

Stroud College of Further Education
Reinspection of Mathematics, Science and Computing: November 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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Stroud College of Further Education South West Region

Reinspection of mathematics, science and computing: November 2000

Background

Stroud College of Further Education was inspected in November 1999 and the findings of the inspection were recorded in inspection report 30/00. The mathematics, science and computing provision was graded 4.

Key strengths identified during the inspection were: high pass rates on GNVQ IT courses in 1999; good library resources for computing; good teaching materials. Weaknesses included: poor achievement rates in mathematics and on franchised courses; low retention rates on some courses; ineffective teaching of groups which include students with different abilities; and unsatisfactory management of GCSE mathematics.

Reinspection took place over four days in November 2000 by one inspector who observed 13 lessons. Meetings were held with managers, staff and students. A wide range of documentation was scrutinised and students' work was examined.

Assessment

The college has made progress in addressing a number of the weaknesses identified during the previous inspection. The overall quality of lessons observed was higher. Teachers provided good individual help to students. The key skills of all students are assessed on entry and the results used to inform decisions about which levels they will work towards. Students' practical skills in IT are good. In some lessons teachers still did not take account of the full range of ability within the group; less able students fell behind while the more able quickly completed the task and were left with little to do.

Since the last inspection the range of science courses has been reduced. GCE A levels in science subjects are no longer offered and human physiology and health is the only science subject available at GCSE level. The college now places greater emphasis on vocationally oriented provision but there are no vocational science courses at foundation, intermediate and advanced level. Courses at foundation level have been introduced in mathematics and IT. There remains a wide range of computing and IT courses.

Achievement rates have improved on most courses. Results in GCSE mathematics have improved to above the national average. The college has reduced the provision of franchised courses and achievement on these courses has improved significantly. The number of students taking in-house computer literacy and information technology courses has increased and retention and achievement improved; achievement now being significantly above national averages. The college recognises in its self-assessment report that retention on GNVQ advanced IT and GCSE mathematics courses is poor. Measures have been taken to address this issue and to improve achievement but it is too early to assess their impact. Achievement on the GNVQ intermediate IT has improved to significantly above national figures. Achievement on GCE A level courses deteriorated in 2000 to well below national figures but the college has ceased to offer these courses. The management of GCSE mathematics has been integrated with application of number. Course teams meet regularly. Key skills tutors liaise with teachers of vocational courses.

Issues still to be addressed include the quality of teaching in mixed ability groups and the involvement of students in theory lessons.

Revised grade: mathematics, science and computing 3.