

West Kent College
Reinspection of engineering: December 1998
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. 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.

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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**West Kent College
South East Region**

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Background

West Kent College was inspected between September 1996 and June 1997 and the findings were published in inspection report 119/97. Provision in engineering was graded 4.

The strengths of the provision were that: the teaching of practical aspects of engineering was good and NVQ assessment was well organised. These strengths were outweighed by weaknesses which included: poor and declining achievement and retention rates on most courses; poor classroom-based lessons during which students were often required to copy notes from the board for long periods of time; teachers' failure to check what was being learned; students' loss of interest and motivation in many lessons, which went unremarked by teachers; teachers' failure to make much use of visual learning aids; marking of work which did not give guidance to students on what they had done wrong and what they had to do to improve; inadequate clarity about the grading criteria for assessments and assignments; poor management of the timing of assessments and assignments; poor punctuality in some classes; poor co-ordination between teachers which occasionally led to students being taught the same topic in different lessons.

The provision was reinspected in December 1998. The inspector observed 10 teaching sessions, held meetings with senior managers and curriculum managers, examined students' work and a wide range of documentation relating to the college and its courses, and visited the learning resource centres.

Assessment

The college has made progress in addressing the weaknesses identified during the original inspection. Student retention and achievement rates have shown a marked improvement. Course and lesson planning, and the quality of teaching and learning have improved. Half the lessons observed had more strengths than weaknesses. They were well planned and teachers succeeded in sustaining the interest and attention of students for the whole lesson. The organisation of courses has improved; the assignments given to students now are evenly distributed throughout their course. No poor lessons were observed. In the best lessons, teachers use their own and students' experiences to illustrate the topic being taught and to reinforce learning. Good use is made of learning support assistants to enable students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to progress to all courses. Assessments and assignments are of a good standard. The quality of teachers' marking has improved and in many cases, written comments provide students with useful information on how their work could be improved. The faculty's learning centre, with a full-time support assistant, provides a valuable learning resource for students. The practical facilities, particularly the motor vehicle workshop, are well maintained and there is a good level and range of equipment. There are some weaknesses still to be addressed: teachers' planning is not always thorough enough to ensure that lesson time is used effectively, students' interest maintained and learning checked regularly; guidance on assignments is not strong enough to ensure that students respond at a level appropriate to the course; assignment grading criteria are not always sufficiently clear or related to the assignment brief; teaching

materials are of variable quality. There is some way to go in developing a self-critical culture in which an honest appraisal of teaching and learning, and students' achievements contribute to an effective self-assessment report.

Revised grade: engineering 3.