

# The Marine Society College of the Sea

REPORT FROM  
THE INSPECTORATE  
**1999-00**

THE  
FURTHER  
EDUCATION  
FUNDING  
COUNCIL

***THE FURTHER EDUCATION  
FUNDING COUNCIL***

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*College inspections are carried out in accordance with the framework and guidelines described in Council Circulars 97/12, 97/13 and 97/22. Inspections seek to validate the data and judgements provided by colleges in self-assessment reports. They involve full-time inspectors and registered part-time inspectors who have knowledge of, and experience in, the work they inspect. A member of the Council's audit service works with inspectors in assessing aspects of governance and management. All colleges are invited to nominate a senior member of their staff to participate in the inspection as a team member.*

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## Grade Descriptors

Inspectors assess the strengths and weaknesses of each aspect of provision they inspect. Their assessments are set out in the report. They use 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 the 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.

Aggregated grades for aspects of cross-college provision and curriculum areas, for colleges inspected during 1998-99, are shown in the following table.

	<b>Grade</b>				
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
<i>Curriculum areas</i>	10	53	30	7	–
<i>Cross-college provision</i>	14	54	23	7	2

Source: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1998-99: Chief inspector's annual report*  
Sample size: 104 college inspections

## Student Achievements

Where data on student achievements appear in tables, levels of achievement are shown in three ways:

- as number of starters, which is the number of enrolments on qualifications where the student was expecting to complete the qualification that college year. For example, a student on a two-year programme who began their programme in October 1995, would appear in the results for 1996-97 because this is the year in which they expected to complete their qualification
- as a retention rate, which is the percentage of qualifications which students have completed as expected or where they are continuing their studies beyond the expected end date of the qualification. For programmes of study of two years or more, retention is calculated across the whole programme, that is, from the start to the end of the qualification
- as an achievement rate, which is the number of qualifications students have fully achieved as a percentage of completed qualifications with a known outcome. Partial achievements are not included.

# Summary

## **The Marine Society College of the Sea**

### ***Greater London Region***

#### **Inspected May 2000**

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 to seafarers scattered throughout the world. Teaching is carried out by five part-time tutors who correspond with their students in a variety of forms. Where possible, some tutors and students use electronic mail services to exchange coursework. The Marine Society has its headquarters in London.

Since the last inspection, the College of the Sea has increased enrolments and has broadened its links with other organisations. In particular, the range of promotional activities has been enhanced through the development of a comprehensive website. In 1999, enrolments had risen to 116 compared with 22 in 1995. At the time of inspection, 245 seafarers were studying for GCSE and GCE A level qualifications in mathematics, English and physics, through distance learning programmes managed by the college. The administration of the college's distance learning provision and support and guidance services is outstanding. Teaching on distance learning courses is good. Students' value highly the support provided by their tutors and by the college. Governors and senior managers demonstrate a strong commitment to the services provided to seafarers by the college. The college has effective computerised systems to record and monitor the progress of students and to assist in controlling the flow of distance learning materials and students' work. The college should: improve the quality of

presentation of distance learning materials; broaden the use of learning targets to help motivate students to complete their courses and take examinations; provide opportunities for tutors to share good practice; and develop service standards for tutors.

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

**FEFC-funded provision**

**Grade 2**

## The College and its Mission

1 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 is a registered charity and is regulated under the *Charities Act* by the Charities (The Marine Society) Order 47/1976. The society's general object 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 are persons who are serving in the navies, merchant navies and fishing fleets of such other countries as the governors from time to time determine or who might be called upon to serve in times of need'. In May 1999, the nationality criteria for the society's beneficiaries in respect of educational services was broadened to include seafarers of any nationality studying for United Kingdom academic qualifications.

2 The Marine Society fulfils the objects of its charter through a number of inter-related operations, including the College of the Sea, Seafarers Libraries, Sea Training, Sea Lines, through publishing, and the provision of scholarships and financial assistance to seafarers. The society's income derives from the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC), investments, legacies, subscriptions, trusts and donations from individuals and companies.

3 The governors or members of the society, numbering about 400, are collectively responsible for the affairs of the society, which they delegate to a council consisting of the president and treasurer of the society, together with some 30 elected members and up to 15 co-opted members. The council carries

out the day-to-day operation and administration of the society through its committees, managers and staff.

4 The College of the Sea, as part of The Marine Society, is unique amongst colleges and educational institutions in that it provides educational and academic services specifically and only to seafarers who, by the nature of employment and lifestyle, do not have easy access, if any, to facilities or sources of higher or further education. The College of the Sea accounts for approximately one-quarter of the annual expenditure. It has no assets and its income is derived from The Marine Society funds, the FEFC and other external sources. In 1999, income from the FEFC amounted to approximately 34% of the college's expenditure.

5 The college provides:

- advice to seafarers on education and training, supported by self-study programmes, either directly or through other agencies
- examination facilities ashore and at sea
- sea-going health and fitness tutors
- competitions to encourage educational development through artistic and literary expression
- financial support for education and training, including the administration of scholarships, bursaries and loans
- loans of textbooks and study materials
- careers advice to seafarers
- research into the employment, education and well-being of seafarers at sea and ashore.

6 The college's mission is to 'provide for seafarers a programme of student-centred, multimedia learning and practical support to cater for all aspects of their continuing education and professional development.'

7 The Marine Society is based in Lambeth, London. It has an attractive building close to Lambeth Palace. The building is also used by

# Context

the headquarters of the Sea Cadet Corps, the Nautical Institute, the Transport Trust and the British Maritime Charitable Foundation.

## **The Inspection**

8 The college was inspected in May 2000. Inspectors had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and reviewed information provided about The Marine Society and the College of the Sea by other FEFC directorates. Inspectors met with the society's director and the head of education approximately two months before the inspection to confirm the inspection arrangements. Two inspectors and an auditor working for a total of nine days carried out the inspection. Inspectors met with governors, managers and tutors, and communicated with seafaring students by telephone and electronic mail. They examined distance learning materials, students' work and documentation relating to the college and its courses.

# Curriculum Provision

**9 Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses noted by the college. A few additional strengths and weaknesses were identified by inspectors.**

## **Key strengths**

- outstanding administration of distance learning courses and examinations
- broad range of advice and guidance provided for seafarers
- good teaching provided by distance learning tutors
- thorough recording and monitoring of students' progress
- valued and productive personal contact between many students and their tutors

## **Weaknesses**

- inconsistent standard of presentation of some distance learning materials
- insufficient use of targets to motivate and encourage students
- too few student examination entries

## **Curriculum Content, Organisation and Management**

10 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) qualifications in mathematics, physics and English. The college is registered as an examination centre and is able to arrange for its students to take their examinations at the society's headquarters in London, at other centres in the United Kingdom or on board the ship in which they are serving. The number of students starting courses with the college has risen from 22 in 1995 to 116 during 1999. The total number of students studying with the college is 245.

11 The administration of the college's distance learning courses is outstanding. Administration

aspects include: providing advice and guidance to potential and enrolled students; the production of marketing and publicity materials; arrangements for examinations at many different locations and on board ships; controlling the timely flow and destination of distance learning materials and students' work; and rigorously monitoring the progress of students. Of the 245 students currently studying GCSE and GCE A level courses, 108 students are serving with the Royal Navy, and 137 are serving in the merchant navy with the Royal Fleet Auxiliary and with some 20 shipping companies. At the time of inspection, 213 students were following GCSE study programmes, and 32 students were studying for GCE A level qualifications. The college has contracted with five part-time tutors to teach across the range of courses, and has recently increased the number of part-time tutors to cope with the increase in demand for its courses. Two part-time tutors have been recruited to teach mathematics and one to teach GCE A level English. As recognised by the college in its self-assessment report, the tutors have a good understanding of the particular difficulties faced by seafarers when embarking upon a distance learning course of study.

12 Since the last inspection, the college has reduced the range of GCSE and GCE A level subjects offered directly to students. For subjects other than English, mathematics and physics, the college directs students to other providers of distance learning courses. It then makes a contribution to the costs of the course and provides the same personal support for these students as for those taking courses directly with the college. The college has recently gained approval from the Forces Distance Learning Scheme to offer distance learning courses to those serving with the Royal Navy. It has also satisfied additional Royal Navy criteria by offering the international GCSE papers that do not include an assessed coursework element. This has resulted in the college now collaborating with an increased

# Curriculum Provision

number of examination boards. Many students from the Royal Navy are enrolled on the college's courses directly. This means that the head of education is sometimes unable to speak to or provide specialist advice about the suitability of the course that some of these prospective Royal Navy students intend to study. Although this is outside of the college's control, it is not in the students' best interests to be denied the initial specialist advice and support that the college is able to provide.

13 A comprehensive record of each student who enrolls with the college is maintained at the society's headquarters, as acknowledged in the self-assessment report. The records include student profile cards and detailed entries on a computerised database. Each student is assigned a tutor who then sends a personal letter of welcome and a diagnostic test to help the tutor to identify the students' previous knowledge of the subject. Students enrolled for GCSE mathematics courses also receive a standard textbook with the initial study pack.

14 The College of the Sea acts as the postbox in the United Kingdom for students taking Open University courses. In 1999, the college helped 38 students in this way, and also supported a further 75 students taking Open University examinations at sea. In 1999, the college established links with Middlesex University and now offers assistance in the administration of work-based degree courses for seafarers. 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 does not offer vocational courses but refers students to five maritime training colleges in the United Kingdom. The college is currently exploring with other distance learning providers, including a further education college, the possibility of offering courses in information and communications technology.

15 The college contracts with two seagoing health and fitness consultants. In 1999, the consultants visited 28 ships and tested and advised 1,170 seafarers about keeping fit and adopting a healthy lifestyle. Their work has been complemented by the publication of their 'Positive Health at Sea' booklet. The college also organises annual seafarers' competitions with a total of £1,500 offered as awards. Competitions include story writing, art, photography, and the recently introduced competition for website design. In 1999, there were 138 entries from 45 seafarers. In addition to providing prizes for the winners and runners-up, all entrants receive a written critique of their work from the college.

16 The society's Sea Lines scheme links seafarers to participating schools to promote school children's awareness of the importance of the shipping industry. In 1999, 30 schools were linked with British seafarers. Each seafarer visits their designated school and exchanges correspondence with its pupils. They are sometimes able to organise a visit to a ship for the children. A recent development of the society's website includes details about four vessels and its seafarers. The vessels are referred to as 'web ships'. The four vessels comprise a large container ship trading between Europe and the Far East, a Royal Fleet Auxiliary replenishment ship, and two specialist North Sea supply vessels. The website pages provide an up-to-date record of the voyage of each vessel, and include photographs and contributions from seafarers writing about their experiences of life at sea. The site provides seafarers with opportunities to learn about modern communication technology, and the skills required for the production of material for publication. The 'web ships' have been an important development in bringing the life of those who work at sea to the attention of others. Correspondence received by the college about their website confirms that many teachers and students access the pages.

# Curriculum Provision

## Teaching and the Promotion of Learning

17 The quality of mathematics teaching is good, although there are variations in the approach and style of each tutor. The tutors use the same textbook. Two tutors use the chapters of the book as the main source for each lesson and provide brief explanatory notes if they consider it necessary. One tutor produces his own lesson material, requiring students to use the textbook for additional information and for examples. In the latter case, the teacher is able to address more effectively each student's individual learning needs and give more attention to weaknesses identified through the diagnostic test and the work returned to be marked.

18 The GCSE English course is skilfully structured to meet the learning needs of each student. The teacher makes an assessment of the abilities of each student from the diagnostic test. Students are then sent a detailed analysis of their test papers, and the course is structured accordingly. The teacher uses a wide range of materials assembled over many years of teaching distance learning courses for seafarers. Interesting and relevant articles about the sea and ships are used when it is thought that they may be of interest to the student.

19 The length of time students remain on a course varies considerably. Some serve on merchant ships engaged on short sea trips with longer periods in port. For students serving on these ships it is often difficult for them to establish a rhythm to their day and to set aside regular periods for study. Students serving on ships trading on long sea routes such as those to the Far East, or on Royal Navy ships on long patrols, have more opportunity to establish a routine and set aside time each day for study. Some students have been prepared to complete the GCSE English course in as little as three months, but some mathematics students have continued to return work for as long as five

years. The average time taken for most students to complete their study and sit GCSE examinations is between one and two years. As noted by the college in its self-assessment report, the college does not impose any maximum period for completion of its courses. Generally, tutors do not set clear targets and learning goals for each student, and some students interviewed by inspectors felt that more use of such practices would help to motivate them to complete their courses in a shorter period of time.

20 During the inspection, two students on the GCSE mathematics course were serving on an Antarctic survey vessel based in New Zealand, and due to the nature of their work, returned their assignments infrequently. Another student contacted by inspectors was serving as a mechanic on a tanker in the South Atlantic. He had experienced significant difficulty in receiving post and sending his work back to the college, as the postal services in the countries in which the ship visited were unreliable. The lengthy delays in sending work to the college and receiving the returned marked work and new materials from the tutor had resulted in a one-year postponement of taking the examination. Inspectors found that these experiences are not uncommon among students of the college, and the college is making considerable effort to overcome these difficulties by encouraging students to use electronic mail where this is available on board ship. When students return home on leave, few continue with their studies until they return to sea.

21 Students return their completed work to the college where it is recorded before being sent to the tutor. Because of the erratic work and leave patterns of seafarers, long periods sometimes elapse between the receipt of one piece of work and the next. The head of education makes contact with students to establish why work is overdue, and sends letters of encouragement. Tutors are not always kept informed of the reasons for students not returning their work for long periods.

# Curriculum Provision

22 Each tutor maintains comprehensive records of the work and the progress of each student. Tutors mark and return the work to students usually on the day it is received. The work is well marked. Most tutors return comprehensive notes and additional examples to their students. Some also send letters of encouragement. Tutors give students their telephone numbers and, if available, their electronic mail addresses. It is not uncommon for students to meet with their tutors when on leave to address some of the more difficult problems they have encountered. One tutor of English had travelled from London to Edinburgh to meet with three students who were about to sit examinations aboard a fishery protection vessel. In discussion with inspectors, the students expressed their appreciation of the valuable help and assistance given to them by the tutor during her visit to the ship. As noted by the college, although most tutors never meet their students, they develop very positive teaching relationships with them through correspondence.

23 The quality of the learning and support materials produced by each tutor is of a high standard. However, the presentation of their work varies. Some use a wordprocessor or typewriter but others produce handwritten work, which is inconsistent with the college's aim of using modern communication technology to assist distance learning. This weakness was not identified by the college in its self-assessment report.

## Students' Achievements

24 The number of students who have taken GCSE examinations in the last three years is lower than during the same period at the last inspection. Twenty-four students have taken a GCSE examination between 1997 and 1999 and of those, 17 achieved a high grade pass. In the last two years all students taking GCSE English, and 71% of those taking mathematics, achieved

high grade passes and the others achieved passes at grade D. One student took GCE A level mathematics and achieved a D grade pass. As noted by the college, this is a good set of results for distance learning courses but too few students take the examination. The number of students entered for examinations in 2000 is higher than for any of the last 10 years. This figure is expected to increase as more Royal Navy personnel complete their courses.

25 Many students studying courses with the college do so to improve their knowledge and understanding of mathematics and English, which assists them in achieving promotion or gaining certificates of professional competence at a later time. Some students do not sit the examination for the course for which they are studying, as they find that their personal goals may be achieved without the qualification. A few students find it difficult to confirm arrangements to take the examination because of the nature of their work. The college does not maintain a record of students who have achieved their intended goal. The self-assessment report recognises that the college should provide greater encouragement to students to take the examinations for which they have prepared.

26 The annual competitions organised by the College of the Sea attract some entries of a high standard. Photographs, which have been submitted by seafarers, are used in The Marine Society publications and some have been purchased by advertising agencies. Short stories are often published in national literary magazines, and a selection of seafarers' poems are broadcast every Christmas by a national broadcasting corporation.

# Cross-college Provision

## 27 Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified by the college in its self-assessment report.

### Key strengths

- strong commitment by governors and managers to a high-quality distance learning service for seafarers
- impressive range of skills and experience of governors
- comprehensive and effective computerised financial and student records systems
- thorough policy review and future policy development informing strategic planning
- effective promotional activities resulting in a significant increase in the number of enrolled students
- strong and productive links with a range of external organisations

### Weaknesses

- underdeveloped quality standards to ensure consistency in the quality of learning materials and support provided for students by tutors
- limited opportunities for tutors to share good practice
- few measurable objectives and milestones in the strategic plan

## Support for Students

28 The college has made considerable progress since the last inspection in marketing its courses to seafarers. As acknowledged by the college in its self-assessment report, a broad range of media is used, including advertisements in shipping company in-house magazines, seafarers' publications and through its website. The courses offered by the college are listed in a publication available to those in the Royal Navy who want to gain a qualification through distance learning. Recent changes to the education provision offered to Royal Navy

personnel has enabled the College of the Sea to become one of its preferred providers of distance learning GCSE and GCE A level courses. This has resulted in students from the Royal Navy contributing to the recent growth in enrolments. Although the number of British seafarers serving in the merchant service has continued to decline, and new entrants to the service are often better qualified, the college has achieved an increase in the number of enrolments to its courses from this sector over the same period.

29 The college receives about 2,000 requests for support and guidance each year from current or former seafarers. These range from general requests for information about the services of The Marine Society to detailed questions concerning careers, courses or financial assistance. All requests and the action taken by the society's staff are recorded. The head of education has a thorough knowledge of educational qualifications and the training and progression routes open to ships' ratings and officers, and gives impartial advice to all those who seek it. In many cases this will not lead to the caller being recommended a course offered by the college. For example, during the inspection, the head of education received an enquiry from a Royal Navy rating about taking a course leading to GCE A level mathematics. The person, who was about to leave the Navy, had already gained an Open University degree and a postgraduate teaching certificate, but had received advice that he would be better qualified to teach if he had GCE A level mathematics. The head of education gave sound advice that did not require the student to study for another qualification.

30 The society offers a range of scholarships to seafarers each year divided into three categories, pre-sea education, serving ratings and serving officers. In 1999, the total value of the scholarships was £32,000. It also sponsors prizes to the best cadet officers and for other specialist awards each year. The society also provides interest-free loans for seafarers to

# Cross-college Provision

promote their professional advancement amounting to £60,000 in 1999. It also administers scholarships on behalf of the Merchant Navy Officers' union for those ratings aged over 20 who wish to obtain professional maritime qualifications as an officer.

31 Students appreciate the efforts made by the college and their tutors in supporting them during their studies. Those students who were interviewed during the inspection 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 felt that they had done well with the College of the Sea because of the support they had received. Students are kept in touch with the activities of the college by regular mailing of 'The Seafarer', the society's informative quarterly journal. 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.

## General Resources

32 Thirteen Marine Society staff, equating to 4.3 full-time equivalent staff, contribute to the operation of the college. In 1999, total staff salary costs apportioned to the college were approximately £164,000. The payments made to the five part-time academic tutors and two seagoing health and fitness tutors accounted for some 10% of the overall staff expenditure. The distribution of staffing costs reflects those aspects of the college's work which include: administration of distance learning courses; examination arrangements; marketing; college management; advice and careers guidance; loans and grants; and the Seafarers Libraries service.

33 Seafarers Libraries provide a lending library and a purchasing service for books. The libraries aim to provide a recreational service

and to provide opportunities for seafarers to improve their general education. Collections of books are sent to ships that are owned by most of the major British companies, and also to some foreign owned ships. Some 470 vessels have their book collections changed every four months. Libraries vary in size from 50 to 650 books, and each one is made up of 60% fictional works and 40% non-fiction. Each collection contains a small number of general reference books. The society's quarterly journal 'The Seafarer' and the college's promotional materials are included in ships' libraries three times a year.

34 Seafarers Libraries holds a total of about 500,000 books. There is little audiovisual material. There is no reliable and comprehensive catalogue and the exact number of books in stock is unknown. Losses on loan collections made to ships are low, at less than 3% each year. Expenditure on books has been approximately £93,000 for each of the last two years. Shipping companies are charged a fee for each library and income from the service balances its costs. A qualified librarian manages the service, supported by three full-time and three part-time clerical staff. The library also makes longer-term book loans to those individual seafarers who are following programmes of study, and offers a book-selling service to seafarers.

35 Part of the FEFC grant is used to purchase educational reference books in 19 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, for a period of up to two years. The service is valuable in improving the educational content and range of books available to seafarers, and written feedback received from users of the service is very positive. Purchase of titles by the library service is informed by the views of seafarers.

# Cross-college Provision

## Quality Assurance

36 Managers and tutors are committed to providing a high-quality distance learning service to seafarers. The head of education has overall responsibility for quality assurance. However, as acknowledged by the college in its self-assessment report, formal quality assurance systems within the college are restricted to student questionnaires and oversight of students' and tutors' work by the head of education. Managers consider that these systems were effective before the college entered a period of significant growth.

37 Students comment positively about the advice and guidance they receive from the college and the learning materials and support provided by tutors. Students are sent questionnaires shortly after commencement of study and on completion of their courses. The head of education reviews all completed questionnaires, but the college does not prepare a summary for consideration by the members of the society's council, the education and training committee or tutors. Effective use is made of the computerised student record database in notifying the head of education about overdue coursework from students. The head of education carefully reviews the likely reasons for late returns when composing a reminder to students. The head of education also records and monitors students' work sent to the college and makes the arrangements necessary for examinations that are taken on board ship and at land-based installations. Some examinations are taken at The Marine Society headquarters.

38 In evaluating the effectiveness of their learning materials and the feedback given on students' work, some tutors maintain significant and productive contact with their students by telephone, electronic mail and correspondence to ascertain their learning needs and to ensure that learning materials are appropriate. A few other tutors have yet to fully develop these practices. The college has yet to establish

teaching standards to ensure consistency in the quality of distance learning materials and the nature of distance learning support activities provided by tutors. There are few, if any, arrangements made by the college for tutors to meet and share good practice. As recognised by the college, a few tutors require support in using computers, electronic mail and the Internet in carrying out their work, and the college is currently considering ways in which assistance may be given.

39 The head of education produces reports on the activities of the college for consideration at meetings of the education and training committee. The reports include references to enrolments, the numbers of students continuing with their studies and achievements in examinations. However, there is little analysis of the progress being made by students towards achievement of their learning goals, or progression to other courses and in their seafaring careers.

40 The college produced its first self-assessment report for inspection. The report was comprehensive and self-critical, and covered all aspects of the college's work. The draft report was developed by college managers and subsequently considered and approved by the education and training committee and the society's council. Managers found the process helpful in reviewing the quality of all aspects of the college's work and identifying areas for improvement. The self-assessment report includes an action plan, and some progress has been made in addressing identified weaknesses.

## Governance

41 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, governance arrangements are adequate. The society substantially fulfils its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC.

# Cross-college Provision

42 The Marine Society is a charity regulated by the Charities (The Marine Society) Order 47/1976. The society has approximately 400 members, referred to as governors, 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. Other bodies or charities that have subscribed to the society may also nominate governors. Governors delegate their responsibilities to a council. The council currently has 30 members, but can have up to 47 members, comprising a president, a treasurer, a maximum of 30 members elected at the annual court, and up to 15 co-opted members elected by the council. Council members serve for a period of not more than three years.

43 The council delegates much of its work to two main committees: finance and general purposes; and education and training. Clearly defined terms of reference have been introduced for the committees that mainly accord with good practice. The level of attendance at council meetings by members is good, given its size. Each member of the council is a member of at least one committee. The main committees have been delegated important powers owing to the numbers of members on the council. For example, the finance and general purposes committee approves the society's annual estimates. These estimates are noted, not expressly approved, by the council. A number of subcommittees have also been established dealing with future policy, internal audit, and staffing. These report to the council directly. The finance and general purposes committee has its own subcommittees dealing with investments, premises and grants, respectively. The council meets at least three times a year and the two committees three times. The minutes of each committee and subcommittee are presented to the next meeting of council.

44 The education and training committee has primary oversight of the work of the College of the Sea. The head of education, the head of

library services, as well as the director, deputy director and secretary attended all council and education and training committee meetings in the two years prior to the inspection. The society does not have a dedicated clerking function. Senior managers clerk the committees they attend. Agendas, minutes and supporting papers are of a high standard, and members are well informed about the society's activities.

45 The members of the council bring an impressive range of skills and experience to the society, and have strong links with naval and national institutions. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that these skills and links are effective in enhancing the activities of the College of the Sea. The relationship between governors and managers is professional and supportive. Members understand the distinction between governance and management and respect the limits this imposes on their involvement in the day-to-day running of the college.

46 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that governors have maintained an effective oversight of the finances of the college. Management accounts are regularly prepared and considered by the finance and general purposes committee, prior to being referred to council meetings for information. The management accounts are functional but basic. They do not incorporate a cashflow statement or an income statement rolled forward beyond the year-end.

47 There are established and effective arrangements for reviewing policy and future planning. In 1999, the future policy subcommittee carried out a comprehensive and thorough review of the society's achievements since the adoption of the first five-year future policy statement produced by the subcommittee in 1995. The review document made a number of policy recommendations and proposals for the period 2000-05. These included a recommendation that the society should make

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every effort to keep pace with advancing information and communications technology in providing its services, and the possibility of providing information technology (IT) training for seafarers. It also recommended adoption by the society of the following general policy statement: 'to continue to modernise and develop the society's services and activities to encourage recruiting of seafarers, to optimise their professional and academic opportunities and to support a revival in the British shipping industry'. The council subsequently approved the recommendations given in the review paper. The review paper informed the development of the strategic plan for the College of the Sea, covering the period 1999 to 2002, although the plan includes few measurable objectives and milestones. The council periodically reviews the progress being made in achievement of the policy recommendations and the college's strategic plan.

48 The society has adopted Charity Commission guidance as to the responsibility of charity trustees. Members are required to declare and register their interests on their appointment. However, this information has yet to be consolidated into a single register.

## Management

49 Managers demonstrate a strong commitment and dedication to the furtherance of the college's mission, and since the last inspection, have developed and implemented a range of initiatives which have resulted in a significant increase in the number of seafarers participating in the college's distance learning courses.

50 Implementation of The Marine Society policy is delegated to the director, who is also the principal of the College of the Sea. 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 roles and responsibilities

are clearly documented and the management is effective. The head of education is responsible for educational services to seafarers and management of tutors; the deputy director deals with requests from seafarers for financial assistance towards the cost of vocational education and training; and the secretary manages financial procedures and budgetary control. Each one has other responsibilities, which are unrelated to the College of the Sea. They meet weekly as a group to organise the work of the society, including the college. Formal minutes of these meetings are not kept. There are frequent informal discussions between senior staff, when operational decisions are made.

51 Since the last inspection, the college has further developed its computer management information systems for finance and student records. The comprehensive student record database is overseen by the head of education, and is used to carefully record and monitor the profile of each student. The record includes details of students' employer, type of ship or vessel, voyage schedule and leave plans. The academic progress of each student is recorded together with details of exchanges of correspondence and coursework between students and tutors. The college submits computerised details of its students and their courses to the FEFC for the unit-funded element of its FEFC income. The head of education is also responsible for the society's website and liaison between seafarers and the college in updating the 'web ship' pages for the society's Sea Lines operation. The society is planning to investigate how modern information and communications technologies may be further used to improve the college's distance learning provision for seafarers.

52 As acknowledged by the college in its self-assessment report, managers have further developed strong and productive links with a range of external organisations and institutions. These include examining boards, the Open

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University and Middlesex University, numerous merchant shipping companies, and the Royal Navy. For example, the head of education is a member of the Ministry of Defence and Open University liaison committee, and has assisted merchant service seafarers in accessing Open University courses. The college is currently exploring with other organisations the development of a 'virtual campus' for seafarers and officers. The director and head of education regularly write articles for the house magazines of shipping companies. The head of education also contributes to each issue of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary quarterly newspaper 'Gunline'. The director regularly visits nautical colleges in the United Kingdom to talk to students about the work of the society and the college. The society has recently engaged a public relations consultant with a view to improving further its links with the industry and the wider public.

53 There are effective lines of communication between manager, tutors and administration staff. Managers regularly meet informally with administration staff to discuss day-to-day operational matters and to keep them informed of developments. There is regular contact between the head of education and each tutor but, as acknowledged in the self-assessment report, they do not meet as a team to discuss and share views about how they can better meet the needs of their students. The college provides few opportunities for tutors to update themselves on current educational practices and issues, and in the effective use of information and communications technology.

54 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, financial management arrangements are adequate. Since the last inspection in 1996, the society's audited accounts have reported operational deficits each year, both on the activities of organisation as a whole, and in respect of the activities of the College of the Sea. However, these operational deficits were more than offset by substantial

gains arising from the society's investments each year. The society enjoys a very strong cash position.

55 Since 1997, the FEFC's annual funding of the College of the Sea has varied between £92,000 and £111,000. This represents between 50% and 59% of the college's income over the period, but 9% or less of the total income of the society. The proportion of the FEFC income provided on a funding unit basis is relatively low, at 17% or less, with the remaining financial support taking the form of a block grant to support the overall activities of the college.

## Conclusions

56 The college produced its first self-assessment report for the inspection. Inspectors found the report to be comprehensive and self-critical. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses given in the report by the college, but also identified a few additional strengths and weaknesses in the curriculum provision and aspects of cross-college provision.

57 Strengths and weaknesses identified during the inspection are listed under each main section of this report. The main strengths and weaknesses are identified in the summary.





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