

**Macclesfield College**  
**Reinspection of quality assurance: September 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. 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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## **Macclesfield College North West Region**

### **Reinspection of quality assurance: September 1999**

#### **Background**

Macclesfield College in north-east Cheshire was inspected in May 1998 and the findings published in inspection report 105/98. Quality assurance was awarded a grade 4.

The key strengths were: the institution of new arrangements to tighten controls; well-developed policies and procedures for staff development; rigorous evaluation of performance in a few areas of the college. The major weaknesses were: failure of the quality assurance arrangements to provide a reliable picture of college performance; insufficient use of standards, performance indicators and targets in planning for improvement; absence of formal monitoring of the student charter; inadequate action plans which fail to address significant issues; insufficient analysis of students' achievements and retention data.

Reinspection took place in September 1999. Inspectors had meetings with college managers, teaching and support staff, the clerk to the corporation and students. They reviewed a wide range of college documentation, including self-assessment reports, performance reviews, minutes of meetings held by college teams and the corporation board.

#### **Assessment**

The college has attached a high priority to address the issues raised at the last inspection. Progress has clearly been made. Inspectors agreed with the college that the new quality assurance manual is clearly written and user-friendly. It contains revised procedures and documentation and sets out where responsibility lies for assuring quality throughout the college. Governors have taken a close interest in monitoring the progress towards improving arrangements for quality assurance. The charter has been revised and the process of monitoring performance against its standards has begun. Documentation for recording the outcome of curriculum reviews allows performance data to be compared with national benchmarks, an action plan to be specified and targets proposed for the coming year. The college has improved the reliability and quality of the data which the management information system provides. Managers across the college now obtain a more accurate picture of college performance against national benchmarks. The college has implemented a more rigorous approach to lesson observation, which includes external moderation. Arrangements for internal verification have been improved. The college has responded well to feedback from students, who appreciate the improvements in accommodation and catering facilities which have been made. Complaints are well documented and monitored, both to ensure that prompt action is taken and to identify issues and patterns arising. Inspectors agreed with the college that key weaknesses remaining include the lack of rigour in some course and action plans, the decline in some areas of students' achievements and the need for greater consistency in the application of systems for attendance monitoring. The amount of analysis recorded in some course reviews is limited, as is the detail contained in the action plans. The process of review and action-planning does not take enough account of progress made in implementing actions previously agreed. Student retention and achievement rates still show some underachievement against national averages for 1998, although there have been improvements at level 2. Data on retention for 1998-99 indicate improved rates at all levels. Staff appraisal for teaching and support staff is focused on identifying development needs. The college regularly reviews the performance of managers against their action plans

but, for most staff, appraisal and action-planning is not systematically linked. Inspectors did not agree that progress had been as extensive as the college claimed in its self-assessment report, but the report clearly identified areas for further development to build on these initial improvements.

**Revised grade:** quality assurance 3.