

North Area College  
Reinspection of Humanities: January 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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## **North Area College North West Region**

### **Reinspection of humanities: January 1999**

#### **Background**

North Area College in Stockport, Greater Manchester was inspected in September 1997 and the findings published in inspection report 01/98. Provision in humanities was awarded a grade 4.

The areas covered by the inspection were GCSE and GCE A level courses in humanities subjects and the college's modern languages provision. The key strengths were: good quality learning materials for some courses; lively and enthusiastic teaching of language courses for adults; good arrangements for reviewing younger students' progress with them and their parents. The major weaknesses were: examination pass rates in most subjects which were below national averages, and individual grades which were lower than those predicted by students' previous performance in GCSE examinations; poor retention rates in most subjects; poor attendance rates well below college targets in most subjects; inadequate development, assessment and accreditation of key skills; the weak study skills of many students; ineffective curriculum management at subject level; inappropriate teaching methods.

Reinspection took place in January 1999. Inspectors observed 19 lessons, examined a range of documents, scrutinised students' achievement and retention data and students' work, had meetings with managers and staff and spoke with students from a range of courses.

#### **Assessment**

The college has taken to heart the criticisms of humanities provision made during the inspection of September 1997. There has been a marked improvement in the quality of teaching and learning. In many lessons, teaching is interesting, lively and enthusiastic and students are actively involved. There are regular checks that students understand their work and are learning. In all subject areas there are comprehensive schemes of work which refer explicitly to the key skills to be developed. These are reflected in lesson planning and delivery. In most humanities subjects, students use information technology to enhance their learning, though such technology is rarely used in English lessons. The humanities subjects are taught in a dedicated area with a new base room for students and staff to use for study and support. Teaching rooms are attractive and most have relevant display material. Student satisfaction with their courses, with the exception of English, is high. Students' achievements are improving, with good results in some subjects in 1998. Achievements in GCE A level law, psychology, geography and communication studies and in the access to higher education course were all above the national average in 1998. However, there are still poor levels of achievement in GCE A level sociology, GCE A level English Language and GCSE English. Despite modest improvements, retention levels are still low for the sector and there are declining enrolments in humanities subjects. The recently introduced course reviews lack meaningful analysis and evaluation. The relationship between the curriculum area and the learning resources centre is informal and underdeveloped. There is a lack of leadership and organisation at subject level for English courses, which is not the case for the other humanities subjects. The self-assessment report identifies the need for further development following these initial improvements.

**Revised grade:** humanities 3.