

Regent College
Reinspection of Governance: May 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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Regent College East Midlands Region

Reinspection of governance: May 2000

Background

Regent College was inspected in March 1999 and the findings were published in inspection report 72/99. Governance was awarded a grade 4.

The key strengths were: high level of attendance at corporation meetings; active involvement in revising the mission statement and in strategic planning; comprehensive monitoring of the academic performance of the college; good working relationships with senior management. The key weaknesses were: no formal governor training programme; inappropriate membership on one committee; ineffective operation of some committees; ineffective procedures for the appointment of new governors; inadequate monitoring of college finances. The FEFC's audit service concluded that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college was weak. The corporation did not substantially conduct its business in accordance with the instrument and articles of government. It also did not substantially fulfil its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC.

Following the inspection the college prepared a post-inspection plan with detailed actions to improve each of the main weaknesses identified in the governance report. The college revised its self-assessment report in May 2000. The revised self-assessment report includes a detailed action plan for 2000-01.

An inspector and an auditor reinspected governance over three days from 16 May 2000. They examined a range of documents including the new self-assessment report and held meetings with governors, the principal, the clerk to the corporation and senior staff.

Assessment

The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is adequate. The corporation substantially conducts its business 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 the key weaknesses identified during the previous inspection. The operation of committees has been reviewed. The terms of reference of committees have been clarified. A new cycle of committee meetings has been established which allows their conclusions to influence recommendations to the corporation. The inappropriate membership of one committee has ceased. The search committee is working effectively. The operation of the audit committee is improving. The monitoring of the college finances has improved. Governors continue to receive monthly management accounts and reports on progress against targets. The content and presentation of these reports have been further improved. The corporation has not approved some key documents, mainly relating to audit matters. Governors held a training day in January 2000 which had a particular focus on a number of the issues identified in the inspection report including the monitoring of college finances. A formal governor training programme is in the process of development and is not yet complete.

The written appointment process for governors is not comprehensive or publicly available. A formal system of appraisal has been developed and the principal and the clerk appraised, but a professional development plan is not in place for the principal, clerk or other senior postholders. Arrangements for the corporation to review its own effectiveness are being developed. The recent changes in the composition of the corporation have produced a good skills, gender, and ethnic balance. An initial audit of governor skills has been undertaken, but has not matched the generic and specialist skills of governors against a desired skills profile for the corporation. There is a clear process for the development of the annual strategic objectives and associated operating statements as identified in the initial inspection report. The corporation's method of reviewing progress against these objectives and statements is not clear.

Revised grade: governance 3.