

Pendleton College
Reinspection of Quality Assurance: February 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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Pendleton College North West Region

Reinspection of quality assurance: February 2000

Background

Pendleton College in Salford, Greater Manchester was inspected in December 1998 and the findings were published in the inspection report 37/99. Provision in quality assurance was graded 4.

The strengths of the college were: effective arrangements for gathering students' views; well-established staff appraisal linked to staff development; thorough quality assurance arrangements for franchised provision; and effective internal verification. The major weaknesses identified in the inspection were: unsystematic arrangements to assure the quality of provision; insufficient use of performance indicators, value-added data and the findings from student surveys; inadequate course review system; lack of impact of quality assurance on retention and achievements; underdeveloped quality assurance arrangements for support services; the failure to monitor progress towards charter commitments; the failure to record complaints and responses to them; and the poor self-assessment process and report.

Following the inspection, the college prepared an action plan to address the weaknesses. It evaluated its progress against the action plan and produced an updated self-assessment report in November 1999.

The reinspection was carried out in February 2000 by an inspector working for four days. The inspector held meetings with the new principal, managers, teachers, support staff and students and examined a wide range of documents including information on students' achievement and retention since the inspection.

Assessment

The college has made good progress in addressing the key weaknesses in quality assurance identified at the last inspection. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses in the updated self-assessment report, but found that a few strengths had been overstated. The self-assessment report produced in November 1999 is comprehensive and more evaluative than that produced for the 1998 inspection. A range of evidence supports strengths and action plans address all the weaknesses. The quality assurance section of the report provides evidence on progress since the inspection and acknowledges that some weaknesses remain. Inspectors agreed that there has been progress in involving staff in the self-assessment process.

On his appointment in January 2000, the new principal established a senior managers' monitoring committee that meets fortnightly. This group, chaired by the principal, has made good progress in implementing and monitoring a number of practical measures to improve quality. The outcomes of these measures are recorded and inform the emerging strategic plan. Managers have effectively communicated to all staff both short-term and longer-term targets and related action plans to raise standards. Staff are carrying out specific actions to address weaknesses in attendance and punctuality and these are already beginning to have a measurable effect. Although inspectors did not fully agree that a comprehensive quality assurance system is in place, significant progress has been made to establish an effective system. Teachers are highly supportive of recent quality improvement measures. They are

particularly positive about steps to ensure that students join appropriate courses and about systematic reviews of students' progress. These reviews have been effective in raising the aspirations of students and helping them to identify how to improve their progress. However, there is still inconsistency and lack of rigour in course reviews, a weakness acknowledged in the self-assessment report. Course reviews do not, as yet, focus sufficiently on learning and outcomes. They do not make effective use of benchmarking and performance indicators. Action plans have broad, imprecise targets and long-term deadlines. They lack monitoring procedures and criteria.

Following the inspection, a newly formed quality assurance committee developed a quality manual in consultation with all sections of the college. The manual sets out college procedures for most aspects of the college's work. It has been helpful in assisting support staff to develop service standards and targets. There are good examples of how these have been used to improve quality. However, as the self-assessment report recognises, the manual does not identify a coherent, college-wide quality monitoring process nor demonstrate how quality assurance links into the strategic planning cycle. The manual is to be revised shortly. Students are given a wide range of opportunities to put forward their views. Students' awareness of the college charter and of their rights and responsibilities is monitored through focus groups, the student council and numerous student surveys. The surveys are analysed promptly and action plans result. Records of complaints are now kept centrally. However, though the records include the complaints and their outcomes, they do not always include the action taken to investigate the complaint.

In 1999, pass rates on advanced courses improved significantly, as did those on GNVQ intermediate and other long courses. Retention rates on all types of advanced courses declined in 1999. There is some evidence that recent measures are beginning to improve retention. Figures for the current year show a significant improvement in overall retention rates on two-year courses.

Revised grade: quality assurance 3.