

Isle of Wight College
Reinspection of Engineering: March 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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Isle of Wight College South East Region

Reinspection of engineering: March 2000

Background

The college was inspected during February 1999 and the findings were published in inspection report 52/99. Provision for engineering was graded 4.

The main strengths of the provision were the achievement and retention rates in the higher national certificate in mechanical engineering and the well-defined safety procedures operating in the workshops. These strengths were outweighed by weaknesses that included: poor pass and retention rates on many courses; the failure of a significant number of lessons to motivate students; the lack of appropriate variety in teaching methods; too high a ratio of part-time to full-time staff; and inadequate specialist equipment.

Reinspection took place over four days in March 2000. Inspectors examined a range of documents which included: data on students' achievements and retention; course files; and the college's self-assessment report and post-inspection action plan. They observed 11 lessons, examined students' work, and met with managers, teachers and students.

Assessment

The college has made progress in addressing the weaknesses identified in the previous inspection report. In all lessons observed, student interest and motivation has improved. Teaching is more lively, although better use could be made of directed questioning to ensure all students are included. Working relationships are excellent. In some lessons teaching is insufficiently varied and the opportunity to develop self-study skills in lessons is rarely taken. Inspectors saw no unsatisfactory lessons. Handouts are used effectively in lessons although the quality is varied and there is no standard house style. Lesson plans are not detailed enough. Work experience for full-time students has been expanded to include the NVQ foundation students with a target to include the remaining full-time students by June 2000.

Inspectors found significant improvements in students' achievements and retention and most courses are now at the level of or above the national average. The external verification of the college's 1999 data gave rise to a number of queries which means that these achievements must be treated with some caution. Course teams undertake an annual course review and compare students' performance with national averages. However, they do not set targets for improved retention and achievement and record these in the course review document.

Using standards fund money, action has been taken to replace ageing specialist equipment. Examples include a new milling machine for the engineering workshop and new equipment to enhance the electronics facilities. Further investment is still required in all areas, for instance, teaching rooms are of poor quality. Good links with employers have facilitated industrial secondments for all staff. The high ratio of part-time to full-time staff has been addressed and is now relatively low. Staff have faced the challenges of improving quality. To improve further, the college should: ensure better planning of lessons to involve a greater variety of learning styles; improve the quality of teaching rooms; and include targets for achievement and retention in course reviews.

Revised grade: engineering 3.