

Eastbourne College of Arts and Technology
Reinspection of science and humanities: February 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. 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.

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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Eastbourne College of Arts and Technology South East Region

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Background

Eastbourne College of Arts and Technology was inspected in January 1997, and the findings published in inspection report 68/97. Provision in science and humanities was graded 4. The provision in the two programme areas, primarily for GCE A level students, was assessed together.

The strengths of the provision included: some well-structured courses; some good teaching; and good results in public examinations on some courses. However, these strengths were outweighed by weaknesses which included: poor quality of teaching with a limited use of teaching methods, failure to check students' learning and inattention to the quality of students' work; an overall decline in students' achievements with generally poor results; inadequate management arrangements and few quality assurance procedures. The college's data were unreliable.

The reinspection took place from 23 to 25 February 1999. Inspectors observed eight science, mathematics and IT lessons and 10 humanities and social science lessons. They examined students' work, observed one tutorial and had meetings with groups of students and individual members of staff. They read the college's documentation which included a self-assessment report for this provision.

Assessment

Inspectors agreed that the college had taken significant steps to address many of the weaknesses identified in the previous inspection report. They could not, however, verify the college's claim that retention rates on GCSE, GCE AS and GCE A level courses were 'steadily improving' because of the continuing difficulties with the college's data. Since the last inspection, the college has changed its management arrangements for this provision, and reduced and consolidated its core team of full-time teachers. This has led to greater consistency in practice and policy. Improvements were most obvious in respect of teaching and learning. In science, mathematics and IT, lessons were well planned, and included a variety of learning activities. Students' individual contributions were valued and learning was related to their everyday experience. Effective use was made of questioning to extend students' understanding. Humanities teachers had produced clear schemes of work. Schedules of topics and assignments were given to students to assist them in organising their work. Lessons incorporated a variety of tasks, including carefully-constructed investigations. In one case, students prepared most of the material for the lesson and led the discussion that resulted. Teachers demonstrated a good knowledge of their subject, and made use of a wide range of resources which were of a high standard. Of the lessons observed, 75% of those in science, mathematics and IT and 80% of those in humanities were good or outstanding. Students receive constructive written comments on their work. In some humanities lessons, insufficient attention was given to the needs of both lower and higher attainers. Some achievement rates have improved, for example, among students aged 19 or over studying science, mathematics and IT at GCE AS level, and among the same age group studying GCE A level language and literature, history, law, psychology

and sociology. Some results remain poor. Some courses still have low numbers of students. Quality assurance systems are developing. Staff are involved in a lesson observation scheme, which enables them to share good practice. A system to calculate added value in students' achievements has been introduced, and the tutorial system strengthened. The target-setting process is still immature. Attendance on some courses is erratic. The provision has been moved to a new building on the main college site. This has significantly improved the quality of the learning environment for students. The building has full access for students with mobility problems.

Revised grades: science, mathematics and information technology 3. Humanities 3.