

**Matthew Boulton College of Further and Higher Education
Reinspection of Quality Assurance: 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 quality assurance: 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. Quality assurance was awarded a grade 4.

The strengths of the provision were: the well-managed staff development; the well-designed scheme for assessing teaching and learning; and the valuable surveys of students' perceptions. The weaknesses of the provision were: the low pass rates for many college courses; the inaccurate information on students' achievements; underdeveloped and inconsistent analysis of the quality of courses; inadequate monitoring of performance against the standards set for the support services; underdeveloped use of performance indicators relating to quality and standards; an over-complicated staff appraisal system; underdeveloped recording and reporting arrangements for franchised provision, and overgenerous grading judgements in the self-assessment report. The college's self-assessment report was based on insufficient and inaccurate performance indicators. Inspectors were unable to support any of the grades the college awarded itself in the self-assessment report.

Reinspection took place over five days in February 2000. Inspectors scrutinised the post-inspection action plan, together with a new self-assessment report, and considered students' achievement and retention data and targets set by the college. They had meetings with managers, teachers, support staff and students.

Assessment

The college has made considerable progress in improving quality assurance systems and procedures since the last inspection. A quality and audit group has produced a coherent framework for quality improvement in the college that is understood by staff at all levels. This group ensures that new quality procedures are implemented effectively.

Actions to address the weaknesses have begun, but the processes and systems in place have not completed a full cycle and so it is not possible to judge their effectiveness. There are significant improvements in the accuracy of the data available on students' retention and achievements, and this has enabled staff to have confidence in their judgements. The revised systems for assuring quality of courses in college and in franchised provision are clearly documented but at an early stage of implementation. The meetings of course teams show evidence of the use of performance indicators and national benchmarks. In 1999 course reviews were subsumed into the course self-assessment reports. However, many course self-assessment reports lack detail and actions planned to address their weaknesses are not clearly specified. There are service level agreements for all college support services, and managers have begun to monitor performance against standards set. The charter has been reviewed, has measurable standards that are monitored carefully, and is available to students in several formats. A cross-college group has been formed recently and has started to monitor quality systems for support services.

The college has continued to refine its scheme for the observation of teaching and learning. Observations are carried out by managers and external consultants. The grading profiles are

now similar to the norms within the sector. There is a standard system for the appraisal of teaching and support staff that is seen by staff at all levels to be supportive and open. Staff are actively involved in the self-assessment process which is linked to the college's quality and planning cycles. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements made in the self-assessment report produced for the reinspection, but found some additional strengths and weaknesses. Some strengths had been overstated by the college.

The college should: continue to implement the new quality assurance procedures; strengthen the recording and monitoring of the quality of provision; produce more specific action plans to address weaknesses.

Revised grade: quality assurance 3.