

**Merton College**  
**Reinspection of Engineering: February 2001**  
**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.*

*Cheylesmore House  
Quinton Road  
Coventry CV1 2WT  
Telephone 02476 863000  
Fax 02476 862100  
website: <http://www.fefc.ac.uk>*

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**Merton College  
Greater London Region**

**Reinspection of Engineering: February 2001**

**Background**

Merton College was inspected in April 2000 and the findings published in inspection report 91/00. The college's engineering provision was graded 4.

Inspectors judged the strengths of the college's engineering provision to be: the good teaching in practical lessons; the high standards of much practical work; the well-equipped motorcycle and musical instrument repair workshops; and the provision of good progression opportunities. These strengths were outweighed by weaknesses which included: ineffective management of some courses; inappropriate and ineffective teaching in many theory lessons; unclear assessments on some courses; declining retention rates on many courses; consistently low achievement rates on many courses; and low student attendance in many lessons.

Inspectors observed 13 lessons, held meetings with college managers and students, scrutinised students' work and a broad range of documentation.

**Assessment**

The college's engineering provision has undergone substantial review and change since the inspection. The college produced a detailed recovery plan to address the weaknesses identified in the previous inspection report. Course co-ordinators now have responsibility for the management of each course. All teachers in each of the two schools meet regularly to discuss course management and administrative issues.

After the last inspection, with assistance from the standards fund, the college engaged a consultant to observe and report on the quality of teaching. Again using the standards fund, the college has employed a lead engineering teacher whose role is to develop and share good practice in teaching and assessment. Both initiatives have led to significant improvement, and most teaching is now satisfactory or better. Teachers make good use of their specialist knowledge to add interest to their teaching. Good-quality handouts have replaced lengthy periods of note-taking by students, and learning is checked regularly in most lessons. Teachers make good use of the college's extensive range of engineering components to illustrate their teaching. The quality of course and lesson planning is good. Assessment and internal verification procedures have been introduced and are thoroughly implemented. Course assignments and assessments are now set at an appropriate level. Teachers provide written comments on students' work, but these are often insufficiently detailed to help students make improvements. The college has recently improved the resources for teaching electronic engineering, and these now include computer simulation software.

Since the last inspection, the retention of engineering students has improved, although it continues to be low on some courses. There has been an improvement in the number of students achieving their learning goals. The standard of students' practical work remains high.

**Revised grade:** engineering 3.