

**Furness College**  
**Reinspection of Management: 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.*

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## **Furness College North West Region**

### **Reinspection of management: February 2001**

#### **Background**

Furness College was inspected in January 2000 and the findings published in inspection report 52/00. Management was awarded a grade 4.

The key strengths were: effective communications; and extensive, purposeful external links. The major weaknesses were: lack of rigour in operational planning; inadequate monitoring of college performance; and weak monitoring on some aspects of equal opportunities. The FEFC's audit service concluded that, within the scope of its assessment, financial management was weak.

Reinspection took place over four days in February 2001. The inspector and auditor examined a range of documents and had meetings with managers, staff and stakeholders.

#### **Assessment**

The college has experienced a period of instability in management since the last inspection and fundamental weaknesses remain. The previous principal resigned in August 2000 and the deputy principal became acting principal. A new principal was appointed in January 2001 and is due to take up post at the end of March. The acting principal went on sick leave in January and the week before the reinspection the director of resources became acting principal. There was a restructure of management responsibilities last year and many managers have changed roles a number of times within the previous five years. In addition to the principal and deputy, the college management team consists of six directors covering curriculum, planning, student services, finance, resources and quality assurance.

The inspector agreed with the college self-assessment that there are effective channels of communication through newsletters, team meetings, electronic mail and surgeries. Many staff are positive about the team they work with and, in some cases, the close working relationship with their director. Curriculum managers are working well together. The college has successfully relocated to one site. Relations with external partners remain good. There has been additional training on equal opportunities since the last inspection and monitoring reports have been submitted to the academic board.

Although some aspects of college provision have improved since the last inspection, and much associated with the curriculum was judged to be satisfactory at the time, there is a lack of clear leadership and direction. Planning is poor. There are too many plans and they are not documents which spell out clearly what the college intends to achieve within a particular year and how it will be achieved. Staff do not have a clear view of what the priorities are. A voluntary redundancy exercise took place last year to reduce staffing costs. This was not carried out within a clear framework of strategic and operational priorities. Curriculum planning for September 2000 was undertaken in this context and was not sufficiently based on sound marketing information. There is a lack of rigour in performance monitoring, especially in relation to teaching and learning and student achievement.

The college acknowledges that there are key weaknesses in the management information systems. An attempt has been made to develop greater staff ownership of the data by

providing access on the intranet but the impact of this has not been sufficiently monitored. The inspector found that data on student retention and achievement for 1999-2000 are not reliable. Changes to systems and staffing have hampered progress. There is incompatibility across systems. The college is still trying to address fundamental issues regarding enrolments and course registration in order to ensure data are inputted correctly. There is a system for recording withdrawals and transfers but there are often delays in carrying out this function. Achievements are not recorded within an appropriate timescale.

The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is weak. The college recorded its third consecutive deficit in 1999-2000. The unaudited financial statements for that year show negative reserves of nearly £1 million and net current liabilities of nearly £300,000. Financial estimates for 1999-2000 were unrealistic. At a time of increasing financial difficulty during 1999-2000, the college increased its staff costs to 84% of income. The college has since appointed an appropriately qualified accountant and action has been taken to reduce staff numbers. Improvements have been made to the content and timing of financial information which is presented to the college management team and budget holders. Audited financial statements for 1999-2000, whilst due by 31 December 2000, have not yet been submitted to the FEFC. The final student data return to the FEFC for 1998-99 has only recently been agreed. The most recent annual report from the college's internal auditors concludes that the college does not have a satisfactory framework of internal control. Documented financial procedures are not comprehensive and are not up to date.

**Revised grade:** management 4.