

Plymouth College of Art and Design
Reinspection of Governance: February 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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**Plymouth College of Art and Design
South West Region**

Reinspection of governance: February 2000

Background

Plymouth College of Art and Design was inspected in November 1998 and the findings published in inspection report 34/99. Governance was awarded a grade 4. The audit opinion was that the governance of the college was weak.

The strengths of the provision were: committed and active board members with valuable skills; positive measures to inform governors about the curriculum; and good working relationships with senior managers. The major weaknesses identified during the inspection were: lack of response to significant governance issues raised by audit reports; some ineffective management of corporation business, including the mismanagement of the re-election of some governors and officers; unsatisfactory clerking; alterations to committee structure not approved by corporation; and insufficient monitoring of students' achievements.

Following the inspection the college prepared an action plan to address the weaknesses. The action plan, together with a new self-assessment report, provided the main basis for the reinspection which took place over three days in February 2000, by one inspector and one auditor. They held meetings with governors, managers and the clerk and examined a wide range of college documentation.

Assessment

The corporation has worked hard to address the key weaknesses identified in the last inspection. However, some key weaknesses were not sufficiently addressed in the self-assessment report. Some strengths noted at the last inspection have not been maintained. The chair and other governors meet with staff and students informally, in the refectory once each month. Individual governors use their professional expertise to benefit students. However, since the last inspection the corporation no longer receives presentations from heads of schools on curriculum issues. Although updates are provided by the director of curriculum, other activities to keep governors informed of curriculum developments are underdeveloped.

The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is adequate. The corporation substantially conducts its business in accordance with the instrument and articles of government. It also substantially fulfils its responsibilities under its financial memorandum with the FEFC.

Auditors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the college has made good progress in addressing the issues raised in audit reports. The director of finance tracks the progress in implementing audit recommendations and regularly reports to the audit committee. The FEFC's audit service report has received close attention and significant progress has been made in implementing recommendations.

Inspectors and auditors agreed with the college's assessment that the arrangements for clerking have improved significantly since the last inspection. This has led to more effective management of corporation business. The clerk's job description has been revised and strengthened. The college provides more support for the role. The present clerk has been in

post since November 1999, and has yet to receive training in some of his new roles. Agendas and papers for meetings are not always sent to members in good time. There has been some recent improvement in both the timely dispatch of papers and the quality of minutes. Corporation and committee minutes are now clear. The corporation redetermined its constitution following the introduction of the modified instrument and articles of government and set up a transition plan to implement the changes involved. The corporation has not determined sufficient business members.

Arrangements for the induction of new members have been improved. The clerk acts as mentor for new members. There is no formal identification of governor's training needs. The corporation organises two away days each year that provide some training but these meetings mainly consider strategic issues. Participation in external training events is low.

The corporation regularly monitors the achievement of corporate and operational objectives. However, monitoring reports do not highlight variations from previous reports which makes it difficult to identify whether targets have been revised.

Governors do not receive sufficient information on students' achievements to enable comparisons with previous years or with similar colleges. They are given monthly reports on enrolment and retention, but do not receive an overall, appropriately aggregated report on the college's performance. Although two governors are linked to the academic board, their attendance has been poor.

Governors have been slow to develop a range of performance indicators by which they can monitor the performance of the college. The corporation took the decision to develop such indicators in 1998, but no reports have yet been produced. Governors recognise that there is more work to be done.

Revised grade: governance 3.