

Rowley Regis College
Reinspection of Management: 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 management: 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. Management was awarded a grade 4. The audit service assessed financial management as weak. The college attracts students from areas with very high deprivation and has a widening participation factor of 64%.

The key strengths of management were: open and consultative style of management; well-defined lines of communication; the constructive links with external organisations; and comprehensive marketing information and research. The major weaknesses were: the failure to address the decline in students' retention and achievements; imprecise targets and unclear actions in the annual operating statement; inadequate monitoring and deployment of staff; inadequate content of monthly management accounts; and deficiencies in financial forecasts.

Reinspection took place in April 2000. Inspectors examined a range of documents and held meetings with managers and staff.

Assessment

The college is making progress in addressing weaknesses identified at the inspection and has maintained the strengths; some weaknesses remain. Student achievement and retention have improved. Operating statements include measurable targets and are cross-referenced to the strategic plan. The planning process is not linked clearly to operational and financial considerations. The effectiveness of staff deployment and monitoring has been increased. The FEFC funding unit targets have been met and part-time student enrolments are increasing. However, student numbers remain small in several classes and there was a further fall in full-time enrolments in 1999. Strategies have been developed to address the decline and there has been an increase in the number of applications for full-time places. The college has used the standards fund to obtain advice on management information and has introduced a new system, which provides more reliable data. The monitoring and promotion of equal opportunities has been extended.

The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is adequate. A new financial accounting system has been introduced. The quality and timeliness of financial reporting has improved significantly. Updated financial regulations and procedures follow best practice. The college currently has indicators of weak solvency. A recovery plan is in place, which includes a forecast that the level of deficits and borrowings will reduce significantly. A land sale is proposed which would substantially improve the solvency indicators. Action by management has improved operational efficiency. Some franchise provision has been contrary to FEFC guidance.

Revised grade: management 3.