

North East Surrey College of Technology
Reinspection of Science: February 2001
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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**North East Surrey College of Technology
South East Region**

Reinspection of science: February 2001

Background

North East Surrey College of Technology was inspected in January 2000 and the findings published in the inspection report 50/00. Provision in science was awarded a grade 4.

During the inspection in 2000 the key strengths of science were: good achievement at GCSE; a high level of practical skill on advanced courses; and good laboratories and practical equipment. The major weaknesses were: poor achievement on GCE A level science courses; unsatisfactory retention in GCSE; a lack of student attention in biology theory lessons; an inadequate range of activities in some theory lessons; and insufficient use of target-setting.

Following the inspection the college addressed the weaknesses through action plans. A new self-assessment report for the science provision was written before the reinspection. During the reinspection, inspectors examined a range of documents, considered student achievement and retention data supplied by the college along with targets for the courses under inspection. They had meetings with managers, teachers and students, and looked at the science teaching facilities and the resource-based learning centre.

Assessment

The college has made some progress in addressing the weaknesses identified in the original inspection. The science provision at levels 2 and 3 has been much reduced. No GCSE science subjects are offered compared with three at the last inspection. The current cohort of second-year GCE A level chemistry and biology students may be the last. Achievements on these GCE A level courses are unlikely to improve over that seen in previous years. This leaves the college with a new GCE AS biology, an access to higher education course and the national certificate in science (pharmaceutical science) as the only courses at this level. Even though the GCSE subjects are no longer offered their retention rates in 2000 improved to above the national benchmarks in all but physics. Students' attention was maintained in all lessons. However, some students on the GCE AS biology course have a short concentration span and there is a need for tighter control in these lessons. The range of teaching activities used was satisfactory. Although the lesson observation profile is below that quoted for science in *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1999-2000: Chief inspector's annual report* it has improved from the last inspection and there is now no unsatisfactory teaching. Target-setting still requires further development. The targets set for retention and achievement for the current GCE A level programmes were unrealistic and in some cases have had to be dramatically reduced as the year has progressed.

Revised grade: science 3.