

Reinspection of Curriculum Areas 1997-98

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1997-98**

THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL

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The Further Education Funding Council has a legal duty to make sure further education in England is properly assessed. The FEFC's inspectorate inspects and reports on each college of further education according to a four-year cycle. It also assesses and reports nationally on the curriculum, disseminates good practice and advises the FEFC's quality assessment committee.

REINSPECTION OF CURRICULUM AREAS

The Council has agreed that colleges with curriculum areas judged by the inspectorate to have more weaknesses than strengths (grade 4 or 5) may have their funding agreement with the Council qualified to prevent them increasing the number of new students enrolled in those areas until the Council is satisfied that the weaknesses have been addressed satisfactorily.

Arrangements are made to reinspect curriculum areas graded 4 or 5 in time for the next funding round. This is a report on those curriculum areas which have been reinspected in time for the 1998-99 funding round.

GRADE DESCRIPTORS

Reinspections were carried out in accordance with the framework and guidelines described in Council Circular 93/28. Assessments were made using a five-point grading scale to summarise the balance between strengths and weaknesses in the provision inspected. 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.*

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Summary

FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 109/98

Reinspection of Curriculum Areas, 1997-1998

The Council has agreed that colleges with curriculum areas judged by the inspectorate to have more weaknesses than strengths (grade 4 or 5) may have their funding agreement with the Council qualified to prevent them increasing the number of new students enrolled in those areas until the Council is satisfied that the weaknesses have been addressed satisfactorily.

The Council requires that colleges are given the opportunity to have curriculum areas graded 4 or 5 reinspected within a year of their original inspection. Colleges may request the Council to defer reinspection if they do not believe that sufficient improvements in provision have been achieved.

This is a report on those curriculum areas, reinspected between June 1997 and June 1998. Inspectors visited 21 colleges to reinspect 25 curriculum areas which had been judged by the inspectorate to have more weaknesses than strengths. Significant improvements were found in all but one of the curriculum areas.

The reinspection grades are shown in the table on page 2. The table also indicates those colleges with curriculum areas graded 4 or 5 which will be included in a future reinspection report.

Summary

Colleges inspected in 1993-94

College	Curriculum area	Inspection grade	Reinspection grade (January 1995)	Reinspection grade (November 1996)	Reinspection grade (March 1998)
Hendon College	Science and mathematics	4	4	4	4

Colleges inspected in 1994-95

College	Curriculum area	Inspection grade	Reinspection grade
Kidderminster College	Art and design (pre-degree)	4	3
Kidderminster College	Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	4	3

Colleges inspected in 1995-96

College	Curriculum area	Inspection grade	Reinspection grade
Bexley College	Law, history, economics psychology and sociology	4	†
Great Yarmouth College of Further Education	Basic education, including provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	4	3
Hammersmith and West London College	Health and community care	4	3
Hammersmith and West London College	Humanities	4	3
Hammersmith and West London College	Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	4	3
North East Surrey College of Technology	Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	4	3
Sandwell College	Art, graphics design and media	4	3
Somerset College of Arts and Technology	Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	4	3
Stroud College of Further Education	Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	4	3

†reinspection to be scheduled

Summary

Colleges inspected in 1996-97

College	Curriculum area	Inspection grade	Reinspection grade
Airedale and Wharfedale College	Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	5	3
Brighton College of Technology	Basic education	4	*
Brooklands College	Motor vehicle engineering	4	3
Brooksby College	Equine studies	4	2
City of Liverpool Community College [‡]	Mathematics and computing	4	3
City of Westminster College	Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	4	3
The College of North West London	Electrical/electronic engineering, including refrigeration	4	3
Derwentside College	Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	4	*
Eastbourne College of Arts and Technology	Science and humanities	4	†
Halton College	Dispersed hotel and catering provision	4	3
Halton College	Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (college-based)	4	3
John Ruskin College	Leisure and tourism, hotel and catering	4	*
Merrist Wood College	Small animal care	4	3
Milton Keynes College	Art and design	4	3
North East Worcestershire College	Art and design	4	3

[†]reinspection to be scheduled

^{*}reinspection scheduled

[‡]name changed to Liverpool Community College, 1 Aug 1998

Summary

Colleges inspected in 1996-97 *continued*

College	Curriculum area	Inspection grade	Reinspection grade
Oxford College of Further Education	Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	4	3
Rodbaston College	Animal care	4	2
Spelthorne College	Science, mathematics and information technology	4	*
Spelthorne College	History, geography and social sciences	4	*
Stockport College of Further and Higher Education	Engineering	4	3
Stoke-on-Trent College	Art and design	4	*
West Kent College	Engineering	4	*

[†]*reinspection to be scheduled*

**reinspection scheduled*

YORKSHIRE AND HUMBERSIDE REGION

Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities: November 1997

Background

Airedale and Wharfedale College was inspected between April 1996 and March 1997 and the findings were published in inspection report 71/97. Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities was graded 5.

The college was committed to providing educational opportunities for students who had a wide range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities. However, there were many weaknesses in the management and co-ordination of the provision, and the programmes were not meeting the needs of the students. Much of the teaching and learning lacked rigour. Social, recreational and therapeutic activities were emphasised at the expense of learning and achievement. Many students were underachieving. Procedures for monitoring the quality of the provision were ineffective. Few teachers understood the educational implications of students' learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Resources were inadequate, and some of the accommodation was not fit for the purpose for which it was being used.

The provision was reinspected by two inspectors in November 1997. They observed 13 classes, held discussions with managers, teachers and students, examined students' work and a wide range of documentation relating to the college and the courses.

Assessment

The college has made significant progress in addressing the issues identified in the original inspection. New staff have been appointed, the provision has been restructured and the curriculum reviewed. New courses have been established to enable students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to progress from specially designed courses to pre-vocational and foundation level vocational courses in other faculties. There is a more rigorous approach to teaching and learning. The specially designed programmes are managed effectively and the co-ordination of the provision has improved. Positive links have been established with external agencies. Greater emphasis is now given to reviewing and evaluating programmes, and training has been provided to make more staff aware of the needs of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The range and quality of the resources have improved significantly. Weaknesses still to be addressed include: ineffective initial assessment procedures; an over-emphasis on teaching students with severe learning difficulties basic skills such as literacy and numeracy through classroom-based activities which are not linked to other elements of their programmes; the failure of some teachers to set tasks and develop learning materials which cater for the needs of students of differing abilities within a class; the limited range of pre-foundation and foundation level vocational programmes.

Revised grade: provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities 3.

SOUTH EAST REGION

Motor vehicle engineering: February 1998

Background

Brooklands College was inspected during May to November 1996 and the findings were published in inspection report 14/97. Provision in motor vehicle engineering was graded 4.

The strengths of the provision were: the working relationship between teachers and students; the effective support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities; the links with the local training and enterprise council for the Training Credit Scheme. There were also some examples of innovative provision. There was an appropriate range of equipment for teaching and the accommodation was adequate. The main weaknesses identified at inspection were: much poor teaching; poor examination pass rates; the lack of qualified specialist teachers; poor industrial links; weak programme management; poor schemes of work; and students sometimes placed inappropriately on the BTEC national diploma course.

The provision was reinspected in February 1998. Inspectors observed 10 lessons, and held meetings with the head of faculty, the two heads of schools of study, teachers and students. Students' work was examined, together with a wide range of documentation prepared for the reinspection.

Assessment

The college has taken seriously the outcomes of the earlier inspection and has made significant progress in addressing the weaknesses identified. The quality of the teaching has improved and the majority of the lessons observed had more strengths than weaknesses. The provision has been restructured and managers are enthusiastic about the new structure. The management of the programme

has also been strengthened. Resources have been significantly improved. Staff have relevant expertise for the courses they teach. Course documentation and procedures for monitoring students' progress have been improved. A more rigorous recruitment procedure ensures that students are enrolled on courses which match their needs and abilities. The quality of students' class work and practical work has improved. Stronger links are being forged with local industries and there are better opportunities for work experience. Some schemes of work remain poor. Teaching methods are sometimes inappropriate. There is not enough direct questioning of students in lessons; some work is conducted at too slow a pace; teachers fail to exploit teaching aids. Student retention rates have improved on many of the courses, but they have fallen on the BTEC national diploma and the higher national certificate courses. On some courses, including the BTEC first diploma in automobile engineering and the C&G part 1 in motor vehicle studies, examination pass rates have improved. However, on the NVQ level 2 and the BTEC higher national certificate courses, pass rates have fallen steeply.

Revised grade: motor vehicle engineering 3.

EAST MIDLANDS REGION

Equine studies: November 1997

Background

Brooksby College was originally inspected between February and December 1996 and the findings were published in inspection report 32/97. Provision in equine studies was graded 4.

Inspectors' main concern was with the quality of off-site collaborative provision. Students benefited from the experience of undertaking yard duties in a real working environment but generally the management of teaching and learning was weak. Practical teaching was of a higher standard than the teaching of theory. Links between theory and practical teaching were poorly developed. Lessons were poorly planned and schemes of work inadequate. The teaching of theory lacked variety and work was conducted at too slow a pace. Teachers paid insufficient attention to the wide range of ability and experience in some classes. Tasks were not sufficiently demanding for the more advanced and experienced students and some had to repeat work already covered. Although there were high pass rates on the diploma in horse studies, in the college generally, levels of achievement for primary and secondary qualifications in equine studies were poor.

The reinspection took place between 5 and 7 November 1997. The inspector observed 10 teaching sessions. Meetings were held with all equine staff, students, yard staff, the curriculum co-ordinator and the resource manager. All documentation in the base room was examined. Visits were made to the library, IT facilities and all practical facilities.

Assessment

There are good relations between teachers and the yard staff. Students are encouraged to observe and help with commercial activities in the yard to broaden their experience. Teaching methods, particularly in the practical sessions, are relevant to students' needs and abilities. Staff are responsive to the students and they give appropriate additional support where required. Additional workshops are provided for students who have particular difficulties with aspects of the curriculum, for example genetics. Lessons are structured to provide an appropriate range of learning activities and to enable teachers to check students' understanding. Students' achievements are good, especially for 1996-97. Teachers have recent industrial experience which adds value and relevance to their lessons. Strong links with the industry exist through consultative groups, work placements, regular visits, the British Horse Society and commercial activities. Some students have been encouraged to attend programmes on the basis of information about their prior achievement, which is used to identify the sessions they should attend. Retention rates and the achievement of primary learning goals are regularly monitored. The recruitment process has been further developed to try and limit withdrawals. The college should continue to improve the quality of teaching and the management of learning, to ensure that learning objectives are achieved, that work is pitched at the right level and that students have the opportunity to develop appropriate study skills.

Revised grade: equine studies 2.

City of Liverpool Community College

NORTH WEST REGION

Mathematics and computing: November 1997

Background

City of Liverpool Community College was inspected between May 1996 and February 1997. The findings were published in inspection report 64/97. Provision in mathematics and computing was graded 4.

The main strengths were: a wide range of courses offering clear progression routes for students; teachers who were knowledgeable and well prepared; good or above average examination results in GCE A level mathematics; and a good range of paper-based learning materials. The main weaknesses were: the poor quality of some teaching; superficial schemes of work; inadequate formal assessments and records of students' progress; poor attendance; poor examination results in GCSE mathematics and GCE A level computer studies; poor retention rates; poor management of computing and mathematics provision across the college; insufficient resources; and some poor accommodation.

Mathematics and computing provision was reinspected by two inspectors over four days in November 1997. They visited 24 classes, held meetings with staff and students, examined students' work and scrutinised documentation including the college's plan to address weaknesses identified in the earlier inspection.

Assessment

The college has taken action to improve the quality of provision in computing and mathematics. GCSE mathematics teachers meet regularly and have adopted common schemes of work. GNVQ courses in IT are better managed. All courses have set standards and targets for students' achievements, retention and attendance. Pre-course guidance and

assessment for GCSE mathematics and GNVQ IT students have improved. Computing teachers have undertaken staff development on methods of teaching and learning and some is planned for mathematics teachers. More computers are available for students to use at times which suit them. The quality of resources and accommodation for some mathematics classes has improved. Of the lessons observed, 46 per cent had strengths which clearly outweighed weaknesses, a 10 per cent increase from the previous inspection. Lesson plans are more detailed. Records of progress for students taking courses leading to GCSEs in mathematics or GNVQs in IT were, at least, adequate and some were good. In 1997, GCE A level examination results in mathematics and computing continued to improve and results in GCSE information systems remained above the national average. Examination results and retention rates in access to business and IT and women's IT courses were good. However, there continue to be poor examination results on a number of courses. Attendance and retention rates are significantly below the college's targets. Most teachers have low expectations of their students. Many students fail to hand in work regularly or miss deadlines for submitting assignments. There are still some significant weaknesses in classroom practice. Teachers are not sufficiently self-critical in evaluating their work. Course evaluation lacks depth and rigour. There remains some poor accommodation.

Revised grade: mathematics and computing 3.

GREATER LONDON REGION

Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities: February 1998

Background

The provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities was inspected between May and November 1996. The findings were published in inspection report 09/97. Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities was graded 4.

The main strengths were: effective liaison with local agencies, parents and carers; an effective induction process and tutorial system; a recognition of the need to extend the range of pre-foundation vocational access course options to facilitate progression; some effective use of learning support assistants in the classroom; the promotion of equal opportunities and avoidance of discriminatory practices; the provision of learning support for students on mainstream courses; diagnostic testing of students with specific learning difficulties; and support for students with hearing impairments.

Weaknesses included: a substantial amount of ineffective teaching; the narrow range of teaching methods; work which was insufficiently demanding of students; teachers' failure to mark work or to use assignments to monitor students' progress; disorganised portfolios; inadequate record-keeping; a lack of systematic curriculum development; the absence of pre-foundation vocational programmes; and lack of specialist qualifications for those teaching students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

The provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and the support for students with specific learning difficulties were reinspected over four days in February 1998. The inspector visited 12 classes, examined students' work and met with curriculum managers, staff and students.

Equipment, accommodation and a wide range of documentation were examined.

Assessment

The staff supporting the specialist provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have made a positive response to the weaknesses raised in the original inspection. The quality of teaching and learning has improved significantly. There is good initial assessment of students' needs and effective communication between programme managers, teachers and learning support assistants. Record-keeping is now good. The learning support assistants are skilled and they play an active part in the learning process. There has been a rationalisation of accreditation arrangements. All students are now working towards and gaining recognised qualifications. There is effective liaison and collaboration with external agencies over the transition of students to other situations when they leave college. Some weaknesses remain: teachers often fail to define learning objectives accurately when planning lessons; there are limited opportunities for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to progress to courses other than specialist courses; opportunities are missed to share good practice within the curriculum area; slow progress has been made in enabling learning support assistants to acquire specialist qualifications; resources are inadequate to meet all students' learning needs.

Revised grade: provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities 3.

The College of North West London

GREATER LONDON REGION

Electrical/electronic engineering, including refrigeration: November 1997

Background

The college was inspected between September and December 1996 and the findings were published in inspection report 33/97. Provision in electrical engineering, including refrigeration, was graded 4.

The strengths of the provision were that: most students were motivated and keen to learn; most practical sessions were interesting and well planned; teachers were well qualified for the programmes offered; there was a good relationship between teachers and students; there were good opportunities for students to work independently in practical sessions in electronics. These strengths were outweighed by weaknesses which included: poor management of courses and sections; much uninspiring teaching; work which was conducted at too slow a pace; too few opportunities for students to think for themselves or to join in discussion, especially in their theory lessons; too much reliance on note-taking; poor-quality handouts; poor levels of achievement and low retention on many courses; poor regard to health and safety in some workshop sessions; and a lack of rigour in teachers' record-keeping.

The provision was reinspected by two inspectors over three days in November 1997. They observed 22 teaching sessions, held meetings with senior and curriculum managers, examined students' work and a wide range of documentation relating to the college and its courses.

Assessment

The college has made progress in addressing the weaknesses identified in the original inspection. Refrigeration courses are now located in the construction department and the electronic engineering course in the motor vehicle department. Curriculum managers have been appointed to manage groups of related courses. Greater attention is paid to course review and the recording of students' progress. Course and lesson planning, and the quality of teaching have improved. At least half the lessons inspected were well structured and teachers were able to sustain the interest of all students. Handouts given to students during lectures and practical sessions were of a good standard. Health and safety procedures are now integral elements of all practical sessions. On some courses, students' achievements have improved. Students who need it receive language support from a specialist teacher during their lessons and make use of specially prepared worksheets. Some workshops and laboratories have been improved and are now of a high standard. Tutorials and support in developing portfolios are built into all courses. There are some weaknesses still to be addressed: some of the lessons inspected were monotonous and teachers failed to make students think for themselves or to ensure that all were fully involved in their work; although pass rates have improved, a significant number of engineering students still do not complete their course; punctuality on some courses is poor; and not all curriculum managers have received the training and support they need.

Revised grade: electrical/electronic engineering, including refrigeration 3.

Great Yarmouth College of Further Education

EASTERN REGION

Basic education, including provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities: March 1998

Background

The college was inspected between September 1995 and March 1996 and the findings were published in inspection report 85/96. Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and basic education was graded 4.

The strengths of the programme were: the highly committed, caring staff with relevant experience and training; some examples of effective teaching and learning; the well-structured work experience; the efficiently administered college-wide screening programme for literacy and numeracy; the accessibility and fitness for purpose of much of the accommodation. However, these strengths were outweighed by weaknesses: the inappropriate structure of the discrete programme which constrained students' achievements and progression; the limited provision of vocational programmes at foundation and pre-foundation levels; learning support which was insufficiently integrated with other college programmes; some poor teaching and learning; limited accreditation for students' achievements; the decreasing number of students, poor levels of attendance and low retention rates; lack of co-ordination of learning support and learning resources across the college; lack of a strategy for improving the skills of all staff; the inaccessibility of the library; the limited availability of specialist equipment; and the limited use of IT for learning.

The provision was reinspected in March 1998. Fifteen teaching sessions were observed, meetings were held with managers and staff, students' work was inspected and a wide range of documentation provided by the college was examined.

Assessment

The college has made progress in addressing some of the weaknesses. The structure of the discrete programme is now more effective and learning support is better integrated with vocational and academic programmes. The quality of teaching is now satisfactory. Students are making better progress and there is increased opportunity for achievements to be recognised through relevant accreditation. Student numbers have increased and retention and attendance rates are now above college targets. The college has increased the range of vocational programmes at foundation and pre-foundation levels and learning support is effectively co-ordinated. Weaknesses still to be addressed include: the insufficiently rigorous assessment of individual learning requirements; the lack of individual learning programmes for students with the most significant learning difficulties; some ineffective teaching; insufficient use of alternative forms of evidence in recording the achievements of students with learning difficulties and the limited relevance in the way students' achievements are collated and presented; the lack of market research to inform provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and the unclear description of this provision in college publicity; the ineffective monitoring of individual learning support to assess its impact on vocational and academic progress; the lack of rigour in the self-assessment report; the limited number of teachers and learning support assistants with specialist qualifications; the inadequacy of some aspects of accommodation.

Revised grade: basic education, including provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities 3.

NORTH WEST REGION

Dispersed hotel and catering provision: October 1997

Background

The dispersed hotel and catering provision at Halton College was inspected between April and June 1996, and there was some follow-up to this during the main inspection in December 1996. The findings were published in inspection report 25/97. Although the college-based hotel and catering provision was graded 1, the dispersed provision was graded 4.

The strengths of the provision were: the good working relationships with industry partners to whom the provision was franchised; some excellent training facilities on employers' premises; some very good teaching sessions in the workplace, not all of which were exclusively for students registered with Halton College. The weaknesses were: the infrequent contacts between students and their assessors; guidance arrangements which took little account of the characteristically high turnover in the industry; some extremely poor achievements in relation to intended qualifications. By the time of the main inspection some six months later, the college had put in place much improved arrangements for keeping contact between students, assessors, and the college itself. College learning consultants were keeping in touch with specific groups of students, and a telephone helpline was available. In negotiation with industry partners, stricter criteria were being used for entry to training programmes. The college had created a student tracking and recording system which offered a clearer picture of the percentage of students from each cohort achieving their aims.

In October 1997, the outcomes from seven cohorts of entrants to hotel and catering provision, between 1994 to November 1996, were scrutinised by a specialist inspector. No further inspection of teaching and learning was

conducted, as these aspects had previously been found to be satisfactory.

Assessment

Despite the college's attention to recruiting students who are more likely to stay the course, retention is still poor. Levels of achievements, while improving, still look poor, but in the absence of published data on the achievements of students in work-based training, comparisons with other providers are difficult. The college has voluntarily reduced its enrolments in order to concentrate on quality improvement issues. In an industry with a record of high turnover and poor training, especially among less skilled jobs, Halton College is making a useful contribution to raising skill levels, the achievement of NVQs, and widening participation. Achievements would appear to be better than in other forms of work-based training, at least in the local area, but levels of achievement decline as retention improves. In the absence of national standards against which to measure the achievements of these students, and in consideration of the actions already taken by the college, no further reinspection will take place. The college should continue its careful monitoring of this provision, to try to effect further improvements in retention rates, without a consequent decline in achievement.

Revised grade: dispersed hotel and catering provision 3.

NORTH WEST REGION

Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (college-based): January 1998

Background

Halton College was inspected between April 1995 and December 1996 and the findings were published in inspection report 25/97. Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (including dispersed provision) was graded 4.

The strengths of the provision were: the college's willingness to accept students with a broad range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including students with profound and multiple learning difficulties; the establishment of pre-foundation and foundation level vocational programmes; examples of good teaching in some of the vocational programmes. However, there were a number of major weaknesses, including: inadequate initial assessments of students' support needs; ineffective individual learning programmes; inappropriate teaching methods and learning materials for students with learning difficulties following specially designed programmes; inadequate monitoring of the quality of the support for students with disabilities on general vocational and academic programmes; inappropriate teaching of IT for students with learning difficulties.

The college-based provision was reinspected by two inspectors over two days in January 1998. They observed 13 lessons, had discussions with managers, teachers and students, examined documentation provided by the college and scrutinised students' work. Provision in dispersed centres will be subject to a separate reinspection at a later date.

Assessment

A considerable amount of work has been undertaken to address the weaknesses identified in the initial inspection. The provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has been restructured to provide more opportunities for students to undertake vocational training. Procedures for the initial assessment of students' support needs have been improved and the results of the assessments are carefully recorded. Teachers of vocational programmes have responded positively to having students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in their classes. Training has been provided to help these teachers adapt materials and teaching methods to meet the needs of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Some teachers are proving skilled in developing imaginative teaching methods which are helping students to learn. Students are responding well to the new programmes and many are developing confidence and self-esteem. There remain a number of issues. Some staff do not fully understand the new procedures; there are too many separate assessments of students' abilities on entry to the college; insufficient use is made of the information gained from assessments to develop individual learning programmes; in designing individual programmes, little account is taken of students' likely destinations, and students are not given sufficient guidance to help them make informed choices about the programme they wish to follow.

Revised grade: provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (college-based) 3.

Hammersmith and West London College

GREATER LONDON REGION

Health and community care: October 1997

Background

Hammersmith and West London College was inspected between September 1995 and May 1996, and the findings were published in inspection report 111/96. Provision in health and community care was graded 4.

The provision was judged to have some strengths but there were serious weaknesses. The strengths included: the existence of schemes of work and course files for all courses; the regular setting of assignments; appropriately demanding tasks and students with a good knowledge of the subject; some good written work; and students' awareness of the college's appeals procedure. The main weaknesses included: the variable quality of schemes of work; inadequate internal verification; a lack of enthusiasm and sparkle in the teaching, much of which did not extend students' skills; inadequate integration of key skills with other aspects of vocational studies; poor attendance and low retention; levels of achievement below the national average; and poor levels of progression to higher education from the BTEC national diploma course.

One inspector spent three days in October 1997 reinspecting the provision in health and community care. Fourteen teaching sessions were observed. Meetings were held with students, teachers and managers. The reinspection action plan, course files, minutes of team meetings and students' marked work were scrutinised.

Assessment

Most of the weaknesses identified in the earlier inspection have been addressed. Courses are now well organised and schemes of work are of a consistently high quality. More than half the lessons inspected had strengths which outweighed weaknesses. Staff employed a variety of teaching methods, in most cases to good effect. Many of the lessons were lively and interesting and a good atmosphere prevailed. Students have good insights into their own learning needs which they are able to express. The promotion of equal opportunities is firmly embedded in the curriculum. There is a strong team of well-qualified staff. In most cases, their experience of health and care work is recent and relevant, and there is effective leadership of the subject area. On GNVQ courses, staff have worked together to produce interesting assignments, and there are clear grading criteria which are shared with students. The internal verification system has been established but has yet to run through a complete cycle. Time is allocated to developing the key skills of communication, application of number and IT and these skills are now integral to the work students undertake. Students follow a tutorial programme. There are tutorial handbooks, and tutors and students meet regularly to review progress. Students' attendance was considerably higher than during the previous inspection, having risen from 48 to 76 per cent. Pass rates on many courses are above the national average, but results on some courses are less good and retention rates are low. Course teams now monitor retention figures regularly and have implemented measures to strengthen support for students. The progression rate from the BTEC national diploma course to higher education is now good.

Revised grade: health and community care 3.

Hammersmith and West London College

GREATER LONDON REGION

Humanities: October 1997

Background

Hammersmith and West London College was inspected between September 1995 and May 1996 and the findings were published in inspection report 111/96. Provision in humanities was graded 4.

The areas covered by the humanities inspection were English and the social sciences, economics, psychology and sociology. The main strengths were: schemes of work which ensured the syllabus was covered; a few well-structured lessons with clear aims; some effective teaching; the attention given to examination requirements; the development of study skills; some good support materials; the generally good standard of marking; and good learning resources for sociology. The major weaknesses were: examination results which were consistently below the national average; teachers' failure to check that students were learning effectively in lessons; poor attendance and punctuality; and low retention rates. In English, many lessons did not have a clear structure or clear aims; learning opportunities were insufficiently varied; whole-group discussions were poorly managed; there was insufficient feedback to students about their progress; students were poorly motivated; students' written work often contained technical errors; teachers made little use of visual aids; and there was no analysis of the weaknesses of teaching in course reviews. In the social sciences, there was an over-reliance on lecturing as a teaching method.

Reinspection took place in October 1997. The inspector observed 12 lessons, examined students' work and a range of course documentation, and held discussions with managers, staff and students.

Assessment

Good progress has been made in addressing the weaknesses that were identified in the original inspection. The courses have been reorganised and there has been an effective professional development programme to support staff in making necessary changes. A good team spirit is evident amongst the staff and the area is well managed and well organised. Policies and procedures for improving students' attendance and punctuality have been established and these are being implemented. Lessons are well planned. Learning objectives are shared with the students. There is a suitable range of teaching activities and teachers provide good support for students. In the majority of lessons observed, students were playing a full role in the work and, in the better lessons, teachers were making good use of their diverse cultural experiences. Teachers regularly checked students' understanding. Students now review their progress with their tutors and plan future work. Progress has been made in improving course reviews. Some weaknesses remain: students' induction into subject areas does not include a sufficiently clear analysis of their individual needs and abilities; the targets set as a result of reviews of students' progress are insufficiently precise; schemes of work and lesson plans are not detailed enough; and students following a one-year course in English do not have a wide enough choice of study. Examination pass rates and retention rates have improved.

Revised grade: humanities 3.

Hammersmith and West London College

GREATER LONDON REGION

Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities: June 1997

Background

Hammersmith and West London College was inspected between September 1995 and May 1996, and the findings were published in inspection report 111/96. Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities was graded 4.

The main strengths were: teachers' commitment to their students; some aspects of planning and preparation; and students' enjoyment of their courses. The main weaknesses were that: courses and opportunities for accreditation were inappropriate; much of the teaching was poor; and students' achievements were modest.

The provision was reinspected by one inspector over three days in June 1997. The inspector observed 12 classes and examined lesson plans, schemes of work, assessment documentation, data relating to student enrolment, retention, achievement and progression, and students' work. Meetings were held with staff and students and a range of course documentation was examined.

Assessment

The provision has improved since the previous inspection. The strengths identified at that time are still evident. The college is now providing courses which will lead to more appropriate accreditation, although the new structure of nationally recognised qualifications had not been fully implemented at the time of the reinspection. Students enjoy increased opportunities for progression. Students following access and bridging courses, for example, have more opportunity to study practical subjects and to sample vocational courses. Teaching has improved. Work was

conducted at an appropriate pace and level, using terminology which the students could understand. In some lessons, individual tasks have been designed for different students, and lesson activities are sufficiently varied to sustain students' interest. Teachers encouraged students and praised their efforts and achievements. The college has invested in specialist equipment and facilities to support students with disabilities in their learning. Some weaknesses remain: in less successful lessons, little allowance is made for students' widely differing abilities and experience; some lessons were dominated by the teachers and opportunities were missed for students to be allowed to show their initiative; learning goals for students working on their own were not always identified, sometimes resulting in a loss of interest; and some teachers failed to evaluate the learning which had taken place. The slow rates of progress of some students suggests that further improvement in their levels of achievement is possible but there has not yet been a systematic analysis of the progress students are making.

Revised grade: provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities 3.

GREATER LONDON REGION

Science and mathematics: March 1998

Background

Science and mathematics were initially inspected as part of the first quadrennial inspection of Hendon College between September 1993 and February 1994. The findings were published in inspection report 33/94. Provision in science and mathematics was graded 4.

Science and mathematics were reinspected in January 1995 and again in November 1996 with a grade 4 being awarded on both occasions. The second reinspection established that although there had been some improvements in the provision, significant weaknesses remained. These included: low retention rates on some courses; examination pass rates which were below the national average; a declining standard of teaching and learning; work which was not demanding enough for the students; and poor levels of attendance in many classes.

The provision was reinspected by one inspector in March 1998. Eleven lessons were observed, including several practical sessions. The inspector scrutinised a wide range of students' work, and documentation provided by the college before and during the reinspection. Meetings were held with managers, teachers and students.

Assessment

The college has taken some steps to improve the quality of the provision in science and mathematics since the last reinspection, but with limited success. The science accommodation is now excellent, and there have been improvements to the equipment and accommodation used for mathematics, which are now satisfactory. There are comprehensive

schemes of work for all courses, which should ensure coverage of the syllabus. However, significant weaknesses remain. The proportion of lessons observed in which weaknesses outweighed strengths has increased from the previous reinspection. Many lessons were poorly planned. In some practical science sessions, the instructions teachers gave students were unclear and students did not understand fully the scientific reason for carrying out experiments. Many students lack basic scientific or mathematical knowledge and have poorly developed observational skills. Students' achievements in external examinations are below the national average and declining in most subjects. Some of the written work produced by students is of a poor standard and fails to demonstrate that students understand the questions being posed. The work set by teachers is not always of an appropriate level for the course. The marking of homework is insufficiently rigorous.

Revised grade: science and mathematics 4.

WEST MIDLANDS REGION

Art and design (pre-degree): January 1998

Background

The art and design provision at Kidderminster College was previously inspected in October 1994 and the findings were published in inspection report 18/95. Provision in art and design was graded 4.

The provision had a number of strengths: good relationships between staff and students; some effective lessons; data on destinations which provided a satisfactory picture of students' progress; and some good pass rates for students who completed their courses of study. At the time of the inspection, the refurbishment of the art and design accommodation was incomplete. A new co-ordinator for the art and design provision had been appointed but was not in post. Weaknesses included: the fragmented management arrangements; poor initial guidance and variable standards of tutorial support; low levels of retention and poor pass rates on some courses. The combination of students of different ages and abilities in the same groups created difficulties which teachers found hard to manage effectively. Some theory lessons lacked rigour and work was conducted at too slow a pace. Students were given few opportunities to be involved in group discussion. Quality assurance processes were weak. Teachers failed to disseminate good practice in teaching and assessment across the programme area.

The art and design provision was reinspected by one inspector between 26 and 28 January 1998. Documentation prepared for the inspection and statistical data were scrutinised. The inspector observed 13 classes, spoke with staff and students and examined students' work, their portfolios, files, practical work in progress and finished work on display.

Assessment

There has been significant progress in addressing the weaknesses previously identified. The director of studies of art and design, who took up post immediately after the inspection in 1994, has revitalised the organisation of the provision. The planning of courses has improved. The introduction of a GNVQ intermediate course and several part-time courses provide a flexibility which better meets the varying needs of students. Teachers have undertaken training for GNVQ work. Course team meetings take place regularly and are well documented. Both full-time and part-time staff show a high level of commitment to course development. Students are receiving better initial guidance. Retention rates are more carefully monitored and, in most cases, they have improved. Improvements in accommodation and resources have created a more fruitful learning environment. Courses have been organised so that many topics are taught in appropriately furnished studios and workshops. Attention is given to health and safety issues as part of learning. Examination results and retention rates vary, partly because of the small numbers completing some courses. There is scope for further improvement in recruitment, retention and pass rates on some courses. The college should continue to develop opportunities for students to develop key skills as an integral part of the curriculum.

Revised grade: art and design (pre-degree) 3.

WEST MIDLANDS REGION

Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities: January 1998

Background

Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities at Kidderminster College was inspected in October 1994 and the findings were published in inspection report 18/95. Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities was graded 4.

The strengths of the programme were: the centrally organised learning support system; identification, assessment and referral systems for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities on general further education programmes; the efficient, indirect support given to students on general further education programmes. The strengths, however, were outweighed by weaknesses: the college prospectus and strategic plan did not sufficiently address the requirements of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities; the range of provision was too limited; teaching and learning was poor, because work was insufficiently differentiated to meet individual learning needs and methods of working, and learning materials were inappropriate; students were not encouraged to learn on their own; students were not involved in assessing or recording their own achievements; there were inappropriate forms of accreditation for some students, especially those on part-time provision; teaching accommodation was unsuitable; there was no clearly defined budget; and the co-ordinator's role was unclear.

The provision was reinspected in January 1998 by one inspector. Fourteen teaching sessions were observed. There were meetings with managers and staff. Students' work was inspected and a wide range of documentation provided by the college was examined.

Assessment

The college has made progress in addressing some of the weaknesses. The structure for managing cross-college learning support has been strengthened. The cross-college support provision is effective and there is a high level of student satisfaction. The strategic plan commits the college to widening access to students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in every department. Provision has been extended to include students with mental health difficulties. There is a more substantial accreditation framework for students. Teaching accommodation has been improved. The co-ordinator's role is now better defined. Weaknesses still to be addressed are mainly in the discrete provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. They include: the absence of a written briefing for teachers on the impact of students' learning difficulties and/or disabilities, which would help them to target their teaching more effectively; the less effective teaching in part-time discrete programmes for students with severe learning difficulties; the insufficient emphasis given to assessing what students need to learn in discrete provision; the lack of individual learning programmes for students following the discrete provision to ensure that they are all working consistently towards clear, attainable and relevant goals; inadequate recording and analysis of learning which has taken place; the lack of specialist qualifications and recent training for teachers.

Revised grade: provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities 3.

SOUTH EAST REGION

Small animal care: May 1998

Background

Merrist Wood College was originally inspected between May and November 1996 and the findings were published in inspection report 23/97. Provision in the small animal care curriculum area was graded 4.

The provision had several strengths: teachers showed good awareness of students' abilities and career aspirations; student support was effective, particularly for those with learning difficulties; students carrying out duties in the animal care unit worked effectively; the rehabilitation unit was a valuable teaching resource. Strengths, however, were outweighed by weaknesses. There were low levels of retention and achievement on animal care courses. Teachers set standards well beyond those of the qualifications being studied and, in doing so, often lost sight of the needs of their students. Teaching was insufficiently varied and did not effectively motivate students or provide them with sufficient challenge. In the weaker theory lessons, few links were made to practical applications. Poor attention to health and safety was noted in several lessons. Assignments failed to develop students' ability to work on their own and the quality of teachers' feedback varied. There were not enough animals in the animal care unit to enable all students to develop appropriate handling skills. On NVQ courses, assessments were poorly conducted. Internal verification procedures were poor. In practical lessons, group sizes were too large for the resources available.

The college's provision of training for work with small animals was reinspected in May 1998. The inspection took three days. Eight classes were observed, students' work was inspected, and discussions were held with staff, students and employers.

Assessment

The college has made progress in addressing a number of the weaknesses identified. Retention rates and levels of achievement for students completing courses in 1997 were high; 86 per cent of students completed their course and 98 per cent of completing students achieved their award. The national diploma course now lays a greater emphasis on practical work. Teaching is more appropriate for the level of the course. In most lessons, teachers make effective use of questioning to ensure that learning is taking place. Most students develop good practical skills through regular work experience and their involvement in routine duties. Audio tape instructions for use by students on unit duties is an innovative development. Attention to health and safety has greatly improved, although the enforcement of standards is still not consistent. There is generally an effective balance of types of assignment work. The introduction of a wildlife unit provides a useful resource for students. Students receive good tutorial support and animal care specialist tutors provide a great deal of informal advice. The college still needs to address a number of weaknesses, most of which it has identified in the self-assessment report produced before the reinspection. Some teaching is insufficiently varied and, in some cases, teachers do not take enough account of the range of abilities and experience within the same class. Internal verification systems and procedures are not well developed. Work experience is not adequately reviewed and assessed. The full-time NVQ course is not well suited to the needs of the students and does not offer a clear route for progression to higher level courses. Students do not have the opportunity to achieve the additional vocational awards that are usual on equivalent courses. Resources in the animal care unit are inadequate for the student numbers. A new unit is planned.

Revised grade: small animal care 3.

EASTERN REGION

Art and design: February 1998

Background

Milton Keynes College was inspected between March 1996 and February 1997. The findings were published in inspection report 62/97. Provision in art and design was graded 4.

The standard of teaching in art and design varied widely. Drawing and painting were taught well with an emphasis on students' critical observation skills. The development of students' work was well structured. However, some teaching was poor. Key skills were identified but were not sufficiently addressed in the teaching and learning and were not objectively assessed. The work involved in many assignments was not sufficiently demanding to motivate students to continue the work in their own time. In some classes, the lack of challenge led younger students to disrupt classes. In a high proportion of lessons, skills were not being developed progressively. Students' work on the advanced GNVQ and graphic design programmes lacked appropriate research and the level of originality was low. Pass rates for those completing GNVQ intermediate courses had been above the average for two years. Mature students taking art and design did well and achieved high pass rates. Art and design rooms were generally small and, in many cases, they were unsuited to the activities for which they were used and the size of classes.

The provision was reinspected by one inspector over three days in February 1998. The inspector observed 19 lessons, examined students' records and portfolios, met managers, teachers and students, and scrutinised a wide range of students' practical work and documentation relating to the college and its courses.

Assessment

The college has made significant progress in addressing many of the weaknesses. A detailed action plan has been implemented although not all of the objectives have been achieved. The planning of work and the teaching have improved. Course programmes are well organised. Assignments integrate aspects of different subject studies and the teaching of key skills has improved. Classes were orderly and teachers had generally improved class control. In several lessons, however, students arrived late and there were poor levels of attendance. The pass rate for GCE A level painting and drawing has risen and there are improved retention rates for all GCE A levels. The pass rates in two GCE A level subjects, offered as an additional qualification, are below the national average and do little to broaden students' experience. Pass rates for the foundation course and the advanced GNVQ are good. Retention rates on advanced GNVQ and national diploma courses are poor and retention on intermediate courses has fallen. Quality systems are underdeveloped and the use of management information data is poor. Accommodation has been improved and rooms are generally tidy. The siting of rooms still makes it difficult for the staff to work well in teams. Workshop equipment for three-dimensional work is inadequate. There are shortages of specialist software application programs and insufficient computer technician support.

Revised grade: art and design 3.

SOUTH EAST REGION

Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities: October 1997

Background

North East Surrey College of Technology was inspected between June and November 1995 and the findings were published in inspection report 21/96. Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities was graded 4.

Despite the best efforts of individual members of staff and the physical and medical support, guidance and counselling provided by the welfare and student services unit, students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities were not receiving effective learning support. There was no proper assessment of their needs and a lack of consistency in meeting those needs which had been identified. Students were failing on intermediate level courses because there was no alternative provision at a level appropriate to their needs. Few students were identified as needing learning support and the provision of such support was at a very early stage of development.

The provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities was reinspected over three days in October 1997. The inspector observed 13 classes, held discussions with managers, staff and students, and examined students' work and documentation provided by the college.

Assessment

The college has made significant progress in addressing some of the weaknesses but progress in addressing others has been slow. Support for students whose learning difficulties arise from inadequate literacy and numeracy skills, or from dyslexia, is becoming increasingly effective. The increased authority and status of staff with

cross-college roles have led to the creation of more effective systems and more consistent support for students. Tutorial support for students with disabilities is improving. Support for students with hearing impairments is good. Staff are producing some helpful assessment tools to identify students' needs in relation to the particular courses they are taking. There is an increased awareness of the need to develop courses below intermediate level, such as the new GNVQ foundation course in business studies, and an increased willingness to consider providing for students who have traditionally not come to North East Surrey College of Technology. The range of subjects on offer below intermediate level remains narrow and the teaching at foundation level is often too theoretical. Failures and inconsistencies in the support provided for some students have adversely affected their achievements. Some aspects of basic skills support are at an early stage of development. The college should: evaluate the effectiveness of learning support and basic skills teaching; ensure that the learning support team receives speedy information on students who state at enrolment that they may need extra help; make a formal commitment to provide learning support for those students who cannot succeed on their courses without it. The proposed content of, and accreditation procedures for, the Stepping Stones course are too complex.

Revised grade: provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities 3.

North East Worcestershire College

WEST MIDLANDS REGION

Art and design: February 1998

Background

The art and design programme at North East Worcestershire College was inspected in October 1996 and the findings were published in inspection report 81/97. Provision in art and design was graded 4.

The strengths of the programme included the enthusiasm of the staff for their subject and the care they take in monitoring students' progress. Teachers ensured that all students received appropriate attention. In 1995-96, the pass rates on the foundation course were high and 90 per cent of students gained places on higher education courses. However, these strengths were outweighed by weaknesses: much of the teaching was too directive and over prescriptive; students were not given sufficient opportunity to work out ideas or discover information for themselves; lesson objectives were not clear; students' achievements were, for the most part, poor; examination results were consistently below the national average.

The reinspection took place between 16 and 18 February 1998. Ten lessons were observed across programmes and levels. The extensive documentation provided by the college was examined. There were meetings and discussions with staff and students during the reinspection and an assessment was made of students' work, available in portfolios and displays.

Assessment

There has been good progress in addressing the weaknesses identified during the first inspection. Teaching and learning are effective. Students are helped by the enthusiasm and positive encouragement of staff. Those on advanced level programmes contribute willingly to discussion and engage responsibly in

self-assessment and assessment by their fellow students. Students value their studies and, in graphic design in particular, they are confident about making presentations and discussing their work with others. Students' practical work is of an appropriate quality, and there are some examples of good work across all programmes. In 1996-97, a high percentage of full-time students who completed their course achieved the award for which they were aiming, and for those completing successfully, there was a good record of progression to further study. Teaching accommodation is generally appropriate, and there are some good specialist facilities, such as those for ceramics. Helpful support and guidance are available to students during their studies. Staff development is well focused. The quality of some lessons is adversely affected by the use of inappropriate teaching methods. Assignments are not always set at an appropriate level. Students' practical work does not always reflect an understanding of fundamental principles, to match the clear strengths in the quality of the finished images and artefacts. There are pressures on some key resources, including the specialist IT suite. The leadership instability of recent years has yet to be resolved, and it has led to a lack of focus for the subject area and its development. Staff are unclear about the wider quality framework, particularly the feedback they should expect to receive from the centre. Quality assurance is being adversely affected by unhelpful and unreliable management information; the course review reports are inconsistent in their analysis of students' performance.

Revised grade: art and design 3.

Oxford College of Further Education

SOUTH EAST REGION

Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities: May 1998

Background

Oxford College of Further Education was inspected between March and November 1996, and the findings were published in inspection report 10/97. Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities was graded 4.

The main strengths included: staff who were committed to the education of students of all abilities and working hard to improve the provision; students who enjoyed their classes and were proud of their work; effective support for students with hearing impairments. The main weaknesses were that: courses were insufficiently distinct from one another and had aims which did not provide an adequate basis for programmes of learning; the teaching and the methods of working were not related to course aims; in many lessons the work was insufficiently demanding for the students; the differing needs of students within the same class were not met. Students' opportunities for learning were limited by the lack of access to vocational accommodation and to the expertise available in other departments. The emphasis on literacy, numeracy and classroom-based activities was inappropriate for many students. There was little evidence that students were routinely progressing from discrete provision to mainstream courses in the college. A lack of equipment sometimes created a barrier to learning.

The provision was reinspected by one inspector over two days in May 1998. The inspector observed 11 classes, examined lesson plans, schemes of work, assessment documentation, data relating to student enrolment, retention, achievement and progression, and students'

work. Discussions took place with managers, staff and students.

Assessment

The provision has improved significantly since the previous inspection. The strengths identified at that time were still evident. An improved range of courses has been put in place, with clearer aims and routes for progression. The modularisation of the courses has increased the opportunities for developing individual programmes. Teaching has improved. Students are more involved in practical activities and there are fewer inappropriate classroom-based lessons. Teaching is clearly focused; work is conducted at an appropriate pace and level; and teachers use terminology which students can understand. Students demonstrated greater competence and confidence and a greater range of socially acceptable behaviour. The college has invested in some specialist equipment. Pre-vocational students are now taught by vocational teaching staff in the appropriate accommodation. Most aspects of the new courses are at an early stage of development, so that their impact is not yet entirely clearly in evidence. There are still too few opportunities for students to exercise independence within the classroom, and some students and groups of students are not yet achieving their full potential. In some lessons, teachers fail to exploit the available opportunities for learning. As yet, little formal evidence of students' achievements from the new baseline assessments is available.

Revised grade: provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities 3.

WEST MIDLANDS REGION

Animal care: May 1998

Background

Rodbaston College was inspected between February 1996 and May 1997 and the findings were published in inspection report 111/97. Provision in animal care was graded 4.

The strengths included generally high standards of practical teaching and well-designed worksheets. Students worked well together. First diploma assignments were relevant and appropriately challenging. Course documentation and the recording of students' progress were good. National certificate students had high levels of achievement. The resources included a wide range of animals. Strengths were outweighed by the weaknesses, however. The college has been slow to change the curriculum and to ensure smooth progression for its students. Links between theory and practice were not clear. Teaching was too theoretical and there were many poor-quality lessons. Routine practical duties were not demanding enough and students' practical skills were not being fully developed. IT was not effectively integrated with other aspects of the technical curriculum. Some assignment teaching was poor and there were weaknesses in tutorial support. Retention rates for diploma courses and pass rates for the national diploma were both low. There was a lack of information on student destinations.

The reinspection took place in May 1998. Eleven classes were observed and students' work and documentation provided by the college were examined. There were meetings with managers, teachers and students.

Assessment

All the weaknesses identified in the earlier inspection have been addressed, and significant progress has been made in most areas. In a

few areas, frequent staff changes have slowed developments. The quality of teaching has improved considerably. In theory lessons, teachers make effective reference to vocational applications. A comprehensive review of the curriculum has been informed by the wide consultation with industry. A more coherent range of courses is now provided, although the college recognises that the national certificate courses require further development. The practical content of courses has been strengthened and there are structured opportunities for the development of skills. Well-organised routine duties for students effectively complement the work experience. Specialist resources are now used more effectively to support learning. First-year assignments on the new national diploma provide students with good opportunities to develop their understanding by working on realistic exercises. Most assignments are clear, although the outcomes are not always clearly specified. Students receive constructive feedback from teachers. A high proportion of students who completed their courses last year achieved their qualifications, and retention rates for 1997-98 are high. The college is much better informed about student destinations. The data show a high proportion of students continuing in education or entering employment. The college should continue to address: weaknesses in the management of some lessons; the lack of opportunity for students to apply IT and develop their skills; the inconsistencies in tutorial provision; the rapid changes of staff; a few shortcomings in the specialist accommodation.

Revised grade: animal care 2

WEST MIDLANDS REGION

Art, graphics design and media: December 1997

Background

Sandwell College was inspected between May 1995 and May 1996. The inspection findings were published in inspection report 116/96. Provision in art, graphics design and media was graded 4.

The teaching of skills in photography, dressmaking and interior design was of a good standard. Records of students' progress were thorough. Pass rates on the BTEC national diploma in audiovisual design had been consistently high over three years. However, these strengths were outweighed by weaknesses: the quality of teaching in art and design was poor; the tasks required of full-time students were insufficiently demanding; teachers paid insufficient regard to the differing needs of students in the same class; the goals in students' individual action plans were not specific enough to guide their learning effectively; students had insufficient opportunity to acquire IT skills.

The provision was reinspected by one inspector over three days in December 1997. The inspector observed 19 lessons, examined students' records and portfolios, met managers, teachers and students, and scrutinised students' practical work and looked at documentation relating to the college and its courses.

Assessment

Actions taken by college managers have begun to address issues raised during the original inspection. New staff appointments have been made to broaden the range of expertise and some course programmes have been rationalised. Steps are being taken to develop a team approach to teaching in art and design. Technical support staff are well deployed and assist with the supervision of students' learning.

New links include a pilot GNVQ programme being offered in conjunction with a local school, and joint planning of the curriculum with a local university. There were several examples of good lesson planning and of good, supportive teaching in group and individual contexts. Some teachers provided effective additional material. Accommodation in art and design is being improved and capital expenditure for new equipment has been approved. There are now industry-standard computers and software applications for students in the programme area and these are encouraging wider use of IT as an integral part of the work in art and design. Some weaknesses remain: an appropriate range of opportunities in general art and design has still to be achieved; the strategy for curriculum development places too much reliance on staff preferences; there is a need for more market research and a more focused approach to marketing art and design courses; some class work is not sufficiently demanding for students; retention rates on some courses are poor and levels of achievement vary considerably; there is poor access for students with mobility difficulties.

Revised grade: art, graphics design and media 3.

Somerset College of Arts and Technology

SOUTH WEST REGION

Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities: June 1998

Background

Somerset College of Arts and Technology was previously inspected between March 1995 and March 1996 and the findings were published in inspection report 90/96. Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities was graded 4.

Strengths included: the care and commitment of staff; the opportunities for students to learn vocational skills; the range of practical activities in which students could participate; and the linking of students' studies with experience of real work to improve their ability to mix with others outside the college. Weaknesses included: some ineffective course organisation and co-ordination; the lack of initial assessment to ensure that students take the most appropriate courses; some inappropriate teaching strategies; low expectations of students; work which was sometimes insufficiently challenging; and the lack of an effective recording system to monitor students' progress. The range of methods of teaching and learning was too narrow. Most teachers failed to take effective account of the full range of ability in their classes. There was not enough opportunity for students to take some responsibility for their own learning, to work on their own, or to co-operate with other students. There was no consistent assessment of learning and achievement within lessons.

The provision was reinspected over three days in June 1998. Thirteen teaching sessions were observed. Students' work and files were scrutinised. Meetings were held with managers, staff and students.

Assessment

Some of the weaknesses identified in the earlier inspection have been addressed. The college has made good progress in strengthening procedures for the management of learning. Course documentation is well organised. Most practical work is challenging and appropriate. Some teachers make good use of visual aids and IT to support students' learning. The standard of students' work in visual and performing arts and in catering is good. Student achievements are well documented. However, the emphasis is frequently on the description of tasks carried out rather than on what has been learned. On many courses, students of varied abilities are taught together and learning activities are not sufficiently differentiated to cater for individual needs. The college should: ensure that students' learning needs are effectively identified and prioritised; further develop individual learning programmes so that students' progress can be more effectively monitored and recorded; and improve weaker teaching.

Revised grade: provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities 3.

Stockport College of Further and Higher Education

NORTH WEST REGION

Engineering: March 1998

Background

The college was inspected between September and December 1996 and the findings were published in inspection report 38/97. Provision in engineering was graded 4.

The strengths of the provision included: schemes of work and lesson plans which were shared with students; the effective co-ordination of GNVQ programme modules; key skills effectively integrated with other elements of work; teachers' clear, written instructions for students' work; good pass rates on some BTEC higher national certificate programmes; appropriate attention to health and safety. The main weaknesses were that: in many theory lessons students spent too much time listening and teachers did little to stimulate discussion; teaching on technician courses often lacked variety; teachers failed to deal effectively with students who arrived late and disrupted the learning of others; students on the full-time GNVQ intermediate course in engineering were poorly motivated; there were many examples of poor achievement rates.

The provision for engineering was reinspected in March 1998. Two inspectors spent three days in the college. They observed 18 lessons, examined students' work and met with managers, staff and students.

Assessment

Many of the weaknesses have been addressed. The college has introduced NVQ level 1 provision and discrete courses for women. A new management system includes procedures for monitoring student attendance, retention and achievement rates and for setting performance standards. Course teams receive detailed data on the achievements of their students. Staff attend regular timetabled meetings. All students

undertake a basic skills assessment at the start of their studies, and additional learning support is available. The quality of teaching has improved. There is now greater emphasis on students expressing their own ideas and discussing issues with other students. Learning materials have been produced in some subject areas to support students working on their own. Practical work is better planned to encourage all students to play a part in lessons. There have been significant improvements in retention and pass rates. Specialist accommodation is generally bright and clean. Most workshops include a study area for students. Students' work and technical literature are displayed in most areas of the department. New equipment is available. Weaknesses still to be addressed include: the minority of lessons which are poorly planned or organised; teachers' failure to fully exploit the work experience of part-time students in their lessons; poor-quality teaching materials; the lack of materials for students in workshop study areas; teachers' failure to use a wide range of equipment; the poor quality of some students' work; the lack of attention to performance indicators; and the ineffectiveness of the annual quality reviews.

Revised grade: engineering 3.

Stroud College of Further Education

SOUTH WEST REGION

Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities: January 1998

Background

Stroud College of Further Education was inspected between March 1995 and February 1996 and the findings were published in inspection report 59/96. Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities was graded 4.

The college was providing an appropriate learning environment for some students, work experience opportunities and enterprise activities for all students, and an ambitious residential programme. Support staff were working effectively with individual students to help them to learn. However, the area was without a manager. Students with learning difficulties were separated from the rest of the college. They were unable to benefit from many general or specialist resources and their social experience was severely limited. The organisation of the provision limited the range of subjects they could study, and the courses to which they could progress. Students did not have individual learning programmes and some were working at the wrong level. A multi-skills programme had been introduced without a coherent training programme for the staff running it. Accommodation was inadequate and was adversely affecting teaching and learning.

The provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities was reinspected by a specialist inspector over three days in January 1998. Seventeen classes were observed. Discussions were held with managers, staff and students. Students' work and college documentation were examined.

Assessment

The college has made significant progress in addressing the weaknesses. The status of the provision has been raised throughout the college by changes directed by the principal and the senior management team. The new head of inclusive learning manages the team effectively. His membership of the cross-college heads of schools' group ensures that the provision is represented within the management structure. Young people can now progress through three different levels of study on courses specifically designed for students with learning difficulties, and subsequently join general college courses. The curriculum has been redesigned at each level, and appropriate accreditation frameworks are in place. All the lessons observed on full-time courses were satisfactory or good. Students with learning difficulties now use many more college facilities. Vocational subjects, such as cookery, motor vehicle maintenance and health and social care are effectively taught within the appropriate teaching schools. However, the new courses are at an early stage of development. The components of the Skills for Life course have not yet been brought together to form a coherent programme and the Vocational Access course does not include an effective common core which enables students to work as a group. The range of vocational options, and the time available for these options, is limited this year. Some of the teaching was not sufficiently bold and imaginative. Some lessons for part-time adult students had little educational content and the work was unsuitable for adults. A few lessons took place in poor accommodation.

Revised grade: provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities 3.

Glossary

C&G	City and Guilds of London Institute
GCE A level	general certificate of education advanced level
GCSE	general certificate of secondary education
GNVQ	general national vocational qualification
IT	information technology
NVQ	national vocational qualification

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