

Rowley Regis College
Reinspection of Biology, Chemistry and Physics: April 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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**Rowley Regis College
West Midlands Region**

Reinspection of biology, chemistry and physics: April 2000

Background

Rowley Regis College in the borough of Sandwell was inspected in April 1999 and the findings published in the inspection report 91/99. Provision in biology, chemistry and physics was awarded a grade 4. The college attracts students from areas with very high deprivation and has a widening participation factor of 64%.

The key strengths were: good use of a variety of teaching aids; students' competent practical work and good students' achievements in GCE A level physics. The major weaknesses were: teaching not meeting the wide range of students' abilities; low retention rates on some courses; pass rates on some courses below the national average; little work experience and extra-curricular science activities; and some students enrolled on courses inappropriate for their ability.

The reinspection took place in April 2000. Inspectors observed 10 lessons and held meetings with staff and students. They examined students' work, reviewed resources and scrutinised documentation, including student achievement and retention data.

Assessment

The college is making progress in addressing weaknesses identified in the inspection. It has also substantially built on the strengths that were identified. The quality of teaching is now better. The variety in teaching methods used on GCE A level courses has increased; extensive use is made of good, safe practical work. Attendance on courses is good at 84% and better than the 79% average for the programme area according to *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1998-99; Chief inspector's annual report*. Pass rates for three of the four GCE A level subjects improved in 1999 and are now well above latest benchmarks. GCE A level human biology, GCSE science and GCSE human physiology and health results were still below the national averages. Retention rates declined on a number of courses in 1999 but those for GCE A level subjects have increased in 2000. Current in-year retention rates for first-year GCE A level subjects are excellent. The college is reviewing its science curriculum to reduce the problem of students enrolling on inappropriate courses. Management of the curriculum area has improved. Teachers have made successful efforts to improve links with schools, higher education providers and with industry through work placements. Courses are taught in well-appointed, serviced and equipped specialist accommodation.

Revised grade: biology, chemistry and physics 3.