

Rowley Regis College
Reinspection of Computing and Information Technology: 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 computing and information technology: April 2000

Background

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

The strengths were: the effective contribution of part-time courses to widen participation; good-quality course materials; and efficient and flexible use of the IT centre. The weaknesses were: the lack of specialist staff for computing; the restricted breadth and depth of the curriculum; the low retention and achievement rates; poor and erratic attendance in some classes; and lack of access to up-to-date resources for computing.

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 provision has improved since the inspection. Teaching and learning is better. Teachers make strong use of their good technical knowledge and provide students with high-quality learning materials. Assessment of students' work is thorough and teachers' comments informative. Most students are enthusiastic about the skills they acquire and make good use of software packages. Poor punctuality disrupted the start of some lessons and not all students are fully involved in lessons. Some achievements have improved. GCE A level computing pass rates are above and GCSE IT around the national averages for the sector. Since the transfer of computing and IT franchise provision to college-run programmes delivered in the community, in September 1999, early indications suggest that the retention and achievement rates for this area have also improved. The college is increasing the range of courses including the re-introduction of GNVQ intermediate IT. Computing and IT enrolments continue to grow. The increase in the numbers of computers, improvements in specification, networking of machines and the use of up-to-date software was partially financed through the standards funds. Most college machines have Internet access. Some curriculum material, computing and IT resources and on-line books are available for staff and students on the recently developed academic intranet. An additional member of staff has been appointed to deliver the specialist computing courses. A few weaknesses remain and some others were identified. These include: below average retention and attendance on some courses, unsatisfactory documentation for monitoring offsite quality and limited library bookstock. Electronic mail is not used for communications amongst staff and specialist computing and IT students.

Revised grade: computing and information technology 3.