

**East Berkshire College
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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East Berkshire College South East Region

Reinspection of governance: November 2000

Background

East Berkshire College was inspected in November 1999 and the findings published in inspection report 29/00. Governance was awarded a grade 4.

The key strength was constructive input of governors into the strategic plan. The major weaknesses were: lack of regular, systematic monitoring by governors of the strategic plan; insufficient monitoring of student retention and achievement; non-compliance with the instrument and articles of government; non-compliance with some aspects of Council Circular 98/15, *Audit Code of Practice*; lack of clarity in formally recording corporation business. The FEFC's audit service concluded that governance was weak. The corporation did not substantially conduct its business in accordance with the instrument and articles of government. It did not fulfil its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC.

Reinspection took place in November 2000. Inspectors and auditors examined a range of documents and had meetings with governors and managers.

Assessment

Inspectors and auditors judged that significant progress had been made in addressing the weaknesses identified in November 1999. Following the resignation of the chair, the confirmation of the changed composition of the governing body and the completion of some members' terms of office, six new governors have been appointed. Governors have invested a significant amount of time and effort in ensuring that the work of the corporation is up to date, well managed and focused on the critical areas of the strategic plan. Governors have approved a revision to the strategic plan that is concise and has clear performance targets. A newly established strategic development committee is just beginning to monitor the strategic plan and make recommendations to the board about its implementation and future development. Key policies are now reviewed by the corporation through relevant committees.

The committee structure has been revised, following a review led by a governor. The structure was approved in July 2000, and so is just beginning to be put into operation. Governors intend to review the committee structure after six months and this should help to address the minor difficulties of overlap of responsibilities and the variation in detail of terms of reference. The audit committee has been re-established since the last inspection and now operates in accordance with Council Circular 98/15, *Audit Code of Practice*. A full internal audit programme was completed in 1999-2000 and the committee has played a leading role in beginning to formulate a risk management framework covering key aspects of the college's operations. The search and review committee is just beginning to operate effectively. Recent appointments support the corporation's objective of ensuring that membership reflects the composition of the local community. An initial skills audit has been conducted, but was not used to identify clearly gaps in the skills base of governors. The standards committee has only recently identified the level and type of information that it requires in order to monitor effectively the quality of the college's academic performance. The attachment of the recently appointed director of planning and quality to the committee is beginning to support its work,

but the monitoring of outcomes is being hampered by the lack of reliable management information. Governors are currently considering ways in which their information requirements can be met most effectively.

An extended and improved induction programme has enabled new governors to settle quickly into their role. A structured training programme has been devised to ensure that all governors have a good understanding of the college, the sector and their responsibilities. The programme was only approved in July 2000, so it is too early to judge its effectiveness. Governors all participate in a link scheme where each is attached to an area of the curriculum. The guidance on the purpose and operation of this scheme is limited.

The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, 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. There have been a few instances of non-compliance with the instrument and articles of government during the past twelve months. However, procedures are now in place to ensure that such instances do not recur.

To improve further, governors should continue to critically review their own performance and that of the college, and continue to take decisive action within their newly established culture of openness and transparency.

Revised grade: governance 3.