

**Furness College**  
**Reinspection of Governance: February 2001**  
**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>*

© FEFC 2001

*You may photocopy this report and use extracts in promotional or other material provided quotes are accurate, and the findings are not misrepresented.*

## **Furness College North West Region**

### **Reinspection of governance: February 2001**

#### **Background**

Furness College was inspected in January 2000 and the findings were published in inspection report 52/00. Provision in governance was graded 4 and the audit service opinion was that governance was weak.

The strength of the provision was an effective policy of openness. The weaknesses were: inadequate financial monitoring; inappropriate delegation to subcommittees; insufficient involvement in target-setting and in monitoring college performance; and no monitoring of equal opportunities or of the statement on disability.

The college was reinspected over four days in February 2001 by an inspector and an auditor. They held meetings with governors, managers, and the clerk and attended a board meeting. They examined a range of documents including corporation and committee minutes and other documents relating to the self-assessment report. The inspector and auditor did not agree with all the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report and found additional weaknesses.

#### **Assessment**

The inspector and the auditor agreed that the college had taken action to address many weaknesses identified in the previous inspection. However, some weaknesses have not been fully addressed and additional weaknesses have emerged. The inspector agreed that governors have continued to be actively involved with the strategic planning process and they attend an annual planning day. The monitoring of progress towards strategic objectives by the corporation is not sufficiently rigorous and there is still no formal monitoring plan. The monitoring of the college performance remains inadequate. The quality committee now receives monthly reports on current retention figures, and the corporation and finance and employment committee receive monthly financial reports. Minutes from quality committee to the corporation do not adequately raise issues of concern. Information on retention and achievement for the year 1998-99 presented to the corporation did not contain sufficient detail to allow governors to identify any areas which were underperforming. At the time of reinspection the corporation had not received a report for 1999-2000. Governors' awareness of curriculum issues is limited. There are now links between individual governors and service areas of the college but there are no links with curriculum areas. The principal presented a report on equal opportunities to the corporation in July 2000 but this was inadequate for monitoring progress. A more detailed report has been prepared but not yet received by the corporation. There is no annual report on health and safety presented to the corporation. Performance indicators for monitoring the corporation's own performance were agreed in December 2000. The corporation is now set a target for attendance of 80%. In 1999-2000, the overall attendance at corporation meetings was 69%.

The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is weak. The corporation does not conduct its business in accordance with the instrument and articles of government. It also does not fulfil all of its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC. The college reported deficits in the years 1997-98 to 1999-2000. On the basis of the college's performance over the last three years the

corporation has not met its statutory responsibilities in relation to the financial health of the college. In allowing staffing costs to reach 84% of total income in 1999-2000, the corporation has not secured the efficient, economical and effective management of the college's resources.

The corporation has maintained its policy of openness. Corporation and committee minutes and papers are held in the college library. This availability is advertised in the college. The corporation has an approved code of conduct, standing orders and a policy on access to information to guide its business. These have been updated recently. Governors and senior staff complete a register of interests. The delegation of authority to subcommittees by the board is now appropriate. The corporation has a determined membership of 17. There was one vacancy at the time of inspection. A search committee has clear selection criteria and a written appointment process. Vacancies are advertised publicly. The contribution of governors is assessed before reappointment. Seven new governors have been appointed in the last 12 months. The corporation has had three chairs in the same period. A recent skills audit indicates gaps in experience in education, quality and student issues. There is also no member with a legal background. Attendance at some training events has been good. At others it has been poor. The corporation has revised its committee structure and now conducts its business through five committees, each of which has approved terms of reference. However, the audit committee has not adequately monitored the actions by management in response to internal audit recommendations. The finance and employment committee reviews the most recent management accounts at each meeting.

**Revised grade:** governance 4.