

Dewsbury College
Reinspection of Management: November 1999
Report from the Inspectorate
The Further Education Funding Council

THE FURTHER EDUCATION FUNDING COUNCIL

The Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) 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

The FEFC has agreed that colleges with provision judged by the inspectorate to be less than satisfactory or poor (grade 4 or 5) should be reinspected. In these circumstances, a college may have its funding agreement with the FEFC qualified to prevent it increasing the number of new students in an unsatisfactory curriculum area until the FEFC is satisfied that weaknesses have been addressed.

Satisfactory provision may also be reinspected if actions have been taken to improve quality and the college's existing inspection grade is the only factor which prevents it from meeting the criteria for FEFC accreditation.

Reinspections are carried out in accordance with the framework and guidelines described in Council Circulars 97/12, 97/13 and 97/22. Reinspections seek to validate the data and judgements provided by colleges in self-assessment reports and confirm that actions taken as a result of previous inspection have improved the quality of provision. They involve full-time inspectors and registered part-time inspectors who have knowledge of, and experience in, the work they inspect. The opinion of the FEFC's audit service contributes to inspectorate judgements about governance and management.

GRADE DESCRIPTORS

Assessments use grades on a five-point scale to summarise the balance between strengths and weaknesses. The descriptors for the grades are:

- *grade 1 - outstanding provision which has many strengths and few weaknesses*
- *grade 2 - good provision in which the strengths clearly outweigh the weaknesses*
- *grade 3 - satisfactory provision with strengths but also some weaknesses*
- *grade 4 - less than satisfactory provision in which weaknesses clearly outweigh the strengths*
- *grade 5 - poor provision which has few strengths and many weaknesses.*

Audit conclusions are expressed as good, adequate or weak.

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Dewsbury College Yorkshire and Humberside Region

Reinspection of management: November 1999

Background

Dewsbury College in West Yorkshire was inspected in January 1998 and the findings were published in the inspection report 22/98. Provision in management was graded 4 and the audit service opinion was that financial management was weak.

The strengths of the provision were: effective mechanisms for communications and cross-college working; well-structured policy documents; and strong commitment by the college to work with its local community. The main weaknesses identified in the inspection were: the poor financial position of the college; lack of reliable management information; failure to make timely and accurate returns to the FEFC; slow implementation of action agreed with internal auditors; and ineffective use of management targets and forecasts.

Following the inspection the college prepared an action plan to address the weaknesses. The action plan, together with a new self-assessment report, provided the main basis for the reinspection. The reinspection took place in November 1999, by two inspectors working for a total of five days and an auditor whose three days work also involved the reinspection of governance. Meetings were held with senior and middle managers, staff from throughout the college and governors. Documentation, including policies, plans and minutes of meetings, data on students' achievements and retention and college targets were scrutinised.

Assessment

The college has made progress in addressing areas of weakness identified during the last inspection. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report but identified some additional weaknesses. The quality of management information has improved. Staff have better access to the information and have received training to help them use it. Data returns to the FEFC are now submitted on time. Managers have introduced more rigorous systems for monitoring performance against targets for recruitment, retention and achievement. However, despite these measures, the college failed to predict a shortfall in meeting its unit targets for 1998-99 and assumptions about the recruitment of full-time students for 1999-2000 have been over optimistic. Senior managers are taking action to address these issues. Considerable attention has been given to identifying ways of cutting costs. The college has recently reviewed and revised its mission. Staff are positive about their opportunities to contribute to the development of the strategic plan and operating plans. It is too early to judge the impact these plans will have in helping the college to achieve its mission and increase enrolments. Some of the action points in operating plans are written in general terms and are not specific enough to help the monitoring of their implementation. Cross-college planning to address initiatives such as curriculum 2000 and the integration of key skills is not yet fully effective. The self-assessment report did not recognise that insufficient attention has been given to reviewing the impact on teaching and learning of actions taken to address the college's financial difficulties.

The FEFC audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, financial management is adequate. The college has submitted the outstanding audited financial statements from earlier years, and is expected to meet the due date for submission of the 1998-99 audited financial statements. Since the last inspection, the college's financial position has been

clarified and shows improvement. The internal control system is improved and the internal auditors have provided positive opinions on the college's internal control system in both 1997-98 and 1998-99. Finance staff have appropriate experience and expertise. However, the financial regulations have not been updated since October 1997. The over-optimistic forecast for student recruitment in 1998-99 is likely to result in a significant repayment to the FEFC.

Revised grade: management 3.