

Ealing Tertiary College
Reinspection of Quality Assurance: September 2000
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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Ealing Tertiary College Greater London Region

Reinspection of quality assurance: September 2000

Background

Ealing Tertiary College was inspected in February 1999. The findings were published in the inspection report 49/99. Quality assurance was awarded a grade 4.

The main strengths of the provision were: the well-documented quality assurance procedures; the evaluative self-assessment reports of some cross-college services; effective student representation; and a well-conceived mentoring scheme for teachers. These strengths were outweighed by significant weaknesses, which included: the very slow progress made in addressing issues from the previous inspection; the lack of a critical culture in many curriculum areas; a decline in the quality of teaching and learning since the previous inspection; weak internal verification in some curriculum areas; frequent failure to analyse data on students' achievements; and a lack of attention to weaknesses identified in action plans.

The provision was reinspected in September 2000. The inspector examined a range of documents relating to quality assurance, held meetings with college managers and teachers, evaluated students' achievement and retention data, and took into account the judgements of colleagues reinspecting programme areas and other cross-college areas.

Assessment

The college has taken rigorous action to address weaknesses identified in the last inspection. Quality assurance procedures have been strengthened, and there is an increasingly self-critical culture. Improved self-assessment procedures now form the basis of quality assurance. Teams carrying out self-assessment are now required to include clear evidence for strengths and weaknesses, and to conduct thrice-yearly reviews of progress against action plans. Documentation has been simplified and a rigorous validation process introduced. Policies and procedures have been brought together in a helpful workbook format. A well-constructed lesson observation scheme has produced a more accurate picture of the quality of teaching and learning, and enabled managers to provide training and support where it is most needed. Students' learning has been improved by language awareness training for teachers, who are now better able to meet the needs of the large number of students who do not speak English as a first language. New entry criteria and other initiatives have resulted in students being enrolled on more appropriate courses, with improved attendance, retention and achievement. Managers are now provided with accurate data as part of the self-assessment process. Targets for student retention and achievement have been set by every course team. Improvements in internal verification and assessment practice have raised standards and consistency. As part of the preparation for the reinspection of substantial areas of the college's work, an effective mini-inspection was undertaken.

The academic standards committee has had some productive meetings but its effectiveness has been hampered by poor attendance. Four curriculum boards of study have been set up with a remit to ensure consistency of curriculum quality across the college sites. These boards are intended to act in an advisory capacity, reporting to the academic board through the academic standards committee. There is some duplication in the roles of these two committees. Another committee, which sets and monitors standards of support services

across the college, has raised the awareness of support staff to the requirements of quality assurance. A recently established subcommittee of the corporation, the quality, curriculum and performance committee, includes governors in reviewing the outcomes of quality assurance procedures.

As a result of the developments in quality assurance systems, improvements are beginning to take place. For example, in-year retention improved from 77% in 1997-98 to 84% in 1999-2000. Achievement rates have risen from 44% in 1997-98 to 66% in 1999-2000. The percentage of lessons judged to be good or better was 41% in the previous inspection. At reinspection 63% of lessons were judged to be good or better. Surveys show that student satisfaction has increased. Some 64% of students were satisfied with lesson organisation in 1998-99, and 75% in 1999-2000. Self-assessment is increasingly robust and accurate, with an improved use of data and benchmarking. However, some areas of the college are not yet including all key weaknesses and all action taken in their assessments. Not all college statistics are routinely compared with national figures. External consultants have contributed significantly to many of the improvements and the college has yet to undertake a quality assurance cycle in the new format without considerable support. Information on some initiatives has not reached all college staff. Staff development activities are often well planned and meticulously recorded, but inspectors agree with the college's assessment that the lack of a lead member of staff in this area is a weakness. The student charter has been simplified to make it easier for students to use it. However, it does not contain measurable targets.

The college needs to maintain and develop further its initiatives to ensure that quality assurance procedures are being fully implemented by all staff. In particular, the college needs to improve the consistency of curriculum self-assessment reports and the use of national benchmarks. Further improvements are needed in student recruitment, retention and achievement. The college should: identify a staff member to take responsibility for staff development; and develop measurable targets for the student charter.

Revised grade: quality assurance 3.