

**Stroud College of Further Education
Reinspection of Governance: 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 governance: November 2000

Background

Stroud College of Further Education was inspected in November 1999 and the findings were published in inspection report 30/00. Governance was awarded a grade 4 and the audit opinion was that the governance of the college was weak.

Key strengths during the inspection were: the broad range of governors' skills and local knowledge; the high level of commitment demonstrated by board members; and the careful attention to the college's self-assessment. Weaknesses were: the inadequate monitoring of college finances; the slow strategic response to shortfalls in funding; some committees which were not fully effective; the insufficiently rigorous monitoring of students' achievements and retention; and the incomplete monitoring of corporation performance.

The reinspection was undertaken by one inspector and an auditor working for four days during November 2000. A wide range of documentary information was examined, including minutes of corporation and committee meetings. Interviews were held with governors, managers and the clerk to the corporation.

Assessment

Inspectors and auditors judged that the college has made progress in addressing a number of the key weaknesses identified in the last inspection. They agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the latest self-assessment report but identified some shortcomings in the monitoring of the strategic plan and concluded that the financial position of the college remains weak.

Within the scope of its review, the FEFC's audit service concludes that 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 corporation has taken effective action to improve its monitoring of college finances. A qualified accountant now chairs the finance and general purposes committee which meets monthly. Management accounts are formally monitored at both finance and general purposes committee and corporation meetings. Improved management information has resulted in the out-turn budget for the last financial year broadly matching that forecast. The financial position of the college, however, remains weak with a forecast of net current liabilities for the next two years.

The audit committee has adopted a rigorous approach to ensuring recommendations from previous audit reports are implemented. Significant progress has been made in implementing recommendations included in the audit service report dated June 2000. The corporation has approved a set of standing orders and an updated code of conduct. Minutes of corporation and committee meetings clearly state whether an item has been considered or approved. Some papers are tabled at meetings although this is improving.

Strategic planning has improved. There is a timetable for monitoring activity against both the strategic and recovery plans. However, progress towards achieving the targets set has not yet been reported to the full board and some targets are not clearly defined.

The quality committee receives and debates detailed reports on retention and achievement, self-assessment and most recently, the results of employer perceptions of the college.

The corporation has introduced an evaluation questionnaire to measure levels of satisfaction with the conduct of corporation meetings. It is also monitoring individual and overall levels of attendance. The self-assessment report recognises that more formal measures of performance are at an early stage of development.

Revised grade: governance 3.