

**Matthew Boulton College of Further and Higher Education
Reinspection of History, Psychology and Sociology: February 2000
Report from the Inspectorate
The Further Education Funding Council**

THE FURTHER EDUCATION FUNDING COUNCIL{PRIVATE }

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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Matthew Boulton College of Further and Higher Education West Midlands Region

Reinspection of history, psychology and sociology: February 2000

Background

Matthew Boulton College of Further and Higher Education was inspected in November 1998, and the findings were published in inspection report 18/99. History, psychology and sociology provision was awarded a grade 4.

The single strength was the well-planned lessons that had clear aims and objectives. Teaching was weak and there was a lack of differentiation and a slow pace of work in lessons. There was a lack of rigour in monitoring students' progress and attendance and poor rates of students' attendance and punctuality. Pass rates for GCE A level and GCSE courses were well below national averages. There was poor course management and subject documentation. Teachers' assessment of assignments did not include enough written guidance on how students might improve their performance.

The reinspection of psychology and sociology took place over five days in February 2000. The college has ceased to offer provision in history and GCSE courses in psychology and sociology. Inspectors studied the post inspection action plan and a current self-assessment report. Inspectors observed 12 lessons. They had meetings with senior managers, subject leaders and students. Students' assessed work and student files were examined.

Assessment

The college has made some progress in addressing a number of weaknesses identified in the previous inspection. There has been some progress in improving the management of the provision and in the development of quality assurance procedures although these need further refinement.

The standard of teaching has improved considerably but the grades awarded to lessons are still well below the average for the programme area, as identified in *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1998-99: Chief inspector's annual report*. All teaching is satisfactory or better. Half of the lessons observed were judged to be good or better by comparison with 18% in the previous inspection. It is a continuing strength that lessons are well planned and that teachers use a good variety of teaching methods. Teachers check regularly that students' learning is taking place. Standards funding has been well used to train staff in the development and use of differentiated teaching and learning strategies. Students' punctuality and attendance are monitored strictly. Students' progress is reviewed regularly through the tutorial system. Students receive additional support with their written work in the learning centre. The library and resource-based learning centre is well stocked with new books and videos and there are multiple copies of key texts. Students work is represented in displays in most teaching rooms.

Some key weaknesses remain. There were low pass rates at GCE A levels in sociology and history and in access to social sciences in 1999. Some pass rates had declined further from the previous year. Retention rates in 1999 were low, although there are signs of improvement for the first half of the academic year 1999-2000. Feedback on students' written work is of variable quality and teachers give insufficient guidance on how it can be improved. Spelling

and punctuation errors are not always corrected. There was low attendance in some lessons and this adversely affected students' learning.

The college should: raise pass and retention rates; develop consistency in written guidance on ways in which students can improve their work; improve students' attendance rates; improve further the standard of teaching and learning.

Revised grade: history, psychology and sociology 4.