

Hadlow College
Reinspection of Governance: December 1999
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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Hadlow College South East Region

Reinspection of governance: December 1999

Background

Hadlow College was inspected in March 1998 and the findings published in inspection report 82/98. Provision in governance was graded 5 and the audit service's opinion was that governance was weak.

The strength of the provision was the contribution of the governors to the development of the curriculum. The main weaknesses identified at inspection were: failure to fulfil responsibilities under the financial memorandum; inadequate oversight of the activities of the college; poor compliance with the instrument and articles of government; inadequate clerking; insufficient awareness and implementation of best practice in governance; a reactive approach towards strategic planning; inadequate involvement in monitoring the quality of the curriculum and in self-assessment activities.

The college's commentary on progress against the post-inspection action plan and the governance self-assessment report address all of the previously identified weaknesses. The self-assessment report describes the strengths as: compliance with instrument and articles of government; compliance with the financial memorandum; independent clerkship; improved systems of governance; governors with an appropriate range of skills and experience and commitment to the college; effective oversight of college finances. The areas of weakness identified are: governors inconsistent knowledge of the college; inconsistency amongst governors in their ability to monitor the activities of the college; governors insufficiently informed on future strategic developments in further and higher education sectors; underdeveloped links between the governing body and operational staff.

The provision was reinspected in December 1999 by an inspector and an auditor working for a total of three days. They held meetings with governors, senior managers and the clerk to the corporation, and reviewed a wide range of documentation.

Assessment

Governors have considered all the weaknesses in governance described in the last inspection report. Significant progress has been made in addressing a majority of the areas of concern, but there are still some weaknesses.

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 corporation recognised the importance of the procedural issues raised in the last inspection report and formed a governance committee to make recommendations to the corporation on a restructuring of all governance arrangements. An independent clerk to the corporation was also appointed in April 1998. The governance committee, in conjunction with the clerk, conducted a full review of the corporation's policies and procedures for governance. As a result, in November 1998, the corporation's governance structures were completely reconstituted. Continuing work by the governance committee, aided by the clerk,

has ensured a greater awareness and adoption of aspects of good practice. The procedural issues raised in the last inspection report have now been addressed and the clerking of the college is good.

The corporation now exercises effective oversight of the finances of the college, including ensuring adherence to the requirements of the financial memorandum with the FEFC. Governors receive detailed monthly management accounts which are reviewed at both committee and corporation level. Governors were involved in setting financial objectives aimed at achieving and securing the financial viability of the college and these are being achieved.

The corporation has yet to formally consider the establishment of a quality or standards committee. However, a governor with substantial educational expertise has recently been recruited to enhance the corporation's awareness of curriculum issues. Governors receive detailed reports from the academic board at corporation meetings. As noted in the self-assessment report, governors collectively have an uneven knowledge of curriculum areas, and links with them, although some are well established.

Governors' involvement in strategic planning has improved since the last inspection. They oversaw the development of the college's 1998 to 2001 strategic plan, 'new directions' and have closely monitored the implementation of the accommodation strategy. However, other than on financial matters, there is only limited evidence of monitoring progress against the objectives set in new directions. The corporation has yet to develop a process for, or formal targets against which, it can assess its own effectiveness on an annual basis.

Membership of the corporation continues to encompass a broad range of skills and expertise. There is a phased retirement plan to ensure a regular inflow of new ideas. Recruitment of new governors is by open advertisement. Appointments are made to meet a planned mix of skills approved by the corporation in 1998.

Revised grade: governance 3.