade 3 or better.
- 2 Judgements leading to the allocation of a reinspection grade must take into account the whole of the provision originally inspected, not just progress in those areas of weakness identified in the original inspection.
- 3 Preparation for reinspection should begin as soon as possible after a college's inspection grades have been confirmed. The college inspector should encourage the college to pay particular attention to the weaknesses identified in the areas graded 4 or 5 and to set realistic targets for improvement, covering all of the weaknesses identified. College inspectors should refer to the existing information about provision to be reinspected and, if they are in any doubt, seek the advice of the programme area senior inspector to ensure that they can adequately support the college in the task of setting targets for improvement. Once set, targets should be included in the college's action plan when it is shared with the Council.
- 4 The college inspector should set a timetable for reinspection at the earliest opportunity. It should be made clear to the principal that reinspection may be delayed if the college does not expect to improve its provision sufficiently before the deadline of the next funding round. Table 1 illustrates the normal schedule to be followed for reinspection.

Table 1. Reinspection schedule

Colleges with reports published in the period:	Should be reinspected by:	In time for the funding meeting in:
April 1994 to March 1995	Mid-February 1996	March 1996 (allocations for year August 1996 to July 1997)
April 1995 to March 1996	Mid-February 1997	March 1997 (allocations for year August 1997 to July 1998)

5 All arrangements for reinspection must be confirmed in a letter to the principal from the college inspector. This should make the extent of the reinspection clear and should be copied to the inspector carrying out the reinspection. The regional and programme area senior inspector and the editorial team in Coventry should be notified of the date of the reinspection as soon as it has been fixed.

6 It is preferable that reinspection is carried out by a full-time inspector. If reinspection is to be carried out by a part-time inspector, a full-time colleague (preferably the college inspector) must be present at the feedback. Where there is more than one area to be reinspected, inspections should be carried out concurrently, if possible. The college nominee should be invited to participate in the inspection under the same terms which govern their role during a normal institutional inspection.

7 During feedback following inspection, it should be made clear that the grade awarded is indicative only. The grade will be subject to moderation at a national level and will be confirmed in writing.

8 Within one week of the inspection, a note of visit should be completed and copied to the senior inspector responsible for the programme area, and the regional senior inspector and the college inspector. The programme area senior inspector has the responsibility for moderating the grade and must confirm the grade before a letter informing the principal of the outcome of the inspection is sent by the college inspector. If the grade has been changed, appropriate arrangements must be made to ensure that a full explanation is provided for the college.

9 A brief report (about one side of A4) of the inspection must be written by the reinspecting inspector under the following headings:

[NAME OF COLLEGE]

[REGION]

Reinspection of [curriculum area]: [month year]

Background (write in prose)

- when originally inspected and grade awarded
- summary of strengths and weaknesses identified
- the scope of the reinspection, when reinspected
- how many days, classes seen and other activities

Assessment (write in prose)

- extent of progress in meeting improvement targets
- improvements and their effects
- matters still to be addressed

Revised grade: [curriculum area] [grade]

10 Please ensure that the words describing the curriculum area exactly match the wording used in the original inspection report.

11 Reports should be sent to the regional senior inspector for editing and then forwarded to the inspectorate's editorial team in Coventry.

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