

**East Devon College
Reinspection of Quality Assurance: June 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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East Devon College South West Region

Reinspection of quality assurance: June 2000

Background

East Devon College was inspected in March 1999 and the findings were published in inspection report 65/99. Quality assurance was awarded a grade 4.

The strengths of the provision were: the developing programme of lesson observations; the effective monitoring of franchised provision; and the effective system of internal verification. Major weaknesses were: the lack of a comprehensive quality assurance system; the poor quality of some course reviews; the underdeveloped use of targets and performance indicators; the underdeveloped quality assurance of support services; slow implementation of staff appraisal; and the poor self-assessment process and report.

The provision was reinspected in June 2000 by an inspector working for four days. The inspector examined the college's self-assessment report and a range of review documents and scrutinised students' retention and achievement data. Meetings were held with staff, students and governors.

Assessment

Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report and the updated action plan. Some action to address weaknesses identified in the report had been taken by the time of the reinspection.

The college has made good progress in developing a comprehensive quality assurance system. Revised systems for course review and self-assessment were introduced in September 1999 supported by staff training and clear guidance documents. All staff were involved in self-assessment. Performance measures have been introduced in each service area. The academic board has been active in advising on the development of the revised quality systems. The standards committee of governors rigorously questions evidence underpinning the reports it receives on the quality of provision. Staff development procedures are clear. Lesson observations, the analysis of student data against benchmarks and students' views inform course reviews. Targets for recruitment, retention and achievement are set at course team level. There are effective arrangements for the quality assurance of franchised provision.

The quality of course and service area reviews has improved. Lesson observation reports and students' views inform judgements in course reviews. Although there is a comprehensive programme of lesson observations they focus more on teaching quality than on how well students are learning. Reviews contain clear statements of strengths and weaknesses. Managers provide written feedback on the quality of reviews. Agreed actions are usually clear and followed through. A limited range of quantitative performance indicators is used to measure and monitor performance in curriculum areas. Service reviews have resulted in fewer complaints about accommodation cleanliness, faster response times for estate repairs and an improved reporting system between learning support and personal tutors. The college is slow in developing service standards in support service areas but performance measures are now used as the basis for monthly reports to the assistant principal.

The quality assurance systems have not impacted on all students' experiences. Retention and achievement rates for 16 to 19 year old students are above national averages. Since 1997, average GCE A level point scores have improved from 15.2 in 1997 to 21.2 in 1999. However, retention rates for students over the age of 19 are declining significantly on courses at all levels. The college has established a strategy to improve retention. Attendance is rigorously monitored. Recruitment procedures have been revised, the quality of tutorials closely monitored and exit interviews carried out. A retention task group meets regularly to discuss strategy and monitor improvements. The governors standards committee rigorously considers retention reports. Managers are required to present detailed information about early leavers.

The self-assessment process and the report produced are much improved. In the areas reinspected inspectors generally agreed with the judgements in the report. As a result of reinspection inspectors confirmed the grades the college awarded itself for the curriculum and cross-college areas reinspected.

Revised grade: quality assurance 3.