

**Matthew Boulton College of Further and Higher Education
Reinspection of Support for Students: 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 support for students: 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. Support for students was awarded a grade 4.

The main strengths were: the impartial advice and guidance; the good range of careers materials; and the effective induction. These strengths were outweighed by a number of weaknesses: recruitment procedures unsuccessful in preventing the decline in enrolments; the lack of success in addressing issues of retention; poor co-ordination of the provision of additional learning support for numeracy and literacy; an ineffective system for identifying students' additional learning support requirements in numeracy and literacy; unclear plans to improve students' performance; underdeveloped schemes of work for tutorials.

Reinspection took place over five days in February 2000. Inspectors studied the self-assessment report and action plan in response to the last inspection. They observed five tutorials, held meetings with managers, customer services staff, tutors and students, and scrutinised a range of documents.

Assessment

There have been significant improvements in a number of areas. The college has raised the profile of support for students by opening a new customer services centre. This provides a welcoming 'one-stop-shop' where advice, guidance, careers information and enrolment facilities are available. Money from the standards fund has been used to assist with this development. There is a well structured and effective induction programme. Progress has been made in the arrangements for screening students for additional learning support. A learner development centre has been established in the vicinity of the customer services centre and a manager has been appointed. Improved diagnostic testing materials are now in use and the number of students screened has risen to 804 compared with 216 in the previous year. Staff training has been provided to support this development. As part of a strategy to increase the provision of additional support, each faculty now has a unit target and a senior manager has been given responsibility for this area of work.

There has been a significant improvement in the structure of tutorials. The revised tutorial system is supported by a handbook for review tutors that provides separate schemes of work for levels 1, 2 and for both years of level 3 courses. Tutors adapt these to suit the requirements of particular student groups. Through training, staff have acquired a good understanding of the tutorial process and its documentation. Each curriculum manager is responsible for ensuring that students receive their tutorial entitlement. Students have a clear understanding of the role of the tutor and have positive views about their tutorial experience. There is a strong emphasis upon monitoring progress and action-planning. Staff have received training on retention issues and strategies. Using standard procedures there is careful tracking of students' attendance and punctuality by tutors and curriculum managers. There is some evidence at course level to suggest that retention is improving but it is too early to judge the effectiveness of these actions.

Some weaknesses have yet to be successfully addressed. There is still a low take up of additional support amongst those students who have an identified need. Less than half of these students are receiving support through the learner development centre. The shortage of staff to complete the assessment process at the start of the year resulted in some students encountering a delay before their support was arranged. The staffing position has subsequently improved. Students' tutorial files are now centrally stored in each faculty and a curriculum manager is responsible for monitoring them. Most records are well maintained but some are incomplete or lack student comments.

The college should: raise the level of take up by students of additional support; improve the quality of some tutorial files; ensure appropriate levels of staffing are available to complete the initial assessment process.

Revised grade: support for students 3.