

Macclesfield College
Reinspection of science: 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 science: September 1999

Background

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

The key strengths were effective use of IT in lessons and well-resourced laboratories. The major weaknesses were: the small range of teaching and learning methods; low pass rates in two-year GCE A levels; poor recruitment and retention rates; a lack of co-ordination across subject areas; poor schemes of work; inadequate marking of students' work; few opportunities for visits, placements and fieldwork.

Since the inspection, the college has discontinued a number of the courses. It no longer runs GCSE or GCE A level science courses other than GCE A level human physiology and health and GCE A level human biology, both as evening provision only. Science modules continue to be incorporated in the access course, and the college has developed provision in animal care and management. New managers have recently been appointed. Most of the teachers are new in post since the last inspection.

Reinspection took place in September 1999. Inspectors observed 11 lessons, examined a range of documents, scrutinised students' achievements and retention data, and had meetings with managers, teachers and students.

Assessment

The college has made some progress in addressing weaknesses identified in the original inspection: the range of teaching methods used has improved; schemes of work are now well established and of good quality; the marking of students' work is thorough and well structured; placements are an integral part of full-time courses. However, despite these improvements there are still substantial weaknesses. The range of courses offered is very narrow and enrolment targets for September 1999 have not been met. The teaching has improved markedly since the last inspection with all lessons observed being at least satisfactory, but it still remains below that quoted in *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1997-98: Chief inspector's annual report*. There are poor pass rates on the courses leading to GCSE and GCE A level qualifications. No student on the GCE A level courses in biology and chemistry achieved a pass grade in 1999. Retention rates are also poor. The retention rates on courses still being offered are below the national average for the sector. For example, GCE A level human biology had a rate of 47% in 1999 compared with the national average of 70%. The opportunities for students to gain experience from work placements is planned. However, students have to find their own placements with insufficient support. The quality and usefulness of these placements is therefore left too much to chance. The action plan within the self-assessment report does not adequately cover all the weaknesses identified.

Revised grade: science 4.