

**Cricklade College**  
**Reinspection of Management: April 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. 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.*

*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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## **Cricklade College South East Region**

### **Reinspection of management: April 1999**

#### **Background**

Cricklade College was inspected in November 1997 and the findings were published in inspection report 21/98. Provision in management was graded 4 and the audit service opinion was that financial management was weak.

The strengths of the provision were: management restructuring to address long-standing weaknesses and the positive attitude and commitment of managers to remedying those weaknesses. The main weaknesses identified in the inspection were: the poor financial health of the college; poor analysis and use of management information; failure to monitor the quality of teaching and learning and students' achievements; lack of consistency in the planning and teaching of courses; inefficient deployment of staff; inadequate management and communication in some curriculum areas.

The college's commentary of progress against the post-inspection action plan, the management self-assessment report and associated action plan provided a good basis for planning and conducting the reinspection. The college identifies many strengths including: a sustained and focused approach to ensuring financial viability and raising standards; a realistic and developing working relationship between senior managers and governors; a resilient and determined management approach in confronting exceptional circumstances; a positive commitment to remedying identified weaknesses. It also claims strengths relating to teamwork, openness, effective communication, efficient deployment of staff, market research, and measures introduced to improve teaching and learning. The main areas of weakness identified include disruption of management routines because of the college's exceptional circumstances; the need to review the college's strategic planning process; expedient arrangements relating to management roles and responsibilities which require long-term solutions, and an outdated management skills audit which does not include all training needs. An acting principal has been in post for the majority of the time since the last inspection.

The reinspection took place in April 1999, by an inspector working for four days and an auditor whose three days work also involved the reinspection of governance. Meetings were held with senior and middle managers, staff from throughout the college and governors. Documentation, including policies, plans and minutes of meetings, were scrutinised.

#### **Assessment**

Progress has been made in all areas of weakness identified in the last inspection. Some weaknesses have been eliminated. The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, financial management is adequate. Financial reporting and monitoring have improved since the last inspection. Comprehensive monthly financial reports are presented to management and governors on a timely basis. Tight controls over expenditure, imposed in 1998, contributed to a reduced deficit for 1997-98 and a forecast break-even position for 1998-99. However, the college remains in a difficult financial

position and also faces a number of potentially significant contingent liabilities, not all within the control of the college. There has been insufficient attention given to contingency planning to mitigate these risks and also insufficient attention to securing the long-term financial stability of the college.

Good progress has been made in the analysis and use of management information. The student record system has been upgraded. 'Real-time' recording of attendance has been introduced and on-line access has been extended. Returns to the FEFC are timely, users have greater confidence in the accuracy of the data produced and there is improved analysis of unit attainment. Not all staff can easily access the management information system and training in the use of the system has not been systematic.

Teaching and learning are now more effectively monitored through a systematic scheme of lesson observations. There is increasing rigour in the monitoring of students' achievements. Management restructuring and the introduction of a quality development cycle are contributing to improved planning and teaching of courses although some inconsistency persists. The deployment of staff is generally efficient following the management and support staff restructuring and the more rigorous implementation of workload agreements. Management and communication in curriculum areas have improved since the last inspection but remain inadequate in one programme area.

Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment report that some important operational management practices have been suspended or delayed in 1998-99, although action has been taken recently to reinstate most of these for 1999-2000. Inspectors also agreed that target-setting is at an early stage of development and lacks a coherent framework. Work is being undertaken to place target-setting on a firmer foundation.

Two significant additional strengths were also identified. Communication between staff and senior management has become open, two-way and effective. This is valued by staff. There has been sustained, positive leadership by the acting principal and the senior management team whilst they confront difficult circumstances.

**Revised grade:** management 3.