

**Stourbridge College**  
**West Midlands Region**

**Reinspection of quality assurance: June 1999**

**Background**

Stourbridge College in the West Midlands was inspected in December 1997 and the findings published in inspection report 34/98. Quality assurance was awarded a grade 4. Key strengths were the self-assessment reviews carried out by staff, the clear quality assurance arrangements for collaborative provision and the well developed procedures for staff development. The college also offered a clearly stated commitment to providing a high quality of service to students. The major weaknesses were the few performance measures and targets, the lack of arrangements to provide a reliable overview of the college's performance and analysis of students' achievements and retention. Criteria for the evaluation of the performance of course teams were unsatisfactory, as were arrangements for reviewing the college's performance against its charter commitments. There was little use of statistics in self-assessment and some of the methods for obtaining the views of students and other customers on the quality of provision were unsatisfactory. Following the inspection the college prepared an action plan to address the weaknesses. The area was re-inspected by an inspector working 5 days during week commencing 7 June 1999. The action plan, together with a new self-assessment report, provided the main basis for the reinspection. Inspectors also examined a range of documents, considered students' achievements and retention data and targets set by the college. They had meetings with governors, managers, staff, students and some external representatives.

**Assessment**

The college's initial response to the previous inspection report on quality assurance was slow. Subsequently the college invested considerable staff time and development in addressing the weaknesses. However, the delay has meant that many of the new quality procedures are not yet fully established and are not in phase with each other. Members of the new quality improvement team have given effective leadership. Staff are well informed and have been effectively supported during a time of considerable development. The quality improvement team has produced an action plan to address all the key weaknesses identified in the report. A range of new and revised quality assurance procedures has been introduced.

About half of the key weaknesses identified in the inspection report have been rectified and are now strengths, but for some others little progress has been made so far. A significant improvement is the effective use of student data to monitor closely and report monthly upon student performance. This has been made possible by the readily available reliable data, which has also been used to make a satisfactory start in setting targets. There is good use of student data to comment upon achievements. Enhanced monitoring has been used effectively to improve the quality of provision and to support staff in using the new quality assurance procedures. Actions for improvement are recorded, however, while some actions are clearly specified, others are weak. The use of lesson observations has led to improvement in the development of teaching skills. There has been little progress in the development of performance measures for cross-college areas. Although the charter has been revised as part of the action plan, it is not comprehensive. Few of the standards are

clearly defined and monitoring is not fully effective.

The first round of revised programme reviews was carried out just before the inspection. The process was well supported by evidence but there were weaknesses in the arrangements and the reviews do not easily link to self-assessment. Many of the reviews are unclear and lack critical evaluation. Action to address the weaknesses identified in the inspection report relating to student questionnaires has largely been completed. The detailed analysis of these and other methods combine to provide effective arrangements to obtain the views of students and others. The self-assessment produced for the reinspection continued the practice of fully involving the staff. However, there were weaknesses in the process which are reflected in the variations in the quality of the college self-assessment report. The monitoring of collaborative provision, identified in the previous inspection report as a strength, remains so, although not identified in the college's self-assessment. There have been further improvements in the management of staff development, previously recognised as a strength. Training needs are clearly identified and there is effective evaluation of them.

Continuing improvement in quality assurance should include: the more rigorous grading of teaching observations; further development of arrangements to monitor the quality of cross college areas; more thorough programme reviews and greater consistency in self-assessment. To ensure continued progress the roles of committees and teams with responsibilities for quality assurance should be reviewed.

**Revised grade: quality assurance 3**