

Newark and Sherwood 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.

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Newark and Sherwood College East Midlands

Reinspection of governance: February 2001

Background

Newark and Sherwood College was inspected in January 2000 and the findings published in March 2000. Provision in governance was graded 4.

The key strengths were: the governors' range of skills and experience; and frequent and well-attended meetings. The major weaknesses were: insufficient rigour in the monitoring of their own and the college's performance; ineffective conduct of some corporation business; insufficient financial monitoring information; inappropriate clerking arrangements; and poor procedures for openness and accountability.

Reinspection took place in February 2001. Inspectors and an auditor examined a range of documents and had meetings with governors, the clerk and managers. An inspector attended a meeting of the corporation during the reinspection.

Assessment

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.

Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements identified by the college in its self-assessment. Progress towards redressing some weaknesses found at the inspection had been made before reinspection. The college identified a number of former areas of weakness where it had made improvements since inspection and inspectors agreed with this assessment.

Governors have an appropriate range of skills that are effectively deployed to support the work of the corporation. They demonstrate a strong commitment to the college and its mission. Since the inspection seven new appointments and three re-appointments have been made to the corporation. These appointments have strengthened further governors' knowledge of and participation in the local community. Partly as a consequence, the corporation has enhanced its determination of the strategic direction of the college.

There has been substantial progress in the development of procedures and practices for the selection, appointment, induction and training of new governors. Inspectors agreed that this is an area of strength. Following a skills audit of existing members to identify gaps in corporate expertise, vacancies are advertised. Applicants receive comprehensive and informative application packs. References are taken up and following a two-stage interview process successful candidates are appointed. Candidates are given opportunities to inform themselves about the college and the work of the corporation at the time, and in the period following, an interview.

In general, governor development opportunities have improved. All governors have been involved in the review of procedures to enhance the efficiency of carrying out corporation business and in strategic planning. Training on audit and finance has been effective. Some

governors attend college staff development days and college management team meetings where strategic planning is undertaken.

Following the inspection report, advice on developments was taken from external consultants. Subsequently a number of areas of corporation activities have been improved. These include a more effective contribution to strategic planning, a programme of training for existing governors, the arrangements for reviewing individual governors' performance, the monitoring of financial and audit matters, the open conduct of corporation business and the growing links between governors and stakeholders.

Weaknesses remain in a few areas. Following the appointment and resignation of an external clerk, inappropriate clerking arrangements had not been fully remedied at the time of the reinspection, though a shortlist of candidates for a new appointment had been drawn up and an interview date set. Governors did not exercise sufficient oversight of franchised provision immediately after the inspection and an existing contract was extended. The number of units involved was not significant.

As acknowledged in the self-assessment, there is no formal policy for dealing with fraud or irregularity and the corporation had not approved a draft 'whistleblowing' policy. Governors acknowledge and inspectors agreed that the corporation makes insufficient use of appropriate performance indicators and benchmarks in monitoring college performance.

Revised grade: governance 3.