

**East Devon College
Reinspection of Management: June 2000
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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East Devon College South West Region

Reinspection of management: June 2000

Background

East Devon College was inspected during March 1999 and the findings were published in inspection report 65/99. Provision in management was graded 4 and the FEFC's audit service judged that financial management was weak.

The strengths of the provision were: an increasingly clear view amongst staff of strategic priorities; some good practice in financial reporting to governors and budget holders; active review and implementation of equal opportunities and health and safety policies. The main weaknesses identified at inspection were: insufficient progress in addressing significant issues facing the college; insufficient links between financial and strategic planning; lack of systematic monitoring of financial and other objectives; continuing decline in student enrolments; lack of an operating statement; inadequate marketing strategy, and weaknesses in curriculum strategy and management.

The provision was reinspected in June 2000, by an inspector and an auditor working for four days. They held meetings with senior managers, staff and governors and examined a wide range of documentation.

Assessment

Since the last inspection, the college has made much progress in addressing the management issues identified at inspection. Many of the recent initiatives are supported through the standards fund. Managers have achieved a number of challenging targets and objectives. The decline in full-time student enrolments has been arrested. A comprehensive review of the curriculum has been undertaken which has informed strategic planning. Some courses for which there was little demand and some under-performing courses have been closed. The annual operating statement clearly reflects the college's strategic objectives. It is supported by operational plans developed by curriculum and support service managers. A senior manager now has responsibility for quality assurance. The college continues to actively review and implement equal opportunities and health and safety policies.

Some management roles have been simplified, and accountability has been clarified. A few middle managers remain unclear about their role within the current management structure, and about their involvement in decision-making. There are regular, well-documented meetings of managers and course teams. Progress with the college's operating statement is reviewed at meetings of the senior management team, although the recording of such reviews is sometimes unclear. Progress with action plans is frequently reviewed. This process is complex and managers recognise the need to rationalise some of the systems designed to address the issues described in the last inspection report.

The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is adequate. The college's financial health category, as graded by the FEFC, has improved. Implementation of the recovery plan has stabilised the college's financial position. The quality of financial reports to senior managers and governors has continued to improve. Targets are set for financial performance and monthly financial progress reports are produced. There are effective controls for budget holders, and the

process for setting budgets is being developed to enable budget holders to influence and understand subsequent allocation decisions. The strategic plan is now appropriately linked to financial forecasts. The college has updated the financial regulations. The internal and external auditors have not identified any significant weaknesses in the systems of internal control.

As acknowledged in the self-assessment report, managers receive reliable and timely management information. Course teams and managers use the data confidently. There is effective communication between managers and staff. Since the last inspection, managers have developed an accommodation strategy that has been approved by governors and is now awaiting approval by the FEFC. Progress has been made in rationalising college accommodation, and further phases are planned to improve utilisation. A revised marketing strategy has been developed, and the liaison with local schools has improved. Members of the curriculum advisory boards include representatives of employers from the local community.

Revised grade: management 3.