

East Devon College
Reinspection of Governance: June 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.

*Cheylesmore House
Quinton Road
Coventry CV1 2WT
Telephone 02476 863000
Fax 02476 862100
website: <http://www.fefc.ac.uk>*

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East Devon College South West Region

Reinspection of governance: June 2000

Background

East Devon College was inspected in March 1999 and the findings were published in inspection report 65/99. Provision in governance was awarded grade 4 and the FEFC's audit service judged that governance was weak.

The strengths of the provision were: the commitment and skills of members of the corporation; good communications with college staff and students; and the regular training and briefing events for governors. The main weaknesses identified at inspection were: insufficient progress in addressing the significant strategic challenges facing the college; delay in appointing a new principal; inadequate clerking support for some key matters; inadequate oversight of the college's strategic plan; little use of performance indicators to analyse students' achievements; lack of systematic appraisal of senior postholders; inadequate involvement in self-assessment.

The provision was reinspected in June 2000, by an inspector and an auditor working for four days. They held meetings with senior managers, students, staff and governors and examined a wide range of documentation.

Assessment

Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified by the college in its self-assessment report. Since the last inspection, governors have made significant progress in addressing many areas of concern. Progress has also been made in addressing a few of the weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report.

The FEFC's audit service concludes that within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is adequate. The corporation operates in accordance with the instrument and articles of government. It also substantially fulfils its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC.

The college has made progress in addressing many of the significant strategic issues described in the previous inspection report. Enrolments of first year students in 1999-2000 have increased slightly. The college forecasts that it will achieve an operating surplus for the current financial year. An accommodation strategy has been developed and approved by the corporation. Governors have made effective arrangements to appoint a new principal to succeed the current principal from July 2000.

Governors have contributed to the development of the college's strategic plan. At each corporation meeting, they consider the progress towards achievement of the objectives in the operating statement and receive reports from committees. Some measures to monitor the corporation's performance have been developed.

The committee structure of the corporation has improved. There are detailed terms of reference and standing orders for each committee. The new standards committee has oversight of students' achievements and retention rates. Members of the finance and general purposes committee receive a detailed monthly financial report which includes targets and

performance indicators as well as a detailed 12-month rolling cashflow forecast. Arrangements for the appraisal of senior postholders have been established, and specific annual targets have been agreed with the corporation. Outcomes of these appraisals are reported to the corporation.

The business of the corporation is clearly recorded and good practice issues have been updated to reflect latest guidance. Agendas and papers are received at least seven days before meetings. A new clerk was appointed in September 1999. Prior to this, the transfer to the revised instrument and articles of governance had not been handled well.

Governors continue to demonstrate a commitment to the college. There are four new governors whose skills complement those of longer serving members. As recognised by the college, some governors have insufficient knowledge of the college and its curriculum. Although new governors receive an informal induction to their role, the college has yet to develop fully a structured induction and training programme. Governors maintain contact with staff and students in a number of ways. A few are members of the college's employer advisory committees. Some attend college events, such as open days and exhibitions, and are able to meet staff and students at these events.

Revised grade: governance 3.