

Halton College
Reinspection of Management: November 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.

*Cheylesmore House
Quinton Road
Coventry CV1 2WT
Telephone 02476 863000
Fax 02476 862100
website: <http://www.fefc.ac.uk>*

© FEFC 2001

You may photocopy this report and use extracts in promotional or other material provided quotes are accurate, and the findings are not misrepresented.

Halton College North West Region

Reinspection of management: November 2000

Background

Halton College was inspected in October 1999 and the findings were published in inspection report 15/00. Management was awarded a grade 4.

The strengths of the provision were: good communications; and productive links with local partners. Weaknesses of the provision were: inadequate management information system; ineffective strategic planning; weak financial management; underdeveloped implementation and monitoring of college policies; and widely varying curriculum management practices.

Reinspection took place over four days in November 2000. Inspectors scrutinised a number of college documents including the post-inspection action plan and latest self-assessment report. They considered students' achievement and retention data and targets set by the college. They held meetings with the principal, managers, teachers, support staff and students.

Assessment

Since the appointment of the new principal in February 2000 the college has made rapid progress in addressing the weaknesses identified in the last inspection report and in implementing its recovery plan. Some actions have already had a positive impact but for others, it is too soon to judge their capacity to bring about measurable improvement.

The new management structure is effective and well led. Senior managers have agreed targets against which their performance is monitored. These are circulated to all staff. Leadership is open and consultative. Staff clearly understand their roles and responsibilities and those of managers. A clear strategy, which includes staff training and standardised procedures, is in place to help to ensure improvement and consistency in curriculum management. Good communications have been maintained. There is a published college meeting schedule. Course team meetings take place at least once a month. The minutes include clear action points and are circulated. Staff feel well informed and have opportunities to contribute to decision-making and planning processes. The strategic planning process has been revised and is well understood. The self-assessment process and the operating plans of academic and service departments inform the strategic plan. Staff have undertaken training to enable their involvement in strategic planning to be effective. Teams receive feedback on the contribution they make to the strategic objectives. The college has made good progress on its key objectives of reducing the proportion of dispersed provision and increasing courses for the local community. It has been helped in this by a well-conceived marketing strategy that is informed by relevant market research and builds on the existing strong links with local partners. The college has made good progress on its accommodation strategy. Its use of the standards fund has made a good contribution to many of these improvements.

The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is adequate. The college now has appropriate audit arrangements. Its internal auditors have identified internal control weaknesses, which are a legacy of the previous management regime. The current management team is committed to addressing the weaknesses. Financial reporting systems are well developed, and detailed management

accounts are prepared. The college has a new, appropriately qualified and experienced director of finance and corporate services. The college has now finalised the 1997-98 and 1998-99 financial statements, and furthermore, the 1999-2000 financial statements, which are unqualified, will be submitted to the FEFC before the required deadline. The college is still reliant on FEFC funding at a high level but expects to reach convergence by 2002-03. The college did not meet its 1999-2000 funding unit target. The current management team has allocated a high level of resources to addressing the issues related to the college's franchised provision.

The college has made considerable progress in improving the reliability of management information system data. Inspectors found that student retention and achievement data for 1999-2000 was more accurate than data for previous years. However, there is room for further improvement in managers' use of the information for planning and review. The academic board has been strengthened. It has established seven subcommittees, including equal opportunities and community liaison. These committees have clear terms of reference and meet regularly, though it is too early to judge their effectiveness. The college continues to review and implement its policies and procedures but, as yet, neither senior managers nor governors effectively monitor the policies.

Revised grade: management 3.