

**Stafford College**  
**Reinspection of Governance: October 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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**Stafford College  
West Midlands Region**

**Reinspection of governance: October 2000**

**Background**

Stafford College was inspected during November 1999 and the findings were published in inspection report 28/00. Provision in governance was awarded a grade 4.

The key strengths were: good governor induction; comprehensive procedures for open governance; and governors' involvement in the monitoring of academic performance. The main weaknesses were: inadequate monitoring of the college's financial performance; poor oversight of franchised provision; and failure to make returns to the FEFC. The FEFC's audit service concluded that governance was weak. The corporation did not conduct its business in accordance with the instrument and articles of government. It also did not fulfil its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC.

Reinspection took place in October 2000. Inspectors and auditors held meetings with senior and middle managers, and governors including the chair of governors. They also examined a range of college documents.

**Assessment**

Inspectors and auditors judged that governors have made progress in successfully addressing some of the weaknesses identified in the previous inspection report. They have also maintained many of the strengths noted at that time, including good governor induction and governors' effective monitoring of academic performance.

Through the work of the academic standards and performance committee in particular, governors have continued to closely monitor and review achievements and retention and to set challenging improvement targets for these. At their meetings, they receive detailed reports on academic performance from senior and middle managers, including performance reports from heads of school.

The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is adequate. The corporation conducts its business in accordance with the instrument and articles of government. It also fulfils its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC. The corporation has met eight times in the last year. Attendance is monitored and formally reported to the corporation twice a year.

Governors are now better able to monitor the college's finances on the basis of the improved management accounts. The resources committee meets five times a year. Each governor normally receives a copy of the management accounts each month, once these have been approved by the senior management team. However, the first management accounts for this financial year were tabled at the October 2000 corporation meeting.

Inspectors and auditors agreed with the college's self-assessment that the governors oversight of the college's franchised provision has improved significantly. It is no longer a significant weakness. A number of reports on this subject are provided to the corporation, the audit and the resources committees, although a comprehensive report on franchising is still not received

by governors each term. The college has made significant successful efforts to ensure that returns to the FEFC are now made in good time.

The corporation has maintained its procedures for open governance. However, the register of interests for governors, and for the appropriate members of the senior management team, has not been comprehensively updated in the last year. Its public availability is still not well known.

**Revised grade:** governance 3.