

**Isle of Wight College**  
**Reinspection of Quality Assurance: 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 quality assurance: March 2000**

**Background**

The college was inspected in February 1999 and the findings published in inspection report 52/99. Quality assurance was graded 4.

The key strengths were: a clear quality assurance policy; and prompt actions in response to student concerns. Major weaknesses were: lack of progress on actions outstanding from the previous inspection report, published in 1995; insufficiently rigorous use of information on student enrolment, retention and achievement; poor quality data; too few indicators and targets to measure performance; no effective procedures for monitoring the implementation of policy; and the small impact of the scheme to observe teaching and learning.

Reinspection took place in March 2000. Inspectors examined a range of documentation, including the recently completed self-assessment report, scrutinised data on student retention and achievement rates, and met with staff, students and governors individually and in groups.

**Assessment**

Since the previous inspection, the college has improved its quality assurance framework. Parts of the previous quality assurance system have been rationalised and revisions made to the annual programme for planning, implementing and reviewing quality improvement in all aspects of the college's work, including that of support areas. The strategic planning and quality committee of the corporation board, chaired by a new governor committed to continuous quality improvement, will monitor the quality policy and its implementation. Responsibility for quality assurance now rests at executive team level, with the vice-principal. There is a quality assurance committee of the academic board to standardise procedures and monitor issues concerning the assurance of quality of provision. A quality management team comprising college managers executes the decisions of the quality assurance committee. Quality verifiers have been appointed to each department to meet and share good practice, and to monitor compliance with quality procedures. Standards fund money has enabled the college recently to improve and externally validate its scheme to observe teaching and learning. Observations recommenced in November 1999, having been left in abeyance since the last inspection. Approximately 100 observations have been carried out since November 1999 and inspectors found a more realistic profile of grades awarded than that produced through the former system. Lesson observations form part both of the college's appraisal system and its staff development system. Line managers are responsible for appraisal, but newly appointed professional tutors also observe teaching and work with staff to improve the quality of their work. The design of student surveys has been improved. The reliability of student data has recently been improved so that precise targets for student retention and achievement can now be set for the first time. The college charter now includes standards against which its effectiveness can be more accurately measured. There are service level agreements between support staff and other areas in the college. The redesigned aspects of the quality assurance system are understood by staff, and the latest self-assessment report indicates better evaluation by course teams of the quality of their work. However, some of these new developments are not yet fully established in the college, nor has their impact been tested.

Progress since the last inspection was uneven because of major changes in the governance, management and staffing of the college. Consequently, many of the new developments emerged only a little time before the reinspection. There are as yet few clear measurable outcomes or improvements as a result of the revised systems and the implementation of quality assurance procedures is still uneven across the college. The combined course reviews and self-assessment procedures are carried out less effectively in some areas and contain too little emphasis on steps needed to set targets for improvement. Aspects of the system are new and untried and have had little impact. The strategic planning committee of the corporation was given the additional quality monitoring remit in July 1999. Targets for improving retention and achievement rates were not set at course level until September 1999. It is unclear whether the college has sufficient information on targets set for student retention and achievement in 1998-99 to determine the proportion of departments that met or missed their targets. The new tutorial policy, designed to be a major factor in improving students' retention, was also implemented in September 1999. Interim figures suggest an improvement in retention in February 2000 compared with February 1999. Quality verifiers were all in post by December 1999, but have had little time to show an impact. Classroom observations recommenced in November 1999. Data from classroom observations completed in the months before the reinspection have not been fully analysed or used effectively to monitor and improve quality. Although staff have received training in the use of IT, neither they nor students have been adequately prepared for the most effective use of resource-based learning, which has been introduced as a major component to all students' programmes as the number of taught lessons has been reduced.

In order to demonstrate that its quality arrangements are satisfactory or better, the college should be able to identify positive outcomes of the revised quality assurance procedures on: the standards of teaching and learning across the college; target-setting for individuals, courses and departments; students' achievements, retention and other indicators of performance; the consistency of adherence to procedures by teachers, tutors, verifiers and support staff; and the identification of staff training needs, including the proper development of resource-based learning.

**Revised grade:** quality assurance 4.