

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

**An Evaluation
of the Work
of the
Inspectorate
1996-97**

September 1998

**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.

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GRADE DESCRIPTORS

The procedures for assessing quality in 1996-97 are set out in the Council Circular 93/28. Inspectors assess the strengths and weaknesses of each aspect of provision they inspect. Their assessments are set out in published 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.*

Aggregated grades for aspects of cross-college provision, curriculum areas and lesson observations, for colleges inspected during 1996-97, are shown in the following table.

| | Grade | | | | |
|--------------------------------|--------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | % | % | % | % | % |
| <i>Curriculum areas</i> | 9 | 59 | 30 | 2 | – |
| <i>Cross-college provision</i> | 18 | 51 | 27 | 4 | – |
| <i>Lesson observations</i> | 19 | 42 | 31 | 7 | 1 |

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

Sample size: 122 college inspections

SUMMARY

In the college year 1996-97, the inspectorate achieved its targets by inspecting: 124 sector colleges; FEFC-funded provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in 14 independent colleges; and provision in eight external institutions. It also conducted two national surveys and four curriculum area surveys. There was a reinspection of 19 curriculum areas in 18 colleges to meet the Further Education Funding Council's (FEFC's) requirements. Eight independent establishments and two external institutions were also reinspected. The inspectorate continued its training of part-time registered inspectors; it met its target of publishing 85 per cent of inspection reports within 10 working weeks and developed further arrangements for assuring the quality of its own work. The inspectorate continued to prepare for the introduction of the new inspection framework in September 1997: it reviewed and reduced the register of part-time inspectors; provided briefing events for full-time and part-time inspectors; and examined its operational procedures. Guidance was issued to the sector on the new framework, on the process of self-assessment and on the procedures for joint working by the audit service and the inspectorate. Council Circular 97/25, *College Accreditation*, enabled the inspectorate to consult the sector on the introduction of accredited status. Colleges continued to comment favourably on their experience of inspection. Their evaluations confirm that they generally found inspector's judgements fair, though issues are highlighted which the inspectorate needs to address. The number of challenges to inspection grades has risen but they are a small proportion of the grades awarded during inspection. The quality assessment committee's third annual report and the chief inspector's fourth annual report have both been published. During 1997-98, the inspectorate will complete the programme of work agreed by the quality assurance committee, continue to develop its quality assurance arrangements, strive to meet its publication targets, continue to train inspectors, and publish guidance to the sector on the procedures for application for accredited status.

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AN EVALUATION OF THE WORK OF THE INSPECTORATE, 1996-97

INTRODUCTION

1 The inspection arrangements of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) have been in operation since September 1993. To July 1997, inspectors carried out:

- 453 inspections of colleges in the further education sector with a published report on all but one of these colleges
- 86 inspections of independent establishments providing for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- 27 inspections of external institutions
- three inspections of further education in institutions of higher education
- 29 surveys on the curriculum and other aspects of college provision leading to published reports, including good practice reports
- nine surveys of post-16 education and training in other countries
- one survey and one inspection jointly with the Office for Standards in Education (OfSTED).

2 The main purpose of this report is to provide an evaluation of the inspectorate's performance during the college year 1996-97. However, there is also reference to the work of the inspectorate during its first quadrennial cycle, 1993 to 1997. The report covers: changes in the staffing of the inspectorate; the recruitment and training of part-time inspectors; the application of the inspection framework, Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*; 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; matters of quality assurance within the inspectorate, including grade consistency; the production of accurate and concise inspection reports to agreed deadlines; and preparations for the introduction of the new inspection framework, Council Circular 97/12, *Validating Self-assessment*.

BACKGROUND

3 The *Further and Higher Education Act 1992* requires that the FEFC 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 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.’

4 In order to meet its responsibilities for quality assessment, the FEFC established the inspectorate. The terms of reference of the inspectorate and quality assessment committee are given in annexes A and B respectively.

5 The FEFC submits an annual report to the secretary of state on quality and standards in further education. The secretary of state’s response to the annual report for 1996-97 noted that, during an extremely challenging period, the further education sector has continued to expand the opportunities available to students of all ages throughout the country.

THE INSPECTORATE

6 The organisation of the inspectorate has remained stable. The majority of inspectors are home-based, working in regional teams and contributing to national curriculum teams aligned to the FEFC’s 10 programme areas. Each regional team is managed by a senior inspector. In 1996-97, there were 76 full-time inspectors including nine senior inspectors and the chief inspector.

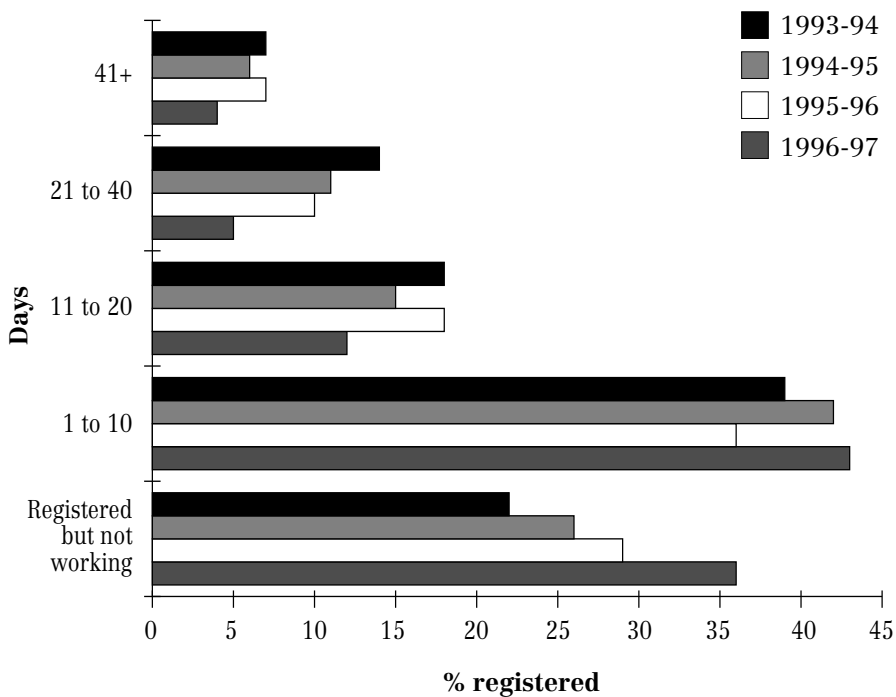
7 Full-time inspectors were supported in their work by part-time registered inspectors, providing the equivalent of approximately 24 full-time equivalent posts. Initial training for part-time registered inspectors occurs in three phases, the first of these comprising an intensive three-day residential training event which aims to establish the context of inspection and to develop in candidates the skills and knowledge required by an inspector. In 1996-97, the need to recruit and train part-time inspectors was far less than in the early years of the inspectorate. Only one course was held. Twenty-four delegates attended the event. All were successful but four withdrew following the event.

8 The second and third phases of training comprise inspection activities carried out in colleges, where trainees’ performance is assessed by full-time inspectors. Over the past four years, the inspectorate has found it difficult to complete college-based training owing to the priority it has given to completing its inspection programme. In 1996-97, 97 part-time inspectors achieved registration, 13 failed their training, 23 withdrew and 29 are waiting to complete the second and third phases of their training.

9 During 1996-97, the inspectorate provided additional training for some part-time registered inspectors to enable them to inspect cross-college aspects of provision identified in Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. In autumn 1996, three advanced training events were run for 63 part-time registered inspectors.

10 In 1996-97, 452 part-time registered inspectors were employed on the inspection programme, representing 64 per cent of the 733 who had achieved registration by August 1997. The proportion of part-time registered inspectors who were employed was lower than in previous years. A greater proportion were also employed for fewer days. This pattern of employment (figure 1) helped to confirm the inspectorate's view that there was a need to reduce the number of part-time inspectors.

Figure 1. Pattern of employment of part-time registered inspectors, 1993 to 1997



11 In 1996-97, the inspectorate reviewed the use of its register of part-time inspectors in preparation for the introduction of the revised inspection arrangements from September 1997. One of the consequences of the revised arrangements, a planned reduction (from 69 days to 40) in the average number of days to be allocated to a college inspection, strengthened the case for having fewer registered part-time inspectors. The review of the register started in January 1997. As part of a comprehensive selection process, part-time inspectors were first asked to indicate whether they wished to stay on the register; 5 per cent decided to withdraw. At the end of the selection process, 385 inspectors accepted an invitation to remain on the register.

12 In preparation for the new inspection arrangements, a number of training events were provided for both full-time and part-time registered inspectors. In January and February 1997, all full-time inspectors attended one of two initial training events on the revised inspection framework. They received further training at their national conference in July 1997. At the conference, training was also provided for colleagues from audit, who will be working with the inspectorate under

the revised inspection arrangements, and for inspectorate support staff. There were six training events for part-time inspectors who had been invited to remain on the register. Attendance at one of these was a condition of registration.

13 The inspectorate continued to offer training to college nominees, to prepare them for their role in inspection teams. Nominees, who are usually senior members of the college, may participate in various aspects of inspection, including observing lessons with an inspector and joining discussions with college staff, students, employers and others with an interest in the work of the college. They may also attend all meetings held by inspectors before, during and after the inspection. There were two training events for nominees in 1996-97. Ninety-six per cent of the nominees from sector colleges to be inspected in 1997-98 received training before September 1997. In addition, there were five briefing events for nominees from external institutions, independent colleges and designated institutions.

THE INSPECTION PROGRAMME

14 The inspectorate achieved its target of inspecting 124 colleges in 1996-97. Each inspection was carried out by a team comprising full-time and part-time registered inspectors and all but one inspection led to the publication of a report. There was no report on Hilderstone College because of the small scale of FEFC funding provided to the college. In addition, the inspectorate carried out the following programme of activities which included:

- inspection of 14 independent colleges making provision, funded by the FEFC, for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- inspection of eight external institutions funded by the FEFC
- reinspection of 19 curriculum areas in 18 colleges to meet the requirements of the FEFC
- reinspection of eight independent establishments and two external institutions
- two national surveys on technology in the curriculum, and collaborative provision
- reviews of four curriculum areas: basic education, health and community care, hotel and catering (including leisure and tourism), and sciences
- an inspection of the Further Education Development Agency (FEDA)
- provision of evidence for the FEFC's widening participation committee and case studies for the FEFC's guide to good practice on how to widen participation
- publication of the chief inspector's fourth annual report.

15 The inspection programme included visits to each college by a designated college inspector. These visits help colleges to prepare for inspection and to devise action plans to deal with issues raised by the inspection. College inspectors also visited colleges to tell them about the new inspection arrangements.

16 The cost of the inspectorate in the financial year 1996-97 was £6.6 million, representing approximately 28 per cent of the FEFC's running cost budget and 0.2 per cent of the overall budget of about £3 billion allocated by the FEFC to institutional provision.

THE FRAMEWORK FOR INSPECTION

17 Inspections in 1996-97 were carried out according to the inspection framework, Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. No major changes were made to this framework for 1996-97. It continued to provide a sound means of assessing the standards achieved by students and the quality of college provision. To improve the consistency of their work, guidance was issued to inspectors on the following topics.

THE USE OF ASSESSMENT NOTES

18 Assessment notes are used to record the judgements inspectors make about students' work. The assessment note was revised to emphasise the contribution assessment of students' work makes to inspectors' judgements of students' achievements.

INSPECTING AND REPORTING ON COLLABORATIVE PROVISION

19 Growth in collaborative provision has been rapid. It was confirmed that collaborative provision should normally be inspected if it constituted more than 10 per cent of FEFC-funded units within a programme area or involved one-third or more of students enrolled in that programme area. Collaborative provision was also normally to be inspected if it constituted more than 10 per cent of the FEFC-funded units for the college as a whole or involved one-third or more of the students. The guidance made clear that collaborative provision should be dealt with in a similar manner to all other aspects of college provision in written reports.

REPORTING ON THE VALUE ADDED TO STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

20 The guidance made clear that if a college had carried out analyses of the value added to students' achievements, the resulting data should form part of the inspectorate's evidence base. It further suggested that it was important to consider value-added analysis over a suitable period of time. Inspectors were asked to make clear where colleges carried out an analysis of students' achievements in relation to their previous attainments and, if appropriate, use was made of value-added assessments in reviewing performance and identifying areas for improvement.

21 Inspectors were also issued with guidance on:

- writing about teaching quality in inspection reports
- the procedures for recording students' attendance
- the use of performance tables issued by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE)
- the management of national surveys
- and the use of the FEFC's performance indicators.

REVISED INSPECTION ARRANGEMENTS

22 Early in 1997, the inspectorate completed its review of arrangements for a new inspection framework. The review took account of advice provided by a consultative group and the responses to a wider consultation carried out by the FEFC during the summer of 1996. The revised framework, Council Circular 97/12, *Validating Self-assessment*, was published in March 1997. A task group, which included representatives from the sector, had been set up in December 1996 to develop additional guidance on the preparation and format of self-assessment reports. This guidance, Council Circular 97/13, *Self-assessment and Inspection*, was published at the same time as the revised framework.

23 The new inspection framework set out the FEFC's commitment to establish closer working between the FEFC's audit service and the inspectorate. In June 1997, Council Circular 97/22, *Joint Working: Audit and Inspection*, established procedures for joint work by the audit service and inspectorate in planning and carrying out college inspections, with particular regard to the assessment of governance and management.

ACCREDITATION

24 The inspectorate also established a working group, comprising the chief inspector and principals from sector colleges, to consider college accreditation. The purpose of the group was to advise the quality assessment committee on:

- the timetable for college accreditation
- the criteria for granting college accreditation
- the procedures for granting accredited status
- the procedures by which the FEFC should discharge its responsibilities for assessing the quality of provision in accredited colleges.

25 In July 1997, the FEFC consulted the sector (Council Circular 97/25, *College Accreditation*), on the introduction of accredited status for those colleges which are able to demonstrate that they have comprehensive, effective and rigorous systems of management control and quality assurance.

COLLEGE INSPECTIONS

26 In July 1997, after four years of inspection, the inspectorate reached its target of inspecting all colleges in the sector. The programme of work included the observation of over 70,000 lessons involving some 750,000 students. Over 3,800 inspection grades were awarded to curriculum areas and over 3,100 to cross-college aspects of provision. On average, inspectors spent 69 days inspecting each college. 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 representing provision which has many strengths and very few weaknesses; grade 5 representing provision which has many weaknesses and very few strengths). College inspection reports were written to a consistent format and were designed to provide a fair record of the strengths and weaknesses of a particular college based on evidence gathered during inspection.

27 In the 124 colleges inspected during 1996-97, inspectors observed 18,721 lessons, involving 201,904 students, and awarded 1,006 curriculum grades and 854 grades for cross-college aspects of provision. An average of 69 working days was spent inspecting each of the colleges, which was slightly fewer than the 72 days used in 1995-96.

28 The purpose of inspection is to provide information and judgements that will promote continuous improvements in standards and in the quality of learning provided in further education. Inspection activity focuses on the quality of the experience offered to students and the efficacy of the systems which support the delivery of that experience.

29 Five aspects of the college inspection programme are evaluated in this report:

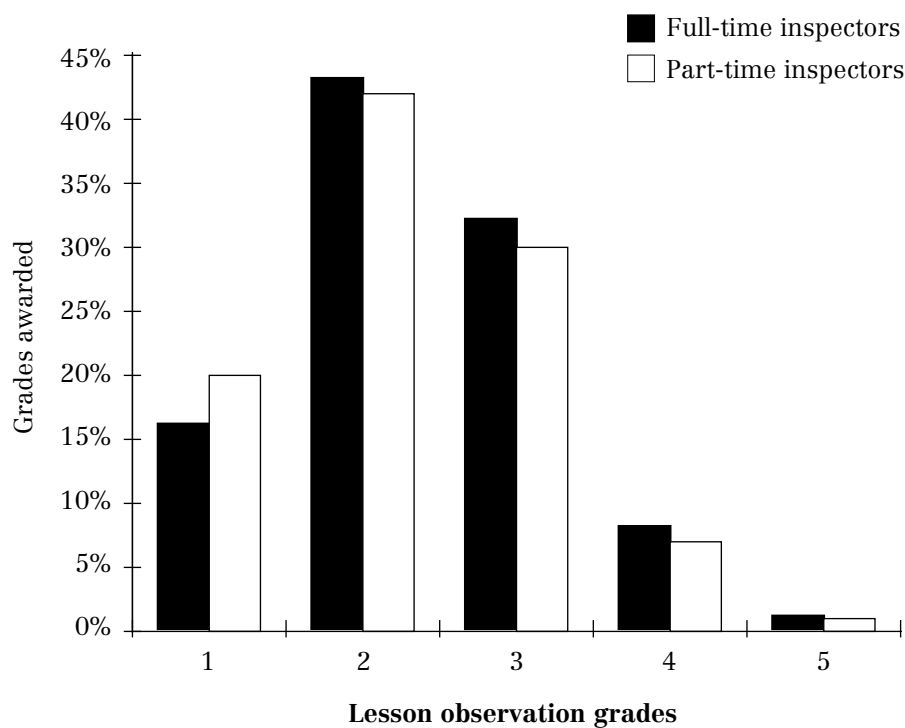
- lesson observation grades
- regional grading profiles
- publication of inspection reports
- college responses to inspection
- follow-up to inspections.

LESSON OBSERVATION GRADES

30 Each lesson observed by inspectors is graded. The 1995-96 report noted a consistent improvement in the quality of teaching and learning compared with the previous year. In 1996-97, however, there was a slight fall in the percentage of lessons awarded grade 1 (from 20 per cent in 1995-96 to 19 per cent in 1996-97) and grade 2 (from 43 per cent in 1995-96 to 42 per cent in 1996-97).

31 The inspectorate uses a data recording system which enables comparisons to be made between the observation grades awarded by individuals, by part-time and full-time inspectors, and by regional teams. Figure 2 presents a comparison between the lesson observation grades awarded by full-time and part-time inspectors. Although the grade profiles are similar, there is a tendency for part-time registered inspectors to award higher grades than full-time inspectors. The difference is only a few percentage points and is similar to that noted in the reports for 1994-95 and for 1995-96. In part, the difference in grading by full-time and part-time inspectors can be explained by the higher grades awarded to the large number of advanced level classes which were observed. Grade analysis continues to be a standing item at programme area team meetings and moderation of grading practice is a continuing focus for staff development.

Figure 2. The distribution of lesson observation grades awarded by full-time and part-time registered inspectors, 1996-97



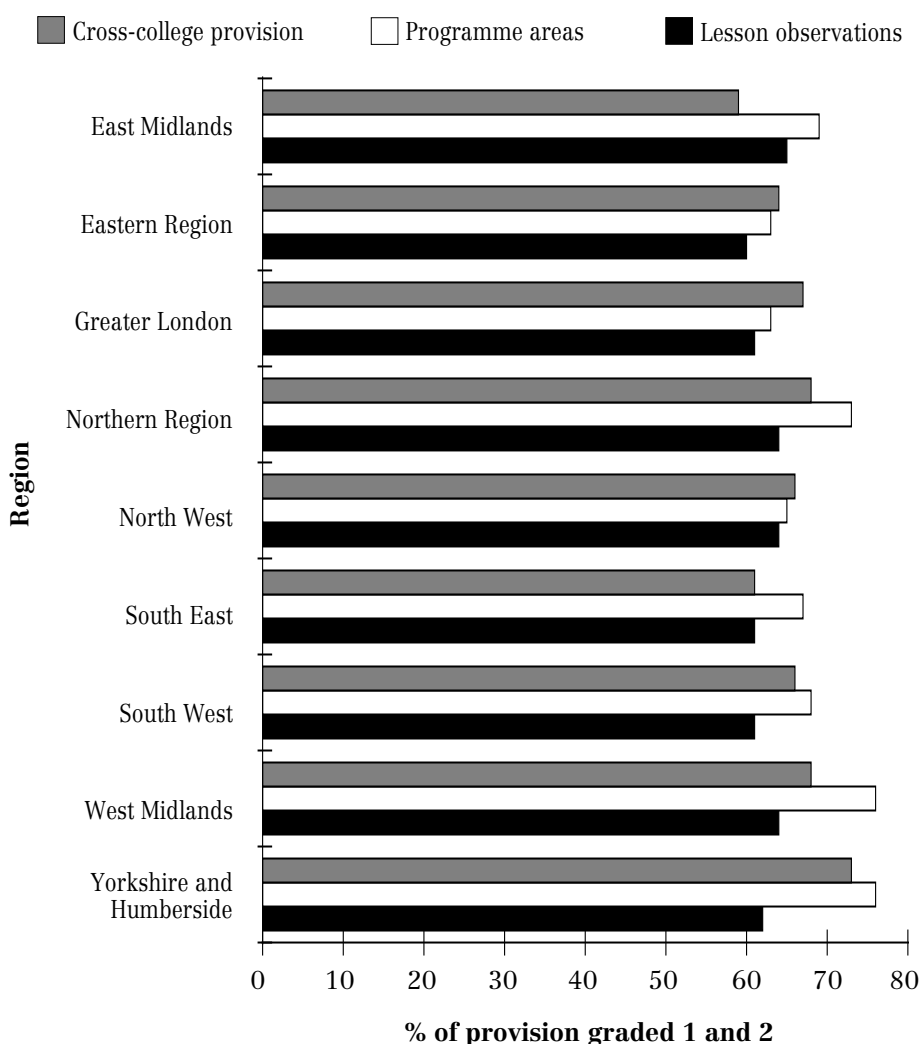
REGIONAL GRADING PROFILES

32 The monitoring of performance increased as the quadrennial cycle progressed and data were more plentiful. After four years of inspection, the number of inspections carried out by regional teams varied from 28 in the FEFC's Northern Region to 72 in the South East region. Each of the FEFC's nine regions has a different range of colleges by type and size. Figure 3 shows the percentage of grades 1 and 2 awarded for lesson observations, programme areas and aspects of cross-college provision in each of the FEFC's nine regions between 1993 and 1997. The profile of lesson observation grades is consistent to within 5 per cent

across the regions and consistent with similar analysis undertaken in previous years. However, there is variation of over 12 per cent in the grading of programme areas and cross-college provision.

33 Action has been taken to improve consistency. Full-time inspectors work outside their home region and many part-time inspectors also work across regional boundaries. Working within different regional teams helps to moderate inspectors' judgements and to promote the sharing of good practice. Consortia, clusters of regions, meet termly to consider variations in practice and grading across both regions and consortia. Senior inspectors responsible for regional teams are asked to explain regional variations.

Figure 3. Percentage of provision graded 1 and 2 by region, 1993 to 1997



PUBLICATION OF INSPECTION REPORTS

34 In 1993-94, 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 the inspection. In 1994-95, this target was increased to 75 per cent, in 1995-96 it was 80 per cent, in 1996-97 it was 85 per cent. In 1996-97, the inspectorate achieved its target by publishing 85 per cent (105) of its 123 college inspection reports within 10 working weeks. Nine other reports were published within 12 working weeks. Another nine reports were subject to further delay.

Table 1. Reasons for publication delays, 1996-97

| <i>Primary reason</i> | <i>Number of reports</i> |
|---|--------------------------|
| Review of inspection findings | 5 |
| Publication delayed at request of college | 8 |
| Drafting/editorial delays | 5 |

35 In all, 18 reports did not meet the publication target. The most frequent reason was the request of the college for a delayed publication date. In an equal number of cases, publication was delayed so that inspection findings could be reviewed or because of drafting or delays in the editorial process.

COLLEGE RESPONSES TO INSPECTION

36 All colleges are invited to submit an evaluation of their inspection after the inspection report has been published. The evaluations received, during 1996-97 confirmed that inspection is generally well received by colleges. Most considered that they had sufficient notice of inspection, had received clear guidance and that the arrangements for setting up the inspection were satisfactory. The amount of information required by inspectors was considered about right and, in most cases, less than half this information was specially produced for the inspection. The number of staff-days used to prepare documentation in colleges varied widely. Many colleges indicated that the documents prepared for their inspection would be useful for future development.

37 Meetings held during the inspection were generally well structured and productive and inspectors were found to have communicated effectively with staff and students. The great majority of colleges considered that the inspection process was thorough and fair and that a representative sample of college provision had been inspected. The majority of colleges also considered that the judgements reached by inspectors were accurate. Inspectors' feedback to curriculum managers, senior managers and governors was generally thought to be adequate and constructive, and in most cases, it was presented sensitively. Colleges found that inspection reports were consistent with the feedback received during the inspection. They were clear about the weaknesses that they needed to address and understood the requirements for the action plan they were expected to produce for the FEFC.

38 The inclusion of a college nominee in the inspection team continued to receive considerable support from colleges. Some other features of the process which were commented upon favourably were:

- the openness and transparency of the inspection process
- the fairness, thoroughness and professional approach of inspectors
- the account taken of the college's mission and values
- the usefulness of good-quality feedback, particularly that on curriculum areas.

39 Colleges' evaluation of inspection is useful because it brings issues to the attention of the inspectorate. In 1996-97, the issues most frequently identified included:

- variations in the level and quality of the feedback given to teachers following lesson observations
- lack of preparation of a few inspectors who were not sufficiently familiar with college documentation
- lack of consistency in the style of feedback
- the role of the college inspector in monitoring college action plans following inspection
- difficulties in compiling students' achievement data in the format required by inspectors
- sampling of provision for inspection which was not considered representative of the college's range of work.

40 During 1997-98, the inspectorate will seek to address these and other issues raised by colleges through regional and programme area meetings and training events designed to improve the effectiveness and fairness of the inspection process. A small number of colleges highlighted the usefulness of a code of practice to guide inspection practice. The FEFC's *Annual Report 1994-95* sets out procedures and targets for dealing with complaints concerning the FEFC's administrative procedures.

41 A number of colleges commented on the variations in the level and quality of feedback given to teachers following lesson observations. This is a matter to which the inspectorate has already given some attention. The inspectorate's position is that inspectors are expected to speak briefly to teachers after observing them teach. If it is inconvenient to do this at the end of a lesson, the inspector should do this later. The intention is that the inspector's feedback should comment on the main strengths and weaknesses of the lesson. This feedback is not teacher appraisal, which is a matter for the college. An inspector will not provide the kind of detailed debriefing which a teacher might expect of a teacher-training programme. Inspectors inspect teaching not teachers. The

lesson grades are used only in an aggregated form and inspectors do not feed back individual lesson grades, either to teachers or their managers. Grade profiles of all lessons are provided during feedback to college managers.

42 Colleges also raised concerns about perceived lack of consistency in the style of feedback to college managers. Feedback of inspection findings provides an opportunity for college managers to explore the findings and the evidence and every effort is made to ensure that inspectors adopt a consistent approach. Inspectors also make every effort to read the documentation colleges prepare for inspection. Some colleges were not sure about the college inspector's role in relation to monitoring action plans following inspection. The inspectorate intends to review the work of college inspectors in 1997-98. The inspectorate also intends to reduce the burden of work on colleges by providing them with FEFC data on their students' achievements. The introduction, in 1997-98, of a planning meeting before inspection will allow colleges to discuss the sample of provision chosen for inspection.

43 The willingness of inspectors to discuss their findings openly continues to ensure that most inspections run smoothly. In a number of cases, colleges were unhappy with the inspection grades awarded. Although in 1996-97, the number of challenges to grades has risen, they are still only a small percentage of the total grades awarded. The inspectorate awarded 1,860 grades for curriculum and cross-college provision and only 46 grades (2.5 per cent) were challenged. The inspectorate received written challenges to 3.2 per cent of programme area grades and to 1.6 per cent of cross-college grades. While no programme area stands out as receiving more challenges than others, grades for range and responsiveness, governance and management and quality assurance were the most frequently challenged cross-college grades. In 1996-97, there was an increase in the percentage of colleges challenging grades and the percentage of grades which were challenged. Thirty (24.2 per cent) of the 124 colleges inspected challenged grades compared with 16 (13.2 per cent) of the 121 colleges inspected in 1995-96.

44 When grades are challenged, inspection evidence is reviewed and, where appropriate, additional inspection takes place. In 1996-97, additional inspection was carried out in 12 cases. Thirteen grades were changed after a review of evidence or the consideration of additional evidence. Eight of these were in respect of programme area grades and five were for cross-college grades. In most cases, challenges were resolved at the regional level without recourse to the chief inspector. Table 2 gives an analysis of written appeals against college inspection grades during the period 1994 to 1997.

Table 2. Written appeals against college inspection grades, 1994 to 1997

| <i>Year</i> | <i>Programme area grades</i> | | <i>Cross-college grades</i> | | <i>All grades</i> | |
|-------------|------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| | <i>Awarded</i> | <i>Appealed against</i> | <i>Awarded</i> | <i>Appealed against</i> | <i>Grades appealed against</i> | <i>Total number of grades changed</i> |
| | | <i>%</i> | | <i>%</i> | <i>%</i> | |
| 1994-95 | 1,060 | 1.6 | 903 | 1.7 | 1.6 | 10 |
| 1995-96 | 1,026 | 0.8 | 840 | 1.4 | 1.1 | 4 |
| 1996-97 | 1,006 | 3.2 | 854 | 1.6 | 2.5 | 13 |
| Total | 3,092 | 1.8 | 2,597 | 1.6 | 1.7 | 27 |

FOLLOW-UP TO INSPECTIONS

45 Immediately prior to publication of a college inspection report, the secretary to the FEFC writes to the college asking for a response to the report in the form of an action plan. Colleges have up to four months to respond to this request. Each action plan is evaluated by the relevant college inspector to see whether it realistically addresses the issues identified in the inspection report. College inspectors monitor and record the progress the college makes in achieving the objectives set out in the action plan. During 1996-97, 53 per cent of college action plans were received within the requested timescale. The most common reason for delay was the appointment of a new principal or chair of governors after the date of the inspection and the wish of the new appointee to give careful consideration to the plan before sending it to the FEFC. Only one action plan was considered inadequate. College action plans, produced towards the end of the first quadrennial cycle, have generally been more detailed and more useful than those which were sent to the FEFC in the early years of inspection.

46 The FEFC requires that curriculum areas graded 4 or 5 are reinspected because a funding penalty is applied by the FEFC which prevents growth in areas of provision in which weaknesses outweigh the strengths. Colleges are given the opportunity for reinspection before the next funding round but may delay reinspection if they have not achieved sufficient improvement. In 1996-97, there were reinspections in 18 colleges; 19 curriculum areas previously awarded a grade 4 were reinspected. In four of these reinspections the provision had improved to a grade 2 and in 14, it had improved to a grade 3. In one case, provision which had originally been awarded a grade 4 in 1993-94, after a reinspection in 1994-95, was again graded 4. A further nine curriculum areas in six colleges are scheduled for reinspection during 1997-98.

Reinspections of two other curriculum areas in a college which has merged with another college will be planned as part of the inspection of the merged college. Curriculum area provision in another college has been discontinued. In 1996-97, 22 curriculum areas in 20 colleges were graded 4. This is slightly fewer than the 25 curriculum areas graded 4 in 1995-96.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

47 The inspectorate has continued to develop its arrangements for quality assurance particularly in respect of the management of inspectors and inspections, monitoring and reviewing inspectors' judgements, and developing arrangements for the inspection framework, *Validating Self-assessment*. The established management structure of the inspectorate remains the same as in previous years. The chief inspector has undertaken a review of the inspectorate's working groups and a new group, the inspection and reporting group, has been established. The purpose of the new group is to advise the chief inspector on:

- the review and development of inspection guidelines
- the development of common working methods for the inspectorate
- methods and procedures for improving efficiency and the consistency of the inspectorate's work
- arrangements for recording and reporting the findings of inspection.

48 In 1996-97, the group was heavily concerned with developing methods and procedures to ensure the smooth introduction of the new inspection framework. This included working on a revision of the inspectors' handbook to provide guidance on the implementation of the new inspection framework for inspectors, colleges and other organisations. Inspectorate support staff, who are represented on the group, have held regular meetings to consider how arrangements for supporting the inspectorate might be improved.

49 The annual calendar for the inspectorate continued to include regular meetings of regional, programme area and consortium (cross-regional) groups. These groups generally meet once a term and often more frequently. Regional teams are expected to meet every six weeks. Their agendas include fixed items such as the programme for, and management of, college inspections, the deployment and use of part-time inspectors, the profile of grades awarded during inspections and the development and management of national exercises. The chief inspector and senior inspectors meet about once every six weeks. Their meetings include items on all aspects the inspectorate's operations. Senior inspectors also regularly review expenditure and progress against the

objectives in the inspectorate's operational plan, and report on these to the FEFC.

50 The quality assessment committee monitors the work of the inspectorate. It meets three times a year and its fixed agenda items include:

- the inspectorate's work programme including college inspections, national surveys and international work
- the inspectorate's work over the previous year
- the chief inspector's annual report
- the committee's own annual report to the FEFC
- the FEFC's report to the secretary of state, and any response from the secretary of state.

From time to time the work of the inspectorate is also subject to external evaluation.

51 Regional teams within the inspectorate continued to work with other FEFC divisions. Inspectors met termly with other FEFC colleagues at regional review meetings, the purpose of which is to share information on colleges within the region. Inspectors receive briefing papers from other divisions of the FEFC in preparation for college inspections. In 1996-97, inspectors worked closely with colleagues from the education programmes division of the FEFC on a survey of collaborative provision in sector colleges. Staff from both divisions jointly visited colleges which were participating in the survey. The inspectorate has continued to make a significant contribution to the work of the FEFC's advisory committees, for example, the committee on widening participation.

52 During 1996-97 there was continuing work on maintaining and improving the standard of written reports. Editors employed to work on the drafts of reports met to discuss consistent approaches and the dissemination of good practice. Editors' general comments on drafts of inspection reports were copied to senior inspectors and shared with full-time inspectors. Draft inspection reports were given an indicative grade for the quality of writing on a scale of 1 to 5 and the grades shared with the reporting inspectors. Since the practice was introduced in 1994-95, this grade profile has shown an upward trend.

53 The inspectorate's programme of staff development continued. During 1996-97, the main focus of training was preparing inspectors for the new inspection cycle. Inspectors attended training events organised by the FEFC including the annual conference in 1997 and other events related to the new inspection framework. Programme area teams organised and attended events on inspection practice and on curriculum development. During 1996-97, secondments of regionally based inspectors to the chief inspector's office continued.

54 The inspectorate has maintained its links with a wide range of external organisations, including those which are concerned with particular areas of the curriculum and with educational policy-making. There is regular liaison with FEDA so that they are briefed on the outcomes of the work of the inspectorate. The inspectorate also contributes to FEDA training events, as it does to training events organised by other providers, where appropriate. During 1996-97, inspectors contributed to events highlighting good practice in curriculum areas and they had considerable involvement in training college senior managers in the new inspection framework, including self-assessment. They also contributed to regional forums for college quality and staff development managers.

CONCLUSIONS

55 The primary task of the inspectorate is to fulfil its terms of reference. It has achieved this in 1996-97 by:

- inspecting 124 further education colleges and publishing reports on all but one of these
- conducting two national surveys on technology in the curriculum, and collaborative provision
- conducting reviews of four curriculum areas: basic education, health and community care, hotel and catering (including leisure and tourism), and sciences
- inspecting 14 independent colleges making provision, funded by the FEFC, for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- inspecting eight external institutions funded by the FEFC
- reinspectng 19 curriculum areas in 18 colleges to meet the requirements of the FEFC
- reinspectng eight independent establishments and two external institutions
- publishing the chief inspector's fourth annual report.

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

- achieving the publication of 85 per cent of inspection reports within 10 working weeks of the end of each college inspection
- reviewing the register of part-time inspectors
- introducing a revised inspection framework to be used from September 1997
- training full-time and part-time inspectors for the new inspection framework

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- reviewing operational procedures in the light of the new framework
 - continuing to develop the inspectorate's arrangements for assuring the quality of its work.

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

- publishing the third annual report of the quality assessment committee
- publishing guidance on the process of self-assessment and how self-assessment reports will be used by the inspectorate
- publishing information on how the FEFC's audit service and inspectorate will work together on inspections
- consulting the sector about the introduction of accredited status
- conducting an inspection of FEDA
- including college nominees on inspection teams and training them for their role
- continuing the programme of training sector staff to become part-time inspectors
- contributing to staff training events organised by FEDA and other organisations
- publishing an evaluation of its activities
- maintaining links with external bodies associated with curriculum development and quality assessment
- maintaining a programme of college inspector visits, including visits to look at college action plans arising from inspection
- inviting colleges to evaluate inspections
- responding to challenges over its judgements.

58 During 1997-98, the inspectorate aims to:

- continue to develop its arrangements for quality assurance
 - meet the publication dates set by the quality assessment committee
 - continue to provide training programmes for part-time registered inspectors on the new inspection framework
 - train principals and vice-principals as part-time registered inspectors
 - provide guidance to sector colleges on the procedures for application for accredited status
 - publish an inspection handbook for the sector.
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59 These targets will be achieved in a work programme which includes:

- the inspection of 108 sector colleges
- inspection of FEFC-funded provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in 21 independent institutions
- inspection of FEFC-funded provision for students in 12 external institutions
- inspection of FEFC-funded provision in two institutions of higher education
- termly visits to each college by college inspectors
- national surveys of four aspects of further education: widening participation; mathematics and numeracy across the curriculum; professional development for further education staff; and general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) pilot evaluation (with OfSTED)
- publication of the chief inspector's fifth annual report
- visits to assess post-16 education and training in Malaysia and South Korea.

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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