

Isle of Wight College
Reinspection of Governance: March 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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Isle of Wight College South East Region

Reinspection of governance: March 2000

Background

Isle of Wight College was inspected in February 1999 and the findings published in inspection report 52/99. Governance was awarded a grade 4.

The key strengths were: a thorough process of self-assessment by governors; and allegiance of governors to the college. The major weaknesses were: a failure to provide adequate strategic direction for the college; poor monitoring of college performance and the lack of targets; insufficiently rigorous consideration of financial matters; reactive approach to strategic planning; an inadequate concern with the quality of the curriculum; and poor attention to the monitoring and review of key policies. The FEFC's audit service concluded that governance was weak. The corporation did not substantially conduct its business in accordance with the instrument and articles of government; it did not fulfil its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC; it had not fulfilled its responsibility for ensuring the future solvency of the institution and the safeguarding of assets.

Reinspection took place in March 2000. Inspectors and auditors examined a range of documents, including the revised self-assessment report, and had meetings with governors and managers, including the chairs of committees.

Assessment

There was a delay in addressing the main weaknesses identified in February 1999. The corporation lodged an appeal against the provisional grade awarded, which was originally grade 5. There has been a significant change of membership of the governing body including the appointment of eight new governors. A detailed skills audit has been undertaken to inform the appointment of new governors. Under the leadership of a new chair, governors have demonstrated an increased understanding of, and commitment to, the measures necessary to secure the financial stability of the college and to meet more effectively the education and training needs of the island community. Governors have reviewed the educational character and strategic direction of the college with a full understanding of the financial and curriculum development measures these imply. These decisions provide the essential mandate for the principal and staff of the college. Inspectors and auditors judged that in the last seven months significant progress had been made. The corporation successfully implemented the modified instrument and articles. The appointment of a new principal was made from October 1999, and two new directors were appointed by the end of the year. There is now an appropriate and productive partnership between the board and the executive. The board is engaged in reviewing the existing strategic plan and formulating a more rigorous approach to the next stage of strategic planning, informed by the increasing confidence in management data.

A completely new committee structure (seven committees) enables the corporation to monitor effectively the work of the college. Each committee is served by the relevant member of the executive group. The curriculum, students and marketing committee took the first but significant steps in November 1999, to scrutinise the academic performance of the college through the post-inspection action plan and the most recent self-assessment report. The committee identified areas of weakness and required the necessary remedial action by

managers. The finance committee has played an important role in ensuring that the financial issues facing the college have been, and continue to be, addressed effectively. During 1999, the audit committee did not ensure that there was an effective internal audit service in place, although action is being taken to redress this matter. The board has recently approved revised policies for equal opportunities and health and safety. The human resources committee receives regular reports on the implementation of these policies. They have ensured that awareness training has taken place for staff and students. There has been a clear and demonstrable improvement in the administration of corporation business, aided by the appointment of an external, independent clerk.

With the support of standards fund monies, governors have undertaken four days of training since September 1999. They have also engaged consultants to assist them in effecting improvements in their own performance.

The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the governance of the college is now 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. In order to make further improvements to its governance, the college should: continue to improve the internal audit service and monitor its effectiveness; set clear targets to enable the strategic plan and financial forecast to be monitored; and continue to engage with the self-assessment process.

Revised grade: governance 3.