

Woodhouse College
Reinspection of governance: June 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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**Woodhouse College
Greater London Region**

Reinspection of governance: June 1999

Background

The college was inspected in April 1998, and the inspection findings were recorded in the FEFC's college inspection report 86/98, published in August 1998. The college's governance was graded 3. To assist in its application for accreditation, the college requested that governance be reinspected.

The strengths of the provision were that: effective use was made of governors' experience and expertise to support college managers; there was thorough, well-presented and timely documentation for corporation meetings; corporation meetings were chaired effectively and all governors contributed to discussions; governors had made a particularly effective contribution to the college's building development plans. In addition, the FEFC's audit service concluded that the governance was adequate and that the corporation substantially conducted its business in accordance with the instrument and articles of government. It also substantially fulfilled its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC. The weaknesses of the provision were that: governors were insufficiently involved in strategic planning and quality assurance; there were no formal induction arrangements for new governors and limited training for governors generally; there was insufficient contact between governors and college staff, other than senior managers; there was no appraisal system for senior postholders. Inspectors found that the college's self-assessment report identified most of the strengths and some, but not all, of the weaknesses in governance.

The reinspection was carried out by one inspector working jointly with an FEFC auditor over two days in June 1999. The inspector and auditor met with governors, senior managers and other college staff. They also scrutinised a wide range of documentation.

Assessment

Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's revised self-assessment report. Governors were involved fully in the production of the report. The college has made progress in addressing the weaknesses which were identified in the original inspection, at the same time building on the strengths. The corporation's committee structure has been rationalised and now comprises four committees, rather than seven. The new structure enables the corporation to deal more effectively with quality and strategic issues. The search committee has been instrumental in recruiting new governors who have appropriate experience and expertise. As the self-assessment report acknowledges, the effectiveness of the new corporation committee structure has yet to be evaluated formally and the terms of reference for the committees are generally too broad to facilitate such an evaluation. Governors closely monitor students' achievements and retention, and have been actively involved in setting targets for these aspects of performance. They also effectively monitor the college's financial position. The self-assessment report acknowledges that procedures for the appraisal of senior postholders have been established. Governors do not yet systematically review the college's performance against corporate objectives. As the self-assessment report notes, an induction programme

for new governors has been introduced. Since the inspection, three relevant and highly-valued training events have been organised for governors. Further training events are being developed in consultation with the governors. The attendance of governors at corporation and committee meetings has improved significantly since the original inspection. In order to enable governors to improve their overall knowledge of the college and strengthen contacts with college staff, three working groups have been established. These groups consider issues relating to curriculum and quality, student support and premises. Each group is chaired by a governor and members are drawn from the corporation and the college management team. The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is good. 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.

Revised grade: governance 2.