

# Basic Education

REPORT FROM  
THE INSPECTORATE  
**1998-99**

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 according to a four-year cycle. It also inspects other further education provision funded by the FEFC. In fulfilling its work programme, the inspectorate assesses and reports nationally on the curriculum, disseminates good practice and advises the FEFC's quality assessment committee.*

*College inspections are carried out in accordance with the framework and guidelines described in Council Circulars 97/12, 97/13 and 97/22. Inspections seek to validate the data and judgements provided by colleges in self-assessment reports. They involve full-time inspectors and registered part-time inspectors who have knowledge of, and experience in, the work they inspect. A member of the Council's audit service works with inspectors in assessing aspects of governance and management. All colleges are invited to nominate a senior member of their staff to participate in the inspection as a team member.*

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# **Basic Education**

## **Making a Difference**

### **A Report from the Inspectorate**

**September 1999**

# Introduction

In April 1998, the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) published the inspectorate curriculum survey report, *Basic Education*. Based on four years of inspection evidence, it describes the strengths of basic education provision, including the wide variety of learning modes and settings, the significant contribution to widening participation, the increase in effective learning support, the many students who make progress towards their learning goals and the conscientious teachers who are committed to this work. However, the report also states that ‘much teaching in basic education fails to meet the needs of learners, particularly those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities’ and that this is often the result of ineffective assessments of learner needs.

Following publication, a national conference entitled ‘An Agenda for Improvement’ was organised in partnership with the Basic Skills Agency. The conference aimed to introduce the report’s findings and place its conclusions in the context of Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) priorities for this area of provision. The national conference was followed by six regional conferences organised with the support of the Further Education Development Agency (FEDA) and the Association of Colleges (AoC). These regional conferences were chaired by college principals and attended by almost 300 delegates.

At both the national and regional conferences, it was made clear that basic education is at the heart of the government’s agenda for reform and that by reaching out to the community, further education can help to reduce social exclusion, increase employability and raise the nation’s economic strength and morale. A key message was that levels of basic skills among adults in the United Kingdom are low in comparison with those of many other countries. The extent of the challenge was graphically illustrated by the facts: one in five adults have poor basic skills and seven million adults have no qualifications at all. The appointment of Sir Claus Moser to chair an advisory group, and the subsequent report *Improving Literacy and Numeracy: A fresh start*, reflects the government’s determination to improve this situation.

At all the conferences, discussion groups gave delegates the opportunity to consider issues arising from the *Basic Education* survey report, and more general issues relating to this area of provision. They also enabled delegates to make suggestions for improving standards.

This guidance presents a practical ‘toolkit’ based on the outcomes of the conference discussions. It reproduces questions which all those working in colleges (including governors) should ask themselves in the effort to improve the quality of basic education. It also includes suggested courses of action to address issues identified when considering college provision. The FEFC is responding to the challenge of improving standards in this area of provision by increasing the number and scope of inspections of literacy and numeracy and by establishing a basic skills inclusive learning quality initiative.



Jim Donaldson  
Chief inspector, FEFC

The FEFC's definition of the basic education programme area is:

*programmes of study in basic numeracy, literacy and English for speakers of other languages; discrete provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, such as courses to teach independent living, numeracy and communication skills; programmes of study for adults, such as 'return to learn' which do not focus on a particular curriculum area and cannot therefore be placed in one of the other nine programme areas*

*Circular 95/02, College Strategic Plans 1995-96 and Beyond*

# Questions to Consider

## Management and Quality Assurance

- Is basic education a feature of the strategic development of the college?
- Does the college have written policies to guide this area of work and are these well known and regularly reviewed?
- Is there a senior manager who looks after the interests of those responsible for basic education provision and are lines of management and accountability clear?
- Are the outcomes of initial assessment recorded to assist evaluation of the effectiveness of learning programmes?
- Does market research identify potential student groups who are not currently being recruited and the changing needs of those who are recruited?
- Are reliable data collected about students, including information about their progression to other programmes and their destinations when they leave the institution?
- Is management information regularly analysed to help to identify the strengths and weaknesses of provision?
- Are challenging targets for basic education provision set and met, and are targets related to benchmarking data?
- Do all those involved with basic education have regular opportunities to meet and discuss how to improve provision?

- Does lesson observation by peers take place and is this used to promote good practice?
- Are students involved in quality assurance and improvement through taking part in surveys and contributing to discussions?
- Is staff development for teachers effective, helping them to achieve relevant specialist qualifications if they do not already have them?
- Are volunteers included in meetings and staff development activities?

## Teaching and Learning

- Do learning programmes for students take into account the results of initial assessment, the requirements of learning plans, the most appropriate learning styles for them and the context in which they will apply their learning?
- Are learning programmes delivered in a flexible way, with scope for adjustments to cater for any changes in students' individual circumstances?
- Are methods of assessment carefully matched to student needs?
- Is students' learning regularly reviewed and progress recorded?
- Do students have access to accreditation if this is appropriate to their learning needs?
- Are students' learning plans appropriately adjusted as a result of individual progress reviews?
- Do students have sufficient access to the right resources and accommodation to help them learn?

# Questions to Consider

- Do teachers have convenient access to good-quality resources which will enable them to develop teaching methods?
- Is there regular liaison between teachers in all programme areas dealing with basic education and other colleagues in the college, and with relevant external agencies?
- Do all students have a confidential interview and initial assessment of their skills?
- Are initial assessments matched to individual students' capabilities and needs, and are they objective and diagnostic?
- Is the relationship between the outcome of each student's initial assessment and their learning plan clear?
- Do learning plans include both short-term and long-term objectives?
- Are students given the opportunity to choose between individual and group sessions, and between drop-in workshops and regular timetabled classes?
- Does the basic education curriculum help to extend students' knowledge and understanding in other domains?

## **Questions Particularly Relevant to Students with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities**

- Do students spend sufficient time 'learning by doing' rather than 'learning about'?
- Is sufficient emphasis given to helping students with learning difficulties develop the repertoire of skills which will be relevant to them in their future lives?
- Are students' skills at the end of their programme compared with those evident during their initial assessment?
- Are student achievements recognised and measured and are students encouraged to achieve nationally recognised qualifications where appropriate?
- Do teachers actively promote the development of basic personal skills in students?

# Making Progress

The following table sets out delegates' suggestions about how to tackle issues which may be identified when considering the questions on pages 3 and 4.

## *Management and quality assurance*

## *Suggested course of action*

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• lack of involvement and awareness of issues by senior managers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• arrange regular briefings for management team</li> <li>• have a designated person for overview of this work</li> <li>• invite managers to visit basic education classes</li> <li>• develop a more strategic, whole-college, approach to this area</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• large number of part-time and temporary teachers; their poor working conditions; their lack of career structure; their lack of continuing development opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• develop guidance for employment and training of part-time teachers</li> <li>• explore the possibility of fractional posts linked to a career structure, rather than part-time posts</li> <li>• examine working conditions and employment rights for part-time teachers</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• volunteers are not always trained</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• encourage appropriate training for all volunteers and ensure adequate guidance for them</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• difficulties of involving part-time teachers in planning and reviewing courses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• seek larger budget for training and development</li> <li>• divert more resources to funding meetings</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• use of non-specialist staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• argue the case for specialists and develop a specialist teaching team</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• proving and enhancing the value of work in this area</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• develop methods to measure standards and then draw attention to the value of the work</li> </ul>



# Making Progress

## *Management and quality assurance*

## *Suggested course of action*

<hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• performance data is collected at college level but is not available to course team leaders</li></ul> <hr/>	<hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• improve internal college communication</li></ul> <hr/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• ineffective management information; inadequate college systems for monitoring progress of basic education students; poor use of information</li></ul> <hr/>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• train staff in the basic education programme area to understand and use management information</li><li>• review monitoring arrangements</li><li>• develop more effective liaison with information systems staff and collaborate on ways to improve systems</li></ul> <hr/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• few reliable benchmarks in basic education</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• use information in the inspection report, <i>Basic Education</i> and in the inspectorate good practice report, <i>Provision for Students with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities</i></li><li>• use FEFC benchmarking data about qualifications as it becomes available</li><li>• monitor programme performance over time</li><li>• liaise with colleagues in other colleges to set your own benchmarks</li><li>• use the materials in topic 2 of the Inclusive Learning Quality Initiative, 'Quality assurance for inclusive learning'</li></ul>

# Making Progress

## *Teaching and learning*

## *Suggested course of action*

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>inconsistent quality of teaching</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>share good practice in pedagogic skills</li> <li>build on existing arrangements for classroom observations</li> <li>use the materials in topic 1 of the Inclusive Learning Quality Initiative, 'Understanding and managing the learning process'</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>early leavers and poor retention rates on some courses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>make initial assessment more effective</li> <li>provide more support for students</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>some programmes do not measure up to high student expectations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>provide effective entry guidance</li> <li>ensure that guidance is monitored through the quality assurance arrangements</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>only partial success with widening participation in relation to recruitment, achievement and progression</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>improve planning for increased demand to reduce waiting lists where they exist</li> <li>analyse retention and achievement rates in relation to groups under-represented in further education</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>lack of time for interviewing, initial assessment and reviewing progress; less effective initial assessments and individual learning plans in some provision</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>share good practice from other areas</li> <li>argue for smaller groups</li> <li>allow more time for initial assessments and individual reviews</li> <li>consider more flexible timetabling arrangements</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>lack of evidence for student achievements other than qualifications</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>measure and record development of other achievements such as gains in confidence and self-esteem</li> <li>develop a value-added approach to recording progress</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>lack of access to computers to assist learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>argue the case for more access and better resources</li> </ul>

# Making Progress

## *Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities*

## *Suggested course of action*

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• difficulties of access to the curriculum for some students</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• audit accessibility and report to college managers</li><li>• use the materials in topic 3 of the Inclusive Learning Quality Initiative, 'Organisational systems, culture and change'</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• some managers not yet aware or well-informed about legal framework</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• arrange dissemination and briefings; <i>Duties and Powers</i> report produced by the Tomlinson committee</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• difficulties of measuring progress of some students</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• improve value-added monitoring and record small steps in learning</li><li>• use the materials in topic 7 of the Inclusive Learning Quality Initiative, 'Measuring the benefits'</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• unsystematic arrangements for progression in some colleges</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• set primary learning goals; design learning programmes to deliver the skills and knowledge students need rather than teaching to deliver outcomes that support an inappropriate accreditation framework</li><li>• map progression opportunities and maintain effective liaison with vocational and academic programmes</li></ul>

# Useful Documents

*Basic Education*, Curriculum area survey report, FEFC, Coventry, April 1998

*Learning Works: Widening participation in further education*, FEFC, Coventry, 1997

*Inclusive Learning: Report of the learning difficulties and/or disabilities committee*, FEFC, HMSO, London, 1996

*The Learning Age: A renaissance for a new Britain*, DfEE, Cm 3790, The Stationery Office, London, 1998

*Learning for the Twenty-first Century*, National Advisory Group for Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning, DfEE, London, 1997

*Provision for Students with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities*, Good practice report, FEFC, Coventry, December 1996

*How to Widen Participation: A guide to good practice*, FEFC, The Stationery Office, London, 1997

*Inclusive Learning Quality Initiative*, FEFC, Coventry, December 1998

*Improving Literacy and Numeracy: A fresh start*, DfEE, London, 1999

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