

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

**An Evaluation
of the Work
of the
Inspectorate
1995-96**

July 1997

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL**

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 1996, 329 college inspections had been completed. The grade profiles for aspects of cross-college provision and programme areas for the 329 colleges are shown in following table.

College grade profiles 1993 to 1996

| Activity | Inspection grades | | | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|-----|-----|----|-----|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Programme area | 9% | 59% | 29% | 3% | <1% |
| Cross-college provision | 14% | 50% | 31% | 5% | <1% |
| Overall | 12% | 54% | 30% | 4% | <1% |

SUMMARY

In the college year 1995-96, the inspectorate achieved its targets for its programme of work by inspecting: 121 sector colleges; Council-funded provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in 18 independent colleges; provision in seven external institutions; and further education provision in two institutions of higher education. A programme of national surveys was completed and the re-inspection of curriculum areas graded 4 or 5 in 20 sector colleges was carried out to meet Council requirements. In addition, the inspectorate: continued its programme of training part-time registered inspectors; met its publication target for college inspection reports set by the quality assessment committee; and continued to develop its quality assurance arrangements. No major revisions were made to the inspection framework which has continued to prove itself as an effective means of assessing the quality of provision in colleges. The great majority of colleges reported favourably on their experience of inspection. This has been confirmed by an independent review of the Further Education Funding Council's inspectorate carried out by the National Audit Office. There has also been a reduction in the number of written challenges to inspection grades. Nevertheless, colleges have drawn attention to matters which the inspectorate will address through regional and programme area team meetings and through a revision of the inspection framework. During 1996-97, the inspectorate will review its register of part-time inspectors and its operational procedures, meet its publication targets, continue to develop its quality assurance arrangements and complete the programme of work agreed by the quality assessment committee.

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AN EVALUATION OF THE WORK OF THE INSPECTORATE, 1995-96

INTRODUCTION

1 This report provides an evaluation of the inspectorate's performance during the college year 1995-96. It covers: changes in the staffing of the inspectorate, including the training and employment of part-time registered inspectors; developments in the use of the inspection framework, *Assessing Achievement* (Council Circular 93/28); the inspection programme; college responses to inspection; grade consistency and other quality assurance matters. During 1995-96, the inspectorate aimed to: improve its record of training part-time inspectors; continue to develop its quality assurance systems; reduce the regional variations in inspection practice; and meet publication targets set by the Council's quality assessment committee. The findings in this report have been considered by the quality assessment committee.

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 meet its responsibilities with respect to 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 April 1996, the Council submitted to the secretary of state its second annual report on quality and standards in further education. The secretary of state's response welcomed the continued development of the Council's inspection arrangements and noted that the inspection programme was on target. It also recognised the sector's role in developing a highly skilled workforce and its contribution to the country's further competitiveness.

INSPECTORATE

5 During 1995-96, the inspectorate maintained its establishment of 79 full-time inspectors, including 11 senior inspectors and the chief

inspector. The organisation of the inspectorate remained stable, with the majority of inspectors home based, but working in regional teams and contributing to national curriculum teams aligned to the Council's 10 programme areas. Regional and curriculum teams were managed by senior inspectors.

6 Full-time inspectors were supported in their work by part-time registered inspectors who provided the equivalent of about 27 full-time posts. The Council continued its policy of providing training for part-time inspectors. In order to achieve registration, part-time inspectors must successfully complete a training programme organised into three phases. The initial phase comprises an intensive three-day course which establishes the context of inspection and aims to develop in candidates the skills and knowledge required by an inspector. Two courses were run in 1995-96, recruiting 85 candidates, 87 per cent of whom completed the course successfully. In evaluating the course, 79 per cent of the candidates reported that it had met their expectations well.

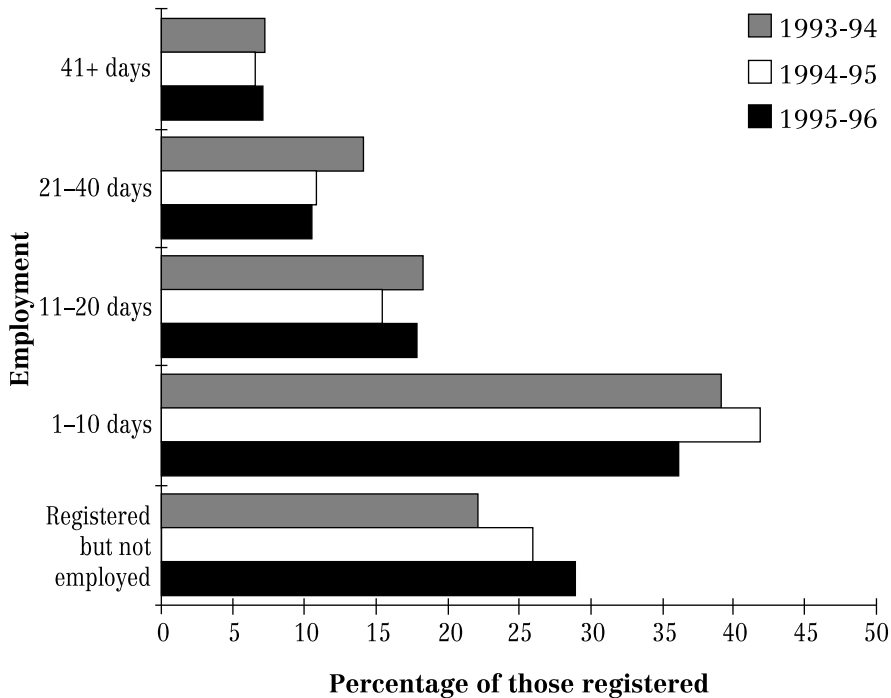
7 The second and third phases of training comprise inspection activities carried out in selected colleges on two separate occasions, when the performance of trainee inspectors is observed and assessed by full-time inspectors. Overall, 280 trainees were involved in these phases of training in 1995-96. In the year to August 1996, 211 trainees achieved registration, 50 failed to reach the required standard and 16 withdrew from the training programme. This increased the numbers on the national register of part-time inspectors from 455 in September 1995 to 666 in August 1996.

8 The annual review of part-time inspectors' performance, begun in 1994-95, resulted in the Council declining to renew contracts for 34 inspectors at the end of 1995-96. In addition, seven inspectors voluntarily withdrew from the register during the year and nine had their registration suspended because full-time employment prevented them from undertaking inspection work.

9 Over the past three years, the inspectorate has found it difficult to meet its targets for college-based training activity owing to the priority it has given to completing its college inspection programme. This has resulted in some trainee inspectors taking over a year to complete their training programmes. In order to reduce the backlog of outstanding training, it was decided to suspend the programme of initial training courses after September 1996 and to review the use of the register of part-time inspectors in preparation for the revised inspection arrangements to be implemented from September 1997. The decision to review the use of part-time inspectors coincided with an internal audit of the management arrangements for the part-time inspectors' database which began in June 1996.

10 During 1995-96, 437 registered part-time inspectors were employed on the inspection programme, compared with 360 the previous year. This reflects the inspectorate's aim of increasing the number of part-time inspectors employed as the register grows in size. However, because of the rate at which the register has grown, almost 30 per cent of registered inspectors were not used in 1995-96 (figure 1). This confirms the inspectorate's view that there are now too many registered inspectors.

Figure 1. Pattern of employment of part-time registered inspectors, 1993 to 1996



11 In addition to training for part-time registered inspectors, training is offered for college nominees. These nominees are senior members of college staff who are included on inspection teams. They may participate in any aspect of inspection, including visiting classes, and attend meetings with staff and others who have an interest in the college. They may also participate in meetings held by inspectors where inspection findings are discussed. This has been a successful feature of inspection, much valued by colleges. Briefing for college nominees is usually offered well in advance of their college's inspection. Some 96 per cent of nominees from the colleges inspected in 1995-96 were trained by October 1994 and, by June 1995, 97 per cent of nominees from the colleges to be inspected in 1996-97 had been trained.

INSPECTION PROGRAMME

12 The inspectorate achieved its target of inspecting 121 colleges in 1995-96. Each college inspection was carried out by a team comprising full-time and registered part-time inspectors and led to the publication of a report. In addition to its programme of college inspections, the inspectorate:

- inspected 18 independent establishments making provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities whose education and training are funded by the Council
- inspected seven external institutions, and further education provision in two institutions of higher education
- re-inspected 26 curriculum areas in 20 colleges to meet the requirements of the Council
- conducted national surveys on general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) provision in further education colleges; higher education in further education colleges; and standards and their assurance in vocational qualifications
- published reviews of three curriculum areas: agriculture, business, and construction
- prepared reports highlighting good practice in colleges' sports provision, in careers education and guidance, in provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, in quality assurance, in collaborative work (including franchising) and in key skills
- published the chief inspector's third annual report
- visited Italy and Canada to assess post-16 education.

13 The inspection programme for 1995-96 also included three visits to each college in the sector by a designated college inspector. Such visits help colleges to prepare for their inspection and to follow up action plans formulated after their inspection has been carried out.

14 The cost of the inspectorate in the financial year 1995-96 was £8.7 million, representing approximately 36 per cent of the Council's running cost budget and 0.29 per cent of the overall budget of about £3 billion allocated by the Council to institutional provision.

FRAMEWORK FOR INSPECTION

15 No major changes were made to the inspection framework in 1995-96. It has continued to prove a robust and flexible means of assessing both the standards achieved by students and the quality of provision in institutions funded by the Council. However, guidance on the following topics has been issued to inspectors in order to improve the consistency of their work:

- **Consistency in reaching judgements and reporting (October 1995)**

As a result of a survey of inspection reports, clarification was issued to inspectors on how certain aspects of provision should be dealt with in inspection reports, as set out in table 1.

Table 1. Guidance on assessing and reporting aspects of college provision

| <i>Aspect of provision</i> | <i>Preferred section of the report in which the topic should appear and grade to which it should contribute</i> |
|--|---|
| Enrichment/additional studies | Responsiveness and range of provision |
| Achievement of targets for growth | Governance and management |
| Arrangements for monitoring destinations | Governance and management |
| Figures for students' destinations | Students' achievements |
| Arrangements for monitoring attendance | Student recruitment, guidance and support |
| Average level of attendance (as a percentage of enrolment) for all classes seen | Teaching and the promotion of learning (judgements should contribute to specialist inspection grades) |
| Provision of childcare | Student recruitment, guidance and support |
| Arrangements for identifying the need for additional learning support and methods of providing support | Student recruitment, guidance and support |
| Statutory requirement to provide a collective act of worship in sixth form colleges | Governance and management |
| Work placement and work experience | Teaching and the promotion of learning (judgements should contribute to specialist inspection grades) |
| The college charter | Quality assurance |
| Deployment of staff, covering all aspects of programmes offered | Resources – staffing |
| Staff qualifications, including appropriate number with training and development lead body (TDLB) qualifications | Resources – staffing |
| Learning resources, including all information about libraries and learning centres | Resources – equipment/learning resources |

- **Disclosure of grades (October 1995)**

It was confirmed that inspectors may disclose to colleges the overall curriculum area grades which are due, at a later date, to be aggregated into a single programme area grade provided that:

- it is agreed with the college principal when the inspection is set up which grades will be disclosed and which will contribute to aggregated published grades
- each disclosed grade is associated with a substantial body of evidence and is based on work undertaken by at least three teachers, to preserve their anonymity
- the grade has been moderated according to the requirements of the regional senior inspector
- the status of each disclosed grade is made clear in all forms of feedback.

- **Reinspection of cross-college provision graded 4 or 5 (November 1995)**

It was confirmed that the Council does not require formal reinspection of cross-college provision graded 4 or 5. Only under exceptional circumstances will the chief inspector agree to the reinspection of such provision.

16 During 1995-96, the inspectorate commenced a review of the inspection framework, *Assessing Achievement*, in preparation for the introduction of revised arrangements in September 1997. The chief inspector was advised by a consultative group, comprising mainly college principals, and proposals were submitted to the quality assessment committee. The Council, after receiving the advice of the quality assessment committee, issued a consultative circular to the sector and others with an interest in further education in June 1996 seeking views on the proposals made by the consultative group.

COLLEGE INSPECTIONS

17 The college inspection programme is approved by the quality assessment committee on the basis of proposals made by the chief inspector. These, in turn, are based on suggestions made by regional teams. The annual inspection programme provides data for an assessment of the quality of provision which reflect the overall range of provision within the sector. By the end of 1995-96, after three years of inspection, 73 per cent of the colleges in the sector had been inspected, in line with the inspectorate's target of completing the inspection of all sector colleges by July 1997.

18 All work inspected is assessed in terms of its strengths and weaknesses, and grades are awarded to aspects of work on a scale of 1 to 5. Grade 1 represents provision which has many strengths and very few weaknesses; grade 5 represents provision with many weaknesses and very few strengths. College inspection reports, which are written to a consistent format, are intended to provide a fair record of the strengths and weaknesses of a particular college based on the evidence gathered during inspection.

19 On average, inspectors spent 72 working days inspecting each of the 121 colleges in 1995-96. During these inspections, inspectors observed 20,161 teaching and learning sessions involving more than 215,000 students and awarded 1,026 grades for curriculum areas. These figures are similar to those for the 1994-95 inspection programme, which covered 129 colleges.

20 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 assist each college by identifying areas for improvement and an agenda for action, using the framework agreed with the sector as guidance. Five aspects of the college inspection programme are evaluated in this report:

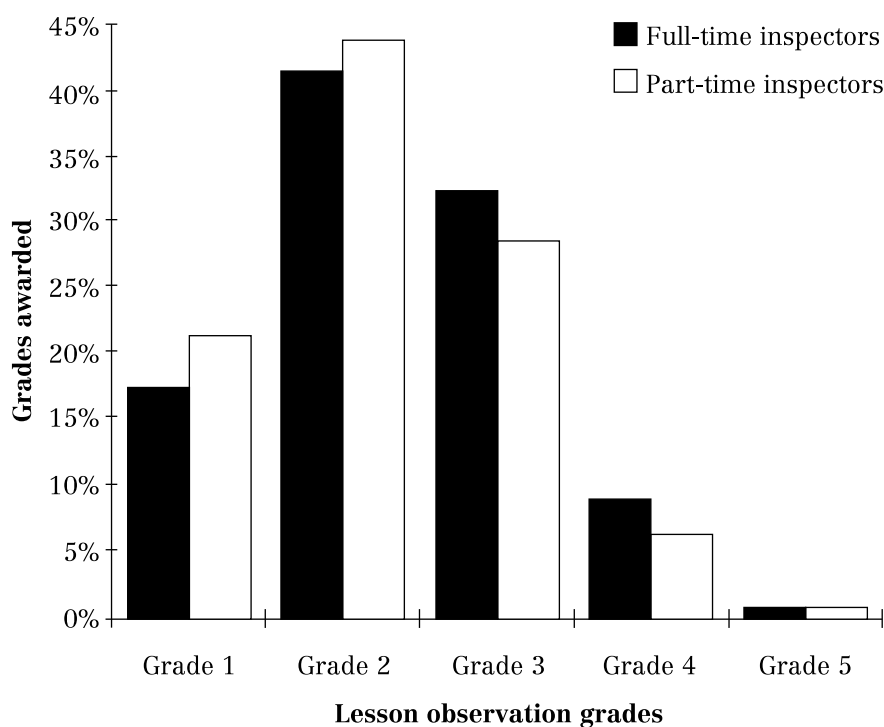
- lesson observation grades
- regional grading profiles
- publication of inspection reports
- college responses to inspection
- follow-up to inspections.

LESSON OBSERVATION GRADES

21 All teaching and learning sessions observed by inspectors are graded. The grade profile for these lessons has indicated consistent improvement in the quality of teaching and learning since 1993-94, with the percentage of lessons graded 1 increasing across all regions to a national average of 20 per cent in 1995-96.

22 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. In last year's report it was noted that there was an emerging tendency for part-time inspectors to award higher grades than their full-time colleagues. Figure 2 presents a comparison of the lesson observation grades awarded by full-time and part-time inspectors in 1995-96. This indicates that, although there is again a difference of a few percentage points in the profiles, it is similar to that of 1994-95. Further analysis of the observation grades reveals that, in comparison with their full-time colleagues, part-time inspectors observe a higher percentage of GCE A/AS lessons. These tend to have higher grades than lessons associated with other courses, as indicated in the chief inspector's annual report of 1994-95. While this helps to explain the difference in grading profiles, the need to ensure that all inspectors adopt a consistent approach to grading lessons remains constant. The moderation of grading practice will continue to be a focus of staff development for the inspectorate.

Figure 2. The distribution of lesson observation grades awarded by full-time and part-time registered inspectors, 1995-96

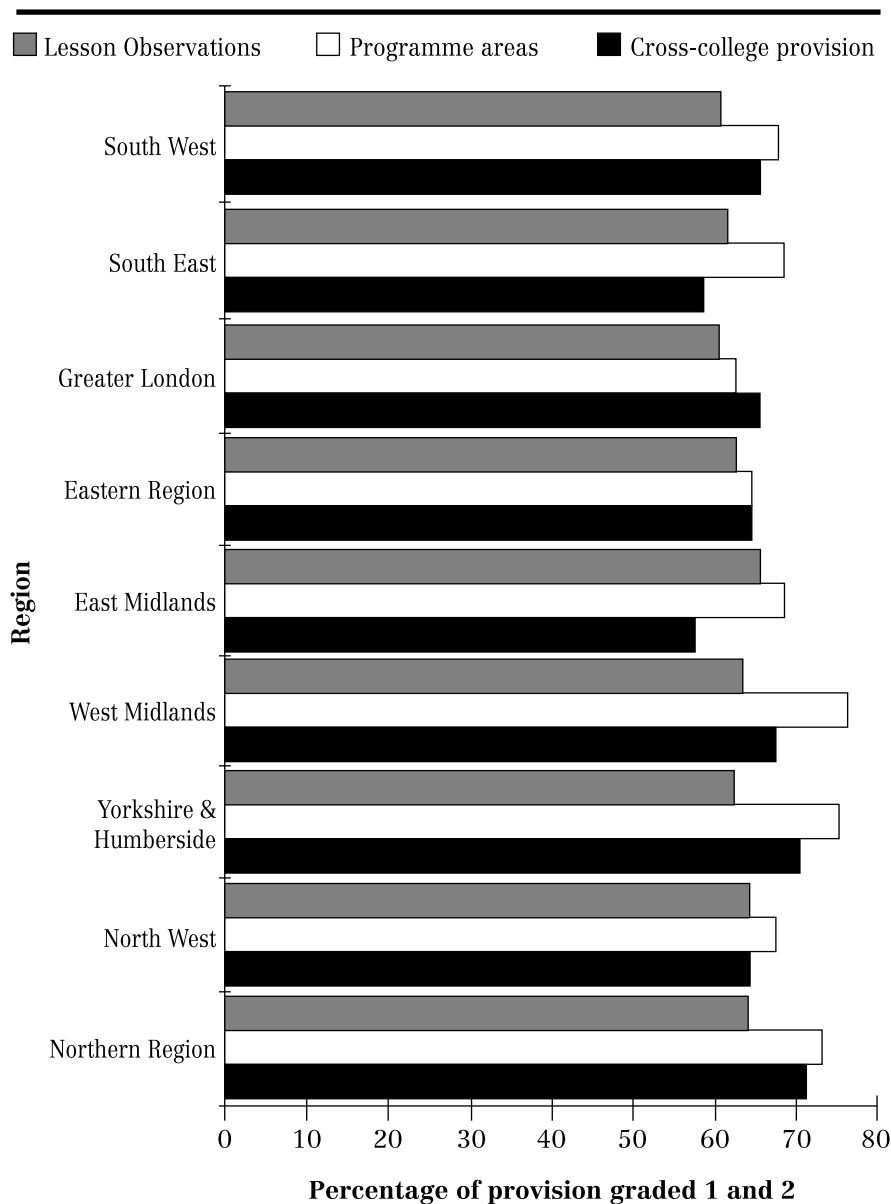


REGIONAL GRADING PROFILES

23 Each of the 10 regions designated by the Council has a different profile of colleges and contributes a different sample of colleges, by number, type and size, to the annual inspection programme. In the three years of inspection to July 1996, the number of colleges inspected annually has varied from 21 in the Council's Northern Region to 50 in the North West and South East regions. Figure 3 shows the distribution

of grades for lesson observations, programme areas and aspects of cross-college provision graded 1 and 2 in each of the Council's 10 regions between 1993 and 1996. This shows that the profile of lesson observation grades is consistent to within 5 per cent across the regions, but that there is a variation of over 10 per cent in grading programme areas and other aspects of college provision. The inspectorate takes steps to minimise inconsistency in grading practice between regions by ensuring that full-time inspectors work outside their home region. Many part-time inspectors also work across regional boundaries. Working within different teams has helped to moderate inspectors' judgements and the process by which those judgements are reached; it has also brought the attention of senior inspectors to areas where improvements in consistency can be achieved.

Figure 3. Percentage of provision graded 1 and 2 by region, 1993 to 1996



PUBLICATION OF INSPECTION REPORTS

24 In 1994-95, 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. This target was increased in 1995-96 to 80 per cent. The inspectorate achieved this target by publishing 83 per cent of its 121 college inspection reports within the 10-week timescale. A further 11 per cent of reports were published within 12 weeks, leaving 6 per cent subject to further delay.

25 Of the 20 reports which did not meet the publication target, the majority were held up either because of action to clarify inspection findings or at the request of the college, as shown in table 2.

Table 2. Reasons for publication delays, 1995-96

| <i>Primary reason</i> | <i>Number of reports</i> |
|---|--------------------------|
| Clarification/review of inspection findings | 8 |
| Publication deferred at request of college | 8 |
| Delays in the drafting/editorial process | 4 |

26 In comparison with 1994-95, there has been a significant reduction (from 18 to 4) in the number of reports delayed in the drafting or editorial process. This improvement in performance has resulted from changes in the editorial procedures and staff development activities which were noted in last year's evaluation report.

COLLEGE RESPONSES TO INSPECTION

27 There is a growing body of evidence to suggest that inspection has been an effective means of encouraging improvements in provision for students in the sector. Most colleges make extensive preparations for inspection, including staff development exercises, the analysis of students' achievements and the preparation of self-assessment reports. Inspectors assist by briefing college staff and governors on the framework for inspection and the process of inspection. Self-assessment has become an important focus of colleges' preparations for inspection and processes colleges use to make judgements about their own provision have become increasingly robust. In many instances, self-assessment incorporates college managers' observation of teaching sessions. Since 1994-95, the inspectorate has regularly assessed the accuracy of college self-assessment reports as part of the inspection process.

28 All colleges inspected are invited to evaluate their inspection. A standard form is provided for this purpose. Colleges' evaluations are collated and considered at both regional and national levels. In 1995-96, evaluations were received from 71 colleges. The great majority of these indicate that inspection is well received. There is particular support for

the work of college inspectors, the involvement of college nominees on inspection teams, and the openness of the inspection process. Most colleges find that judgements reached by inspectors are fair and many cite inspection as being helpful in the process of college development.

29 In November 1995, the National Audit Office (NAO), as part of their review of the Further Education Funding Council as a whole, carried out a survey of 100 colleges selected at random. Of these, 57 colleges had been inspected, one college was in the process of being inspected and two colleges were in the process of agreeing their inspection programme. The NAO report commented that a significant majority of respondents reported positively on their inspection experience, including those with relatively poor grade profiles. On average, 88 per cent of the respondents which had been subject to inspection described the various aspects of the inspection process as adequate or more than adequate. Of the 47 colleges which expressed a view about their inspection report, 41 (87 per cent) commented that it had been fair.

30 Issues raised by colleges in evaluations received by the inspectorate include: the protracted length of inspections, which sometimes occur over many months; the limited extent and time devoted to feedback of inspection findings; variations between verbal feedback and the published report on the college; and inconsistency in practice amongst individual inspectors on the same team. The NAO report also drew attention to concerns cited by more than one college during their survey, including concerns about the quality of the work of part-time inspectors and about the lack of an appeals procedure where institutions did not agree with inspection findings.

31 Some concerns expressed in evaluation reports, for example those related to the time taken for inspections and the time allocated to feedback, have been taken account of in the review of the inspection framework conducted during 1995-96. Other concerns, for example those relating to inconsistency within inspection teams, have helped to set agendas for regional and national meetings focused on the moderation of inspection practice. With regard to an appeals procedure, the Council's *Annual Report 1994-95* sets out procedures and targets for dealing with complaints concerning the Council's administrative decisions. The inspectorate will continue to take account of comments and suggestions received from colleges in order to develop methods of inspection which are effective and fair.

32 Last year's evaluation report noted that the maintenance of dialogue between college staff and inspection teams throughout an inspection is a key factor in ensuring that inspections run smoothly. Such a dialogue ensures that any misunderstanding between inspectors and a college can be dealt with before it adversely affects the value of an inspection. Last year's evaluation report also presented an analysis of written challenges to inspection grades received by the inspectorate. Less than 2 per cent of inspection grades were subject to such challenges. In 1995-96, the

inspectorate awarded 1,867 grades for curriculum provision and aspects of cross-college provision during its inspection of 121 sector colleges. The inspectorate received written challenges from 16 colleges (13 per cent of the total inspected) concerning:

- eight curriculum area grades (0.8 per cent of the total awarded)
- 12 cross-college grades (1.4 per cent of the total awarded).

33 These figures represent a reduction both in the percentage of colleges challenging grades and the percentage of grades challenged. Further analysis confirms that, while no programme area stands out as being the subject of more written challenges than others, grades for governance and management, and quality assurance, were the most frequently challenged of the cross-college grades. It is inspectorate policy that, when grades are challenged, inspection evidence is reviewed and, where necessary, additional inspection is carried out. In 1995-96, additional inspection occurred in four cases. Four inspection grades were changed as a result of the review of evidence or consideration of additional evidence. In almost all cases, challenges were resolved at regional level, without recourse to the chief inspector.

FOLLOW-UP TO INSPECTION

34 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. College inspectors, during the course of their termly visits to colleges, record the progress being made in achieving the objectives set out in action plans. In 1995-96, the great majority of action plans were received from colleges within the requested timescale and only two were considered inappropriate by college inspectors.

35 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. During 1994-95, reinspection of 26 curriculum areas originally awarded a grade 4 was carried out in 20 colleges. Of those curriculum areas reinspected, 19 were found to have improved sufficiently for the provision to be awarded a grade 3 and seven had improved sufficiently for the provision to be awarded a grade 2. This achievement highlights the positive response to inspection demonstrated by colleges and the effectiveness of their actions to remedy weaknesses. Six colleges, due to be reinspected, requested that

reinspection be delayed because the colleges did not consider that sufficient improvement had been made. These will be reinspected in 1996-97.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

36 In last year's report, it was noted that a review of the inspectorate's quality assurance arrangements was carried out and a management structure for the inspectorate had been established. The inspectorate has continued to develop its arrangements for assuring the quality of its work, with particular regard to the management of inspectors and inspections, monitoring and reviewing inspectors' judgements, and staff development.

37 In order to co-ordinate regional, programme area and cross-regional (consortium) inspectorate groups, an annual calendar of meetings has been established which includes fixed agenda items. This ensures that all groups periodically consider aspects of the inspectorate's operations such as the profile of grades awarded during inspections, the deployment and use of part-time registered inspectors, and the development and management of national exercises. Senior inspectors also regularly review expenditure and progress against the objectives included in the inspectorate's operational plan, and report on these to the Council. The inspectorate's cycle of business is co-ordinated with the work of the quality assessment committee which meets three times a year. In addition to receiving all inspection reports, the quality assessment committee considers, as fixed agenda items for its meetings:

- the schedule of college inspections
- the schedule of national surveys and international work
- the inspectorate's work over the previous teaching year
- the structure and content of the chief inspector's report
- the committee's own report to the Council
- the Council's report to the secretary of state, and any response from the secretary of state.

38 Regional teams within the inspectorate have continued to work closely with other Council divisions, attending briefing meetings at which they gain factual information which is helpful in preparing for inspections. The improving quality and comprehensiveness of the data held by the Council has helped to establish the importance of these briefing events. During 1995-96, the inspectorate further developed its own information systems by undertaking a project to make inspection grades more widely available throughout the Council. This has led to a facility for the comparative analysis of inspection grades across the three years from 1993-94 by region, by college type, by programme area and by aspects of cross-college provision. It supplements analyses of

inspection grades which are circulated three times a year and which feed into programme, regional and consortia team meetings. The inspectorate has continued to emphasise the development of writing and editing skills amongst inspectors. Since 1994-95, the quality of all draft inspection reports has been graded by independent editors employed by the Council. The trend in these assessments of inspectors' writing has shown an improvement in the quality of reports issued during 1995-96.

39 A programme of staff development at the inspectorate's 1996 annual conference included sessions on: the contribution of the inspection to equal opportunities in colleges; collaborative provision; widening participation; the Dearing review of 16-19 qualifications; and the use of the Internet.

40 The inspectorate has introduced arrangements which enable regionally based inspectors to be seconded to the chief inspector's office and to work with other divisions of the Council. This has allowed the inspectorate to make a significant contribution to the work of the Council's advisory committees on students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and on widening participation in further education. In addition to internal liaison, the inspectorate has maintained links with a wide range of external organisations. These include professional associations associated with particular areas of the curriculum and groups which focus their work on the development of educational policy. Regular liaison with the Further Education Development Agency (FEDA) has ensured that its staff are briefed on the outcomes of the inspectorate's work and issues arising from it.

CONCLUSIONS

41 A primary task of the inspectorate is to meet targets which will enable it to fulfil its terms of reference. In 1995-96, it did this by:

- meeting its targets of inspecting and publishing reports on 121 colleges within the further education sector
- publishing eight reports arising from national surveys of the curriculum and other aspects of provision in colleges
- publishing a report highlighting good practice in college sport provision, and preparing a further four reports on good practice for future publication
- inspecting Council-funded provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in 18 independent establishments
- inspecting Council-funded provision in two institutions of higher education and seven external institutions
- fulfilling the Council's requirement to reinspect grade 4 and grade 5 curriculum areas which have weaknesses which outweigh the strengths, in order to inform funding decisions

-
- reporting on post-16 vocational education and training in Canada and Italy
 - publishing the chief inspector's third annual report.

42 In carrying out its work, the inspectorate has contributed to the development of the sector by:

- continuing its programme of training for sector staff wishing to become part-time registered inspectors
- maintaining a programme of college inspector visits including follow-up visits to look at college action plans arising from inspection
- including college nominees on inspection teams and helping to train them and develop their role
- inviting colleges to evaluate inspections and responding to challenges to the inspectorate's judgements
- maintaining links with external bodies associated with curriculum development and quality assessment
- contributing to staff development and training events organised by FEDA and other agencies
- commencing a revision of the inspectorate framework, together with an advisory group comprising staff from the sector, which takes account of the development of quality assurance mechanisms within sector colleges.

43 In fulfilling its work programme, the inspectorate has supported the Council's general objective of openness and transparency.

44 In 1995-96, the inspectorate met its aims by further developing its quality assurance mechanisms and its arrangements for improving the consistency of its work. The publication targets set by the quality assessment committee were also met. The record of training part-time registered inspectors has been maintained rather than improved. During 1996-97, the inspectorate aims to:

- meet its publication targets set by the quality assessment committee
- complete a review of the register of part-time inspectors
- introduce a revised inspection framework to be used from September 1997
- commence a training programme for inspectors to brief them on the new framework for inspection
- review its operational procedures in the light of the new framework
- continue to develop its arrangements for assuring the quality of its work.

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

- the inspection of 124 sector colleges
- inspection of Council-funded provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in 12 independent institutions
- inspection of Council-funded provision for students in 11 external institutions
- termly visits to each college by college inspectors
- national surveys of three aspects of further education: access to further education; student retention and examination achievements; technology in the curriculum
- reviews of four curriculum areas: health and community care; hotel and catering; sciences; basic education
- publication of the chief inspector's fourth annual report
- visits to assess post-16 vocational education and training in Singapore and Japan.

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.

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