

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

**The Marine
Society College
of the Sea**

July 1996

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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The Further Education Funding Council 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 every four years. The inspectorate also assesses and reports nationally on the curriculum and gives advice to the FEFC's quality assessment committee.

College inspections are carried out in accordance with the framework and guidelines described in Council Circular 93/28. They involve full-time inspectors and registered part-time inspectors who have knowledge and experience in the work they inspect. Inspection teams normally include at least one member who does not work in education and a member of staff from the college being inspected.

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GRADE DESCRIPTORS

The procedures for assessing quality are set out in the Council Circular 93/28. During their inspection, inspectors assess the strengths and weaknesses of each aspect of provision they inspect. Their assessments are set out in the reports. They also use a five-point grading scale to summarise the balance between strengths and weaknesses.

The descriptors for the grades are:

- grade 1 – provision which has many strengths and very few weaknesses*
- grade 2 – provision in which the strengths clearly outweigh the weaknesses*
- grade 3 – provision with a balance of strengths and weaknesses*
- grade 4 – provision in which the weaknesses clearly outweigh the strengths*
- grade 5 – provision which has many weaknesses and very few strengths.*

By June 1995, some 208 college inspections had been completed. The grade profiles for aspects of cross-college provision and programme areas for the 208 colleges are shown in the following table.

College grade profiles 1993-95

Activity	Inspection grades				
	1	2	3	4	5
Programme area	9%	60%	28%	3%	<1%
Cross-college provision	13%	51%	31%	5%	<1%
Overall	11%	56%	29%	4%	<1%

FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 96/96

**THE MARINE SOCIETY COLLEGE OF THE SEA
GREATER LONDON REGION
Inspected April 1996**

Summary

The Marine Society is a registered charity which has provided assistance to British seafarers for more than 200 years. Among its services are the College of the Sea and the Seafarers Libraries, which receive a contribution towards their costs from the FEFC. The College of the Sea offers distance learning courses, for GCE A level and GCSE qualifications, to seafarers scattered throughout the world. Teaching is carried out by part-time tutors who correspond with their students. Additionally, three part-time tutors offer courses at sea in physical education and art. Tutors are strongly committed to their work. Standards of marking are high and students receive excellent commentaries on their assignments. Those students who complete their courses achieve good examination results which help them to develop their careers. Standards of educational advice and guidance are good. The provision of technical or specialist books to support the courses is a valuable addition to the successful Seafarers Libraries service. The number of students who might gain from the educational provision made by The Marine Society has fallen sharply with the decline in the British naval, mercantile and fishing fleets. As a result, the range of courses that can be offered is narrow and the proportion of income which is spent on support staff and fixed costs rather than on teachers, is high.

The grade awarded as a result of the inspection is given below.

Provision	Grade
FEFC-funded provision	2

INTRODUCTION

1 Inspection of The Marine Society College of the Sea took place during the week beginning 15 April 1996, when three inspectors spent a total of eight-and-a-half days at the college. There were meetings with the chairman of The Marine Society, the chairman of its education and training committee, the general secretary, the head of education of the College of the Sea, the deputy general secretary (administration), the deputy general secretary (operations) and the head of library services. In the six months preceding the inspection, inspectors met tutors and students and met or held telephone conversations with representatives of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary and a large merchant shipping line, P&O Containers. Meetings were also held with tutors and students. Questionnaires were sent to 97 seafarers who are current or former students of the College of the Sea, and 28 were returned. Telephone conversations were held with teachers from two schools involved in the Sea Lines scheme. Policy statements, publicity materials, publications, minutes of committees, working papers, students' records, examination statistics and many other documents were examined.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 The Marine Society was founded in 1756 to encourage men and boys of good character to join the Royal Navy at the start of the Seven Years War. It was incorporated by act of parliament in 1772 to apprentice poor boys to the Royal Navy and the merchant navy, to equip them with clothing, and to provide them with pre-sea education. The society's object under the Charities (The Marine Society) Order 1976, is 'to support the advancement of the education and relief in need of seafarers'. Seafarers, for the purpose of the order, are 'persons of all ranks and grades who have served, are serving or intend to serve in the Royal Navy, the British Merchant Navy and Fishing Fleets, and persons who are serving in the navies, merchant navies and fishing fleets of such other countries as the governors from time to time determine'.

3 The Marine Society fulfils the objects of its charter through a number of inter-related operations, including The Marine Society College of the Sea, Seafarers Libraries, Sea Training, Sea Lines, through publishing, and by providing scholarships and financial assistance to seafarers. The society's income derives from legacies, subscriptions, trusts, donations from individuals and companies, grants from public authorities and from its investments.

4 The College of the Sea, as part of The Marine Society, receives a grant from the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) to contribute to its activities in seafarer education and training. The College of the Sea satisfies the objects of The Marine Society in the following ways:

- advising seafarers on education and training
- providing supported self-study programmes, either directly or through other agencies

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- providing examination facilities ashore and at sea
 - providing sea-going art and physical education tutors
 - administrating competitions to encourage educational development through artistic and literary expression
 - providing financial support for education and training, including the administration of scholarships, bursaries and loans
 - making loans of textbooks and study materials
 - providing careers advice to intending seafarers
 - carrying out research into the employment, education and well-being of seafarers at sea and ashore.

5 Seafarers Libraries meet the society's objects by providing a comprehensive library service for the use of seafarers in ships and offshore installations. A proportion of the FEFC's grant to the College of the Sea is for educational reference books that are used by seafarers in support of their professional studies.

6 The numbers of British ships and seafarers have declined sharply over the past 20 years. There are now about 4,700 British officers and 7,800 British ratings serving in British registered ships. There are an additional 3,000 British officers and 1,900 British ratings in the British-controlled fleet, with an estimated further 8,000 British officers serving on foreign ships. The average age of British officers is 40 and of ratings 37 years; these figures are likely to continue to rise because the recruitment of young people is low. Most seafarers on courses or receiving advice from the college are serving on ships of the British Merchant Navy and the Royal Fleet Auxiliary, scattered throughout the world.

7 The Marine Society is based in Lambeth, London. It has an attractive building close to Lambeth Palace. The building is also used by the headquarters of the Sea Cadet Corps, the Nautical Institute, the Transport Trust and the World Ship Trust.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

8 The College of the Sea provides distance learning courses for General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level) and General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) subjects. Examinations are usually taken at sea. The number of students starting courses was 337 in 1978 but it declined to 37 in 1992 and 22 in 1995. The length of time that students remain on courses varies greatly and, at the time of inspection, the college was administering programmes for about 100 seafarers. Half the current students are serving with the Royal Fleet Auxiliary and the remainder with about 20 different merchant shipping companies. Where the college is unable to offer a particular GCE or GCSE subject it pays for students to enrol with other distance learning organisations. The college provides the same personal support for all students, whether they are taking their courses from it directly, or through another organisation.

9 The College of the Sea acts as the postbox in the United Kingdom for 70 students who are taking Open University courses and it makes arrangements for examinations to be taken at sea. The college co-operates with other organisations, such as the Institute of Chartered Shipbrokers and the Chartered Institute of Transport, by publicising and providing access to their courses. The college also has arrangements with some shipping companies to provide English language training for their foreign ratings. The college does not offer vocational courses but refers students to three maritime training colleges in England.

10 The college has three sea-going tutors who advise the crews of some P&O and Cunard cruise ships on fitness and healthy living, and who teach art on tankers operated by Shell. Each shipping company provides the tutors' accommodation and food, and the college pays a fee. The college organises annual competitions for seafarers in painting, photography, poetry, short story writing and various crafts. In 1995, there were 157 entries from 57 seafarers. In addition to providing prizes for the winners and runners-up, all entrants receive a written critique of their work from the college.

11 The college's Sea Lines scheme links seafarers to participating schools to promote school children's awareness of the importance of the shipping industry. Each seafarer visits the designated school, exchanges correspondence with its pupils, and is sometimes able to organise a visit to a ship for the children. Teachers say that geography is made more interesting by pupils following the voyages of the seafarer; their English is improved by letter writing and preparing audio tapes; and pupils' work in mathematics benefits from study of time, speed, and navigation. In 1996, 87 schools and with 85 seafarers employed by 37 different companies are involved in the scheme.

12 The College of the Sea publicises its services through advertising, personal recommendation and promotion by employers. The Marine Society magazine *The Seafarer* is distributed to subscribers and included in ships' libraries three times a year. The society newsletter *The Seadog* is distributed 10 times a year to sea cadet units, youth organisations and people who use The Marine Society's training ships. Both publications are well produced and contain lively articles and information about the society's services. The Marine Society contributes articles and features to a range of publications which circulate within both the Royal Navy and the merchant navy. A record is kept of advertisements which produce enquiries. Over half the students who responded to the questionnaire sent out by inspectors had learnt about The Marine Society from advertisements, and a further third through personal recommendation. While some respondents had been aware of The Marine Society's library service for many years they had not realised that it offered correspondence courses. The college might benefit from using the library service to promote its courses more effectively. There are details of The Marine Society on the Internet, but it does not yet have an e-mail address.

13 The Marine Society has formal relationships with some of the larger shipping companies, in particular, through the work of its three sea-going tutors. Other relationships are more casual, relying on personal contacts. The college should consider how the society's many contacts in the shipping industry, and with other seafarers' organisations, might be developed so that the emerging needs of seafarers can be identified and educational and social services extended.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

14 The Marine Society is a charity regulated by the Charities (The Marine Society) Order 1976. There are 290 governors of the charity who are responsible for the activities of the society. Anyone can become a governor by subscribing £15 a year, or £250 to become a life governor. Governors may also be nominated by other bodies or charities that have subscribed to the society. Governors delegate their responsibilities to a council which comprises a president, a treasurer and not more than 30 members elected at the annual court. They serve for a period of not more than three years. There are up to five co-opted members of the council.

15 There are two committees of the council: finance and general purposes, and education and training. Each member of council is a member of at least one committee. There are also a number of subcommittees, including one for policy and internal audit. The council meets four times a year, and the two committees three times. The minutes of each committee and subcommittee are presented to the next meeting of council. Council members receive comprehensive briefing papers and are well informed about the society's activities. The college's general secretary and two officers attend council meetings. The general secretary, the head of education, the head of library services and other officers attend education and training committee meetings.

16 There is a clear distinction between policy and operational matters. Marine Society policy is made by its council. Implementation of policy is delegated to the general secretary. Responsibility for the College of the Sea and Seafarers Libraries is further delegated to the head of education and the head of library services. Individual responsibilities are clear and management is sound. The head of education is responsible for educational services to seafarers and management of tutors; the deputy general secretary (operations) deals with requests from seafarers for financial assistance towards the cost of vocational education and training; and the deputy general secretary (administration) manages financial procedures and budgetary control. Each one has other responsibilities which are unrelated to the College of the Sea. They meet as a group most weeks to organise the work of the society, including the college. No minutes of these meetings are kept. There are frequent informal discussions between senior staff, when operational decisions are made.

17 The deputy general secretary (administration) has almost completed computerisation of the society's financial systems. The college received a grant from the FEFC of £98,166 in 1994, of which £17,985 was specifically for the purchase of educational reference books. In 1995, the grant was £95,712, of which £20,294 was for the purchase of educational reference books. In 1995, the total income for the College of the Sea was £107,560 and its expenditure £219,514. The deficit of £111,954 was met from other income of The Marine Society.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

18 The College of the Sea receives about 2,000 enquiries a year from current or former seafarers. They range from general requests for information about the services of The Marine Society to detailed questions concerning careers, courses or financial assistance. All enquiries are recorded and a note made of the staff of the college who are responsible for taking action. Some enquiries are referred to part-time tutors for specialist advice or assistance. Impartial guidance is given by the head of education, who has a thorough knowledge of the training and progression routes open to ratings and officers. Advice is supplemented by a wide range of literature describing the services of The Marine Society, including the educational opportunities it offers. A variety of scholarships, bursaries and loans is available to assist seafarers with professional and educational development. About 20 scholarships are awarded and 30 loans made each year.

19 Following enrolment, a student is assigned a number, a reference card and a work-card. Details are recorded in a computerised student record system before the first contact with a tutor. Students who enrol for GCSE mathematics or English sit a diagnostic test which helps tutors to gauge each student's ability. Students' progress is monitored carefully by the head of education and encouragement provided through regular letters of support from tutors and from the head of education. If a student fails to return several assignments, the head of education makes enquiries to establish the reason and offers appropriate assistance. Students are kept in contact with the college by regular mailing of *The Seafarer* and *The Seadog*, both of which contain news of students' successes. When a student achieves a qualification, the college writes a letter of congratulation and offers advice about further study. Students are encouraged to visit The Marine Society when they are in London to talk to the head of education. The English tutor holds personal tutorials at The Marine Society whenever these are possible.

20 Students appreciate the efforts made by the college and their tutors. Those students who were interviewed said they felt that they were part of an organisation that had a personal concern for them. Some who had been unsuccessful with other correspondence courses had done well with the College of the Sea because of the support they had received.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

21 Of the 99 students enrolled in the last three years, one studied GCE A level history, two started GCE A level mathematics, 51 studied or are studying GCSE English, and 41 GCSE mathematics. A single student is pursuing each of the following: GCSE history; GCSE botany; GCSE English literature and GCSE physics. The majority of the college's work is in GCSE mathematics and English, which are taught by two tutors. The tutors have a strong empathy with seafarers and they appreciate the difficulties of distance learning.

22 Each course is planned to meet the needs of an individual student. Students progress at different rates. For example, in GCSE English some students complete their courses successfully in less than a year, while others take two years. The college does not impose any maximum period for completion of its courses and, in one exceptional case, a botany student is still submitting work to his tutor after 15 years.

23 Students send assignments to the college which keeps a record of their receipt before forwarding them to a tutor. Marked work is returned directly to the student and the student's work-card with a record of marks, comments and new assignments, is returned to the college. This system works well. Returned assignments are despatched within three or four days, but there can be delays in students receiving them when ships are between ports. The quality of marking and tutors' commentaries are of the highest quality. Tutors provide lengthy written explanations of how work can be improved. They also send supporting material such as leaflets on punctuation or worked examples in mathematics. Tutors normally send a personal letter with returned work and students are encouraged to ring tutors at home for additional help if they need it. Although most tutors never meet their students they develop strong personal relationships with them through correspondence.

24 The two physical education tutors, who join ships for anything from a few days to a few weeks, give advice to all members of the crew on matters relating to health and fitness, the use of gymnasium equipment and exercise routines. The services can include individual body-fat analysis or a full physical appraisal. The art tutor works with small groups or individuals at sea to develop practical drawing and painting skills and a general interest in the arts.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

25 Ninety-six students have enrolled for GCSE courses over the last three years. Of the 29 who have taken their examinations, 27 achieved grades A to C. Thirty-seven are continuing their studies and 30 have withdrawn. All of the 24 students who have taken GCSE English achieved grades A to C. This is a particularly good set of results for distance learning. In mathematics, only four students have taken the examination over the same period, two achieving grades A to C and the other two students

grades D and E. Student dropout is far higher in mathematics than in English. The college should consider whether students might benefit from undertaking a less demanding course before attempting the GCSE. Numbers on other GCSE courses are too low to enable conclusions to be drawn. In the last three years, one student has attempted GCE A level history and gained a grade B, and two students started GCE A level mathematics but did not persist.

26 Many students who have taken one GCSE subject with the College of Sea go on to a second. The students who were interviewed said that the opportunity to study GCSE or GCE A level had contributed directly to their being able to undertake a higher national diploma in nautical studies, an Open University degree, or being able to cope with further professional qualifications, including the Certificate of Competency for deck officers.

27 The annual competitions organised by the College of the Sea attract some good entries. Photographs which have been sent in are used in The Marine Society's publications and some have been bought by advertising agencies. Short stories are often published in national literary magazines, and a selection of seafarers' poems are broadcast every Christmas by the BBC.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

28 The college does not have a formal quality assurance system, but relies instead on the head of education's overview of the work of individual tutors and students. In order to achieve this control all communications between tutors and students are logged. The head of education reads most correspondence and checks students' progress regularly. He maintains personal contact with each tutor and reviews their work with them from time to time.

29 The college has no staff-development programme. Tutors work in relative isolation and there are few opportunities for them to share their expertise and to be given help with teaching methods, new curricula, or the production of learning materials.

RESOURCES

Staffing

30 Ten Marine Society staff (4.1 full-time equivalent) contribute to the operation of the College of the Sea. The part-time home and seagoing tutors, who teach the courses, equate to another 1.2 full-time equivalent staff and account for 16 per cent of the college's staffing budget. The remaining 84 per cent of the budget is attributed to administering the services of the college, including educational guidance and career support by means of grants and loans. With this balance of expenditure, the current infrastructure of the college could support a considerable increase in educational provision without a proportionate increase in costs.

Seafarers Libraries

31 Seafarers Libraries provide a lending library and a purchasing service for books. Collections of books are sent to ships owned by most of the major British companies and some foreign owned ships. Some 500 vessels have their book collections changed every four months. Libraries vary in size from 20 to 1,500 books, and each one is made up of 60 per cent fictional works and 40 per cent non-fiction. Each collection contains a small number of general reference books.

32 Seafarers Libraries holds a total of about 500,000 books. There is no audio-visual material. There is no reliable and comprehensive catalogue and the exact number of books in stock is unknown. Losses are low, at less than 3 per cent each year. Expenditure on books has been approximately £90,000 for the last two years. Shipping companies are charged a fee for each library and the service has made an operational surplus every year since 1992. A qualified librarian manages the service, supported by three full-time and four part-time clerical staff. The library makes longer-term book loans to individual seafarers who are following a course of study.

33 Part of the FEFC grant is used to purchase educational reference books in 18 specialist areas including art and design, geography, naval history, psychology, and physical education. Collections of between 15 and 20 books selected from these areas are sent to ships and are retained longer than the normal collections. The service is valuable in improving the technical content and range of books available to seafarers.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

34 The particular strengths of the College of the Sea are:

- the impartial educational guidance and advice it gives to seafarers
- the support it gives to individuals within a distance learning framework
- the high levels of commitment among its part-time tutors
- good examination results in GCSE English
- the provision of examinations at sea
- the organisation of the Seafarers Libraries service.

35 In order to improve its provision the college should address the following issues:

- the small number of students for whom it makes educational provision
- its narrow range of courses
- the high fixed costs of its educational programme.

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