

**REPORT  
FROM THE  
INSPECTORATE**

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**Askham Bryan  
College of  
Agriculture and  
Horticulture**

**March 1996**

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**THE  
FURTHER  
EDUCATION  
FUNDING  
COUNCIL**

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**THE FURTHER EDUCATION  
FUNDING COUNCIL**

*The Further Education Funding Council 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 every four years. The inspectorate also assesses and reports nationally on the curriculum and gives advice to FEFC's quality assessment committee.*

*College inspections are carried out in accordance with the framework and guidelines described in Council Circular 93/28. They involve full-time inspectors and registered part-time inspectors who have knowledge and experience in the work they inspect. Inspection teams normally include at least one member who does not work in education and a member of staff from the college being inspected.*

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## **GRADE DESCRIPTORS**

*The procedures for assessing quality are set out in the Council Circular 93/28. During their inspection, inspectors assess the strengths and weaknesses of each aspect of provision they inspect. Their assessments are set out in the reports. They also use a five-point grading scale to summarise the balance between strengths and weaknesses.*

*The descriptors for the grades are:*

- grade 1 – provision which has many strengths and very few weaknesses*
- grade 2 – provision in which the strengths clearly outweigh the weaknesses*
- grade 3 – provision with a balance of strengths and weaknesses*
- grade 4 – provision in which the weaknesses clearly outweigh the strengths*
- grade 5 – provision which has many weaknesses and very few strengths.*

*By June 1995, some 208 college inspections had been completed. The grade profiles for aspects of cross-college provision and programme areas for the 208 colleges are shown in the following table.*

### **College grade profiles 1993-95**

	<b>Inspection grades</b>				
<b>Activity</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Programme area	9%	60%	28%	3%	<1%
Cross-college provision	13%	51%	31%	5%	<1%
Overall	11%	56%	29%	4%	<1%

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# FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 24/96

## ASKHAM BRYAN COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE AND HORTICULTURE YORKSHIRE AND HUMBERSIDE REGION

Inspected April-December 1995

### Summary

Askham Bryan College of Agriculture and Horticulture offers an extensive range of courses in agriculture and horticulture and adult education which are well matched to the needs of the rural community. The governing body is committed to ensuring the success of the college and has the expertise it needs. College management structures are currently being changed. Resource allocation is well managed. Teaching is generally satisfactory. Students' achievements in examinations are uneven but most students go on to additional education or employment. Recruitment and enrolment procedures are efficient. There is a framework for course review and the monitoring of students' views. Equipment is mostly good. Effective use is made of the estates and off-site facilities. The college should: reduce gaps in its provision; ensure that strategic planning systematically reflects the review of programme areas; improve reporting processes to ensure that evaluation is rigorous; strengthen the role of the academic board; improve the general level of student support, course operation and course quality control; ensure more consistent planning of teaching and assessment; improve the management of staff development; and refurbish some of its accommodation.

The grades awarded as a result of the inspection are given below.

<b>Aspects of cross-college provision</b>	<b>Grade</b>
Responsiveness and range of provision	2
Governance and management	3
Students' recruitment, guidance and support	3
Quality assurance	3
Resources: staffing	2
equipment/learning resources	2
accommodation	2

<b>Curriculum area</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Curriculum area</b>	<b>Grade</b>
Agriculture	3	Engineering	2
Countryside studies	3	Business	3
Horticulture	3	Adult and basic education	2
Equine studies	4		

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## **INTRODUCTION**

1 Askham Bryan College of Agriculture and Horticulture was inspected between April 1995 and December 1995. The college's enrolment and induction procedures were inspected in September 1995. Business studies was inspected in April 1995 and the other curriculum areas in October 1995. Three full-time and five part-time registered inspectors spent a total of 31 days on specialist subject inspections. They inspected students' work and documentation relating to the college and its courses. In the week beginning 4 December 1995, three full-time and three part-time inspectors, including one inspector with experience from outside the world of education, spent a further 29 days looking at aspects of cross-college provision. During the period of the inspection there were meetings with governors, representatives of the North Yorkshire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), representatives of industry, head teachers, a representative from higher education, local employers, parents, students, college managers, and teaching and support staff.

## **THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS**

2 The main college site was purchased in the early 1930s and the foundation stone for the main building, then the Yorkshire Institute of Agriculture, was laid in 1936. The college is in the village of Askham Bryan, four miles from the centre of York and 18 miles from Leeds. There are 'out-centres' in Bedale, Guisborough, Harrogate and Pickering. The college is about three miles away from York Sixth Form College and York College of Further and Higher Education. The nearest specialist agricultural college is 28 miles away. The college recruits nationally, especially to higher education courses, as well as locally and regionally. There is residential accommodation which includes 244 study bedrooms.

3 The college has traditionally concentrated on providing courses in agriculture, horticulture, and agricultural engineering. More recently, it has introduced business, leisure, and equine management courses. It offers a growing range of creative craft courses, including embroidery and flower arranging, and participates in the local authority's adult education programme. About 200 of the enrolled students are on higher education programmes, which include three degree courses and a number of higher national diplomas.

4 There are two subsidiary companies: Askham Bryan College Enterprises Ltd, including Askham Bryan Training which offers full-cost provision and a rural business research unit; and Askham Bryan College Estates Ltd which operates the college farming activities and provides an educational resource as well as commercial farming activities. The estates of the college comprise three farms occupying an area of 174 hectares. The main areas of activity are arable and dairy farming, but sheep and pigs are also reared for breeding purposes. The college leases a forestry training centre.

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5 A partnership with the York Riding School has been established to support the delivery of equine courses. The college has developed a partnership with Easingwold School to deliver the GNVQ advanced business programme and a partnership with Prior Pursglove College in Guisborough.

6 The county of North Yorkshire, in which all but one of the college sites are located, is the largest in area of any county in England and has about 720,000 residents. The unemployment rate is the lowest of any English county. Its rural areas are largely dependent on farming and other land-based industries for employment. Occupational growth in North Yorkshire is expected to be most rapid in the service sectors and construction. Agriculture and manufacturing are expected to decline but will continue to require recruits who increasingly have higher levels of skill.

7 Enrolments at the college have grown by 6 per cent over the last three years to the current total of 6,351 students. During this period a decline in part-time and block-release enrolments has been matched by an increase in full-time and higher education enrolments. Enrolments by age, by level of study and by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figures 1, 2 and 3, respectively. Only a small number of students attending the college come from minority ethnic groups, reflecting the population profile in the county and surrounding rural areas.

8 There are 65 full-time equivalent teaching staff at the college and 114 full-time equivalent support staff, including a significant number involved in running the estate. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4. The management structure comprises the principal and the directors responsible for education, resources, finance, and sales and development. There are also two senior managers responsible for education and curriculum, and a director for human resources. The position of manager for estates and premises is currently vacant.

9 The mission statement of the college is 'to deliver high-quality education, training and guidance to meet the needs of the land-based industries and allied sectors, and to service the wider educational and training needs of all the community in Yorkshire and beyond'. Key corporate objectives identified in the strategic plan are: to remain strong in the higher and further education sectors; to meet by 1997 the target of 25 per cent growth beyond the size of the college on its incorporation; and to provide additional student facilities on the main site.

#### **RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION**

10 Staff are generally well informed about national initiatives in the further education sector. The college is ahead of many other agricultural and horticulture colleges in its development of courses leading to National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs). Teachers are also involved in the

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development of the new General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) courses for the land-based industries.

11 In support of the national targets for education and training, the college has effective procedures to enable students to take NVQs in addition to their target qualification. Students are also able to gain certification in a wide range of skills, often to satisfy legal requirements for qualification in specific occupations. There are opportunities for full-time students to take General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) courses and examinations in mathematics and English. Provision to enable students to study in their own time, with support from the college, is at an early stage of development; a co-ordinator has been appointed and a short-term post is funded by the TEC, but priorities for development have yet to be identified.

12 The college offers a wide range of full-time and part-time courses in agriculture and horticulture which enables progression from intermediate to higher education. However, the low demand for some courses means that the college is unable to run all the courses it offers at all of its centres. This makes access for some students to their first choice of course difficult and some students' needs are not fully met. There is scope for developing more flexible arrangements in the organisation and delivery of the curriculum to care for differing patterns of student attendance. There are plans to offer some modules of the full-time courses at the 'out-centres' next year. Agricultural engineering courses have been available for a number of years.

13 The college is diversifying its provision. Equine and countryside courses have been established in the last four years; business and leisure studies more recently; and an animal care course this year. Some courses are operating with low student numbers, progression opportunities are restricted and the equine provision is poorly matched to the needs of the students. The college is reviewing its equine and countryside programmes.

14 The college offers a good range of courses for adults in the communities local to the main site and to its 'out-centres'. The attendance times for daytime creative craft courses have been arranged to accommodate those with childcare responsibilities and those who wish to take a longer period to gain the qualification. There are clear progression opportunities for those wishing to move to a vocational qualification. There is scope to increase the range of vocational part-time courses for adults. The college has a contract with the local education authority for the provision of non-vocational classes.

15 The college has effective links with many sections of the rural community and is involved in a number of projects that benefit the local community. Its accommodation is frequently used for meetings by a wide range of local organisations. The college is a partner in a European funded initiative to establish a 'community college' in Middleham, a rural area close to the Bedale centre.

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16 There are productive links with special schools and adult training centres. All centres have part-time provision for students with special learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Many of the programmes offered lead to vocational certification. Special schools are complimentary about the provision, appreciating its practical nature. A full-time course was started in 1994 in response to requests from local schools, but the curriculum is limited largely to developing skills in numeracy, literacy and independent living. It provides insufficient opportunities for students to undertake vocational training.

17 Curriculum links with schools other than special schools are underdeveloped. For example, the college does not provide opportunities for school pupils to sample its provision for short periods. The college is currently in discussion with some schools to develop a pilot GNVQ for the land-based industries. A liaison group has recently been set up to formalise links with schools, building on the practice in the 'out-centres' where local associations have been formed which include careers officers, teachers and providers of education.

18 Local companies and other organisations provide good support for teaching. They are used effectively to enhance the students' range of experience through off-site practical work, visits, the engagement of visiting speakers, student project work and planned work experience. The college's 'out-centres' maintain close and valuable links with local employers, enabling students to use specialist facilities for practical work and to borrow equipment. The college's training unit runs a range of short courses in response to local and regional needs.

19 The college has been slow to develop course planning and development based on market research. In the past, some courses have been poorly matched to local requirements. The college is now, however, adopting a more systematic approach. Planning for the animal care course introduced this year was grounded on wide-ranging enquiries and surveys which provided a good basis for informed decision. Technical advisory groups have recently been set up for most of the curriculum areas to provide channels through which relevant industry and commerce can influence and inform course content and development.

20 The college promotes its courses well. Publicity material is mostly of a high standard and prospectuses and course guides are informative and present a positive image of the college. College representatives attend local, regional and national shows and exhibitions. The college's annual open day is a major event which attracts about 3,000 visitors. Courses are actively promoted in schools, staff attend careers conventions regularly, and there are strong links with the local careers service. The college runs information days for careers officers and teachers and conducts surveys to canvass the views of prospective students.

21 There are good links with local further and higher education institutions. The college affiliated to the University of Leeds in 1992; it

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currently runs two degree programmes approved by the university and contributes to a higher degree course. Representatives of the university value the link and pay tribute to the responsiveness of the college. At the time of the inspection the college became an affiliated college of the University of York. The college is a partner in a bio-sciences project supported through the government's competitiveness fund. Other educational providers in York, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, and local companies are co-partners. There are productive working relationships with the local TEC.

22 There are weaknesses in the arrangements for implementing the recently-revised equal opportunities policy. Responsibilities for managing developments are not clearly allocated. The college is establishing a working group to provide detailed recommendations but no targets or deadlines have been set. All staff and students questioned considered that there was equality of opportunity in the college and no discriminatory practices. However, answers to course questionnaires last year showed that 9 per cent of all students, and more than 20 per cent on some courses, felt that the college's policy statement was not being fulfilled while about 30 per cent responded that they 'did not know'. Little has been done to explore the implications of these findings.

#### **GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT**

23 The Askham Bryan corporation has 16 members, nine of whom are experienced in business areas, including those of direct relevance to the college's major activities of agriculture and horticulture. The corporation also includes a trades union official, the principal, two members of the college staff, and a student governor. A co-opted member represents higher education. Members recognise the need to broaden their representation in line with the recent diversification of provision to include, for example, provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. They have adopted vigorous search practices for new appointments. This has resulted in the recent appointment of a woman with experience in property management. The college registrar is clerk to the governors.

24 There is a low turnover among members, many of whom have long-standing connections with the college. Attendance at corporation meetings is good, and members take an active and close interest in the college. Several attend college committees and liaison bodies. The corporation has adopted a code of practice and established a register of interests. It meets four times each year and members of the college directorate routinely attend its meetings. Its work is supported by an appropriate committee structure in which members participate actively. The finance and general purposes committee, which meets 11 times a year, receives a detailed and clear monthly financial statement. Although some members have attended external governor training sessions, and the corporation has received briefings on developments in further

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education, governors have not considered their development needs in a systematic way.

25 Members have a good understanding of their roles and statutory duties and their relationship with college management. The corporation made substantial use of external consultants to guide its development through incorporation. It has responded practically to their recommendations, for example, in strengthening financial management. Every six months the principal gives the corporation a wide-ranging report on college activities. Directors report on their areas of responsibility as required. However, the governors have not considered the number, schedule and structure of the reports they require to monitor effectively the implementation of key policies and college performance. Some of the reports they receive are too descriptive and fail to evaluate the provision sufficiently.

26 The college is restructuring its management arrangements in order to clarify responsibilities and provide more focused subject leadership. Currently, responsibility for the curriculum is shared between 17 programme managers who report to two senior managers who, in turn, report to the director of education. The management of resources is entrusted to five centre managers and six resource managers who report to the director for resources. These arrangements are about to be replaced by a structure based on four schools, each with its own head. Staff know about this new school management structure, though some are uncertain how it is to be introduced.

27 The college's present strategic plan, for the period 1994-97, was not the systematic product of programme and resource area development plans. A strategic planning group, which includes governors, is reviewing current planning procedures with a view to drawing up a new three-year plan as soon as possible. An operational plan for 1995-96 has yet to be produced.

28 The college has reduced its average level of funding significantly. In 1993-94 it was £26.31 per unit. It now stands at £24.98 per unit for 1995-96. The median for agricultural and horticultural colleges is £23.15 per unit. The college's income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1995 are shown in figures 5 and 6. Figures provided by the college show that a substantial proportion of the operating deficit is due to restructuring costs incurred in the year and increased building maintenance provisions. At 31 July 1995 the college had reserves of £464,000.

29 The college has set two major targets for its financial operations: to achieve a break-even position on income and expenditure by 1997-98 while maintaining adequate financial reserves, and to continue reducing its average level of funding without reducing the quality of provision. The corporation has established an overheads review group to identify action needed to improve efficiency. Progress has been made in delegating budgets, mainly for non-pay expenditure. It is planned to continue this process when all the heads of school have been appointed.

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30 The college's 'out-centres' are well run by centre managers who report to the director of resources. They have sufficient autonomy to adapt provision to local needs.

31 Resource management is rigorous and there is close monitoring of provision against targets, for example, for teaching hours and for revenue allocation. This has recently led to improvements in student-staff ratios. Innovative methods are used to maintain and enhance some of the college's equipment such as the tractor stock. In contrast, the present management of course operations, curriculum development and academic quality assurance is poor. Programme area development plans vary in quality and the management of learning is inconsistent. For example, different standards operate both across courses and within courses in relation to schemes of work and assignment development. There are also differing degrees of rigour in ensuring that, following course review, any necessary action is implemented. The new members of the directorate recognise these deficiencies and have started to address them. For example, there are new staffing procedures and quality assurance procedures are being revised.

32 The principal and the directors communicate with staff in a variety of ways, including regular staff meetings and weekly news sheets. A number of managers also operate an 'open door policy', and staff have ready access to all members of the directorate. The key college committees produce comprehensive and detailed minutes of their meetings and these are available to staff. However, weaknesses in communication between the different curriculum managers and between the curriculum and resource arms of the current management structure have contributed to deficiencies in students' experiences. Some programme managers carry a heavy workload and receive insufficient administrative support.

33 The college took part in the pilot from the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) for the individualised student and staff records. The management information system effectively meets needs for this kind of information. However, it is not fully effective in supporting the work of programme managers and little use is being made of the information currently available. Managers and users of the system have not got together to study and co-ordinate their information needs so as best to exploit the potential of an integrated management information system.

34 Reporting on the implementation of college policies and provision is inconsistent. In some cases, there are formal systems, such as those for reporting on the implementation of the health and safety policy. In others, for example with regard to equal opportunities, there are not. Some reports are insufficiently evaluative and others, for example on the evaluation of student achievements, are too brief.

35 The college is developing a methodology to calculate the unit costs of courses. At present, direct costs are apportioned to each course and further work is being done to enable the accurate apportionment of indirect

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costs. Enrolment targets are set for each course. The college achieved its targets for enrolments and units in 1994-95. Data on student absences and retention are monitored regularly and full-time students' destination data are collated against each course.

### **STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT**

36 All prospective full-time students are invited to an interview at the college within a month of application. Interviews are conducted by staff who are specialists in the proposed area of study. Most students expressed contentment with the process, but some, for example students of agriculture, said that they were not always well informed about courses, entry requirements and opportunities for progression. The most recent student survey showed that more than 20 per cent of all students considered that they had not received impartial advice at their initial interview. An open evening, held in November, and the college open day, held in the early part of the summer, have been successful in attracting a large number of potential applicants, their parents and people from the wider community. These events are well promoted through the press and posters sent to local schools, careers services and tourist information offices.

37 College and course enrolment takes place during a single day in mid-September. A booklet of detailed guidance is published to inform students about the college; this needs to be updated. The college is currently introducing a more flexible 'filofax' format for part-time students. Early in their first week of attendance, students meet the principal, senior managers and the student services team. At a freshers' day, information is provided on banking services, equipment required for courses, students' union services and sporting activities.

38 Course induction follows broadly the same pattern across the college. Induction procedures are comprehensive; they include an introduction to college services such as the library and learning resources centre and information technology facilities, as well as dealing with issues specific to courses. Students are given a tour of the estate and introduced to basic health and safety issues. During induction, each student completes an initial assessment and guidance form, and all students at or below intermediate level are given screening tests in language and numeracy. Students who need it are given additional learning support, but course tutors are not always informed of the attendance of their students at learning support sessions or of their progress. A qualified co-ordinator for the accreditation of students' prior learning has been appointed. This year 20 students have used the scheme to gain recognition for relevant experience acquired prior to enrolment.

39 All students have a course tutor who is responsible for both academic and pastoral support. The college tutorial policy specifies a minimum entitlement of tutorial time for each full-time student: two 30-minute

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sessions in the first and third terms and one in the middle term. Most agriculture and engineering programmes meet, and sometimes exceed, this requirement. On some courses, for example the national diploma in urban forestry, students reported that no personal tutorials had yet taken place this year. On other courses, for example the national diploma in horse studies, the length of tutorials falls far short of the prescribed entitlement. The case loading of tutors varies widely; for example one tutor is responsible for 60 students. Tutorial records and action plans are sometimes perfunctory or incomplete. Tutors rely too much on students referring themselves for tutorials. Few meetings of programme teams address tutorial issues. Most courses have no structured tutorial programme covering matters such as the development of study skills, the presentation of curricula vitae, or applications to higher education institutions. Some group tutorials are used to catch up on coursework. Students reported, however, that in spite of the wide variations in tutorial practice, tutors were readily accessible and responsive to their concerns.

40 The system for the support of students is fragmented. Responsibilities are not clearly defined. For example, those of the student support services manager are mainly limited to the co-ordination of the team of wardens. Students' attendance is recorded weekly, but there is no automatic procedure for following up absences. No written progress reports are provided for the parents of 16 to 18 year old students. The college has made little progress in introducing records of achievement. Students are encouraged to bring their records from schools, but not all do so.

41 About 40 per cent of full-time students are residential. Of these, 70 per cent are 18 years or under. There are equal numbers of men and women. The care of residential students is the responsibility of seven wardens, one of whom is a woman. The students find the wardens approachable and responsive to their needs. There are few social or recreational activities organised by the college at weekends, when many residential students return home. CHAT (the Confidential Help and Advisory Team) provides a counselling service to students; it is run by the college chaplain, who holds a professional counselling qualification. Referrals are made through course tutors and wardens; the service is generally well regarded by students.

42 The students' union organises a range of sporting and social activities. It works with the Askham Bryan Association, which has a register of over 1,000 past and present students, to organise the major social events in the college calendar such as the summer ball. The association channels its profits into a student support fund which, in 1994-95, donated nearly £1,500 to hardship cases. The students' union president meets the principal weekly and also sits on the corporation board and the academic board.

43 The careers policy aims to provide high-quality education and guidance for all students to enable them to fulfil their potential. The careers information room is well equipped with a wide range of guidance materials,

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including computerised job search facilities. There are close links with the North Yorkshire Careers Service Agency at the different centres. Visiting speakers from the land-based industries have given talks to students, but they have not been well attended. There has also been a low take-up of external careers advice. A careers counselling team of college staff has been set up to provide information about specific occupational areas.

44 Students' rights and responsibilities are contained in the charter and the notes of guidance booklet, which also gives a full list of college regulations. All students receive a copy of the charter on enrolment, but it is not scheduled for discussion at induction. Most students recognise that if they have any problems, they can take them to their course tutor for help and advice.

### **TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING**

45 Of the 95 sessions seen, 53 per cent had strengths which outweighed weaknesses. The weaknesses outweighed the strengths in 17 per cent of sessions. During the inspection, the number of students attending classes as a percentage of those on register averaged 84.5 per cent. The average class size was 10.9 students. The following table summarises the grades awarded to the sessions inspection.

#### **Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study**

<b>Programmes</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>Totals</b>
GNVQ		1	6	7	2	0	16
NVQ		2	2	2	1	0	7
Other vocational		2	15	10	7	1	35
Other		6	16	10	4	1	37
<b>Total</b>		<b>11</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>95</b>

46 Students were mostly keen and responsive, especially in classes where teachers used a variety of methods and learning was linked to practical applications. In some classes, however, usually where teaching was badly matched to the needs and abilities of all the students, students responded poorly and a few caused disruption. Teachers were knowledgeable about their subjects and showed a good awareness of current developments in relevant industries and occupations.

47 On many full-time courses students are required to undertake work experience. The students valued this experience, whether undertaken for one day per week on one-year courses, or as a 'middle year' extending a two-year course to three years. There are effective arrangements to prepare both students and employers for the placement and to assess the students' experience and draw upon it during teaching.

48 Most teaching was supported by schemes of work. In many cases, however, these failed to give sufficient attention to the overall development

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of the course. The planning of lessons often failed to consider adequately how students of differing ability were to be taught, or how to make the best use of learning aids such as handouts, overhead projectors, and other forms of visual presentation. Some sessions showed evidence of poor planning; for example, where practical work was not linked to underpinning theory, or where there was a lack of variety in the teaching.

49 Some course teams issued a schedule of assignments and other assessments to their students who appreciated the opportunity this gave them to plan their work. On other courses, for example in equine studies and horticulture, students were not so well informed and, in some cases, students were given insufficient notice of an assessment. The quality of the assignment briefs was variable. In the best practice, the briefs clearly stated the objectives of the assignment, the expected outcomes and the assessment criteria, and gave guidance as to the relative importance of each part of the assignment. In some cases, however, the briefs failed to explain adequately important aspects of the assignment: for example, the criteria used to mark or grade the work. Tests and assignments which contributed to the students' assessments were of an appropriate standard.

50 In most cases, students' work was marked and returned promptly, but the guidance given to them on how they might improve their work was uneven. In some cases, the comments were too unspecific to be helpful. Most teachers kept adequate records of the progress of their students, but records were not always collated so that the course team could regularly monitor the overall progress of each student.

51 The teaching in business studies was enthusiastic and included a range of activities. In some classes, students were questioned effectively in order to establish their knowledge and understanding and this helped to generate a productive working atmosphere. Good use was made of real business case studies. In one session, students were required to produce business plans for real enterprises which were considering expansion. The students visited the firms, undertook market research and presented their proposals to the proprietors. In some sessions, however, teachers intervened too readily and did not allow the students to develop their ideas sufficiently. In some sessions the pace of teaching was too fast for the students and the teachers failed to monitor the development of students' understanding effectively.

52 Engineering students follow a programme of visits, receive visiting speakers, undertake work experience in an extended summer period, and have opportunities to achieve certificates of competence in, for example, skills such as fork-lift truck operation. The students on the pilot GNVQ advanced programme also have the opportunity to take several additional units, which give the course an appropriate agricultural bias. These were developed by a college consortium of which Askham Bryan is a member. Teaching was generally of a good standard. Teachers make frequent references to agricultural activity in order to increase the relevance of their teaching to students, many of whom have an interest in working in

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the agricultural industry. A wide range of assignments was set and students received good feedback on their performance, both through written comments on their assignment scripts and orally in individual tutorials. Students responded in a mature fashion, taking good advantage of opportunities given to them to contribute to discussions. A minority of classes suffered from poor planning. In some classes not all students were prompted to contribute and the scheduling of assignments, and monitoring of students' progress, was insufficiently developed.

53 In estate management courses, the standard of teaching and learning had a balance of strengths and weaknesses. In most of the lessons seen the students were well motivated and participated constructively in class discussion. Good use was made of the students' prior experience. The extensive estate facilities were used effectively to develop the practical skills required. However, the pace of work in some sessions was too slow and students were required to spend too much time copying notes. Some of the handout material used was of poor quality. In some classes, usually where there was insufficient variety of activity, students' interest was not maintained.

54 The equine studies courses are taught on two sites and by two groups of teachers. Practical work is subcontracted to the York Riding School while the theoretical teaching is undertaken by college teachers on the main college site. Some of the riding instruction was of a good standard. In one session, the teacher was able to identify weaknesses and prescribe exercises to improve riding skills. While the theory taught was of an appropriate standard, it was not developed in conjunction with the practical work. Overall, course planning was weak and there was little logical development of topics. The poor co-ordination of practical and theoretical teaching limited the students' progress and did not ensure that students always appreciated the relevance of the theoretical work. In some cases, students were taught in unsuitable rooms where the teaching was disrupted by people passing through them.

55 The students on agricultural courses benefited from a wide range of teaching methods. Practical sessions were thoroughly prepared, and the necessary equipment and tools were readily available. The teachers supervised the students' work carefully, provided clear instruction and linked the activity to commercial and theoretical aspects of the course. Not all practical activities were well managed. In some cases, students' time was wasted while they waited for assistance. Some practical tasks were poorly matched to individual students' levels of prior achievement. Theoretical teaching generally related well to the vocational context; teachers made frequent and effective reference to commercial and practical applications. Much of the teaching, however, relied too heavily on formal lectures which failed to hold the interest of all the students and led, in some cases, to disruptive behaviour. Good use was made of the college's and neighbouring farms' facilities to provide realistic working environments.

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56 Practical classes in horticulture, such as plot development projects, were well planned and resourced. Students enjoyed this aspect of their work. The teaching of the underlying science is supported by an informative handbook which gives details of the content of the lectures and of the assessment and assignment programme. Students find this resource very useful; it enables them to plan their work more effectively and serves as a useful reference for revision. In some theory classes, topics were developed in a logical order and at an appropriate pace; teachers used industrial examples to illustrate the topics effectively and answered students' questions carefully. In others, however, the students lacked the necessary understanding of related topics and, consequently, failed to follow the lesson.

57 Courses in creative crafts such as upholstery and embroidery feature strongly in the 'out-centres'. There are also courses in yachting, accredited by the Royal Yachting Association, catering for levels from beginners to experienced sailors. In both the yachting and the crafts courses, the teaching methods used were appropriate to the needs of adults, some of whom had been away from education for some time. In one sailing class, effective use was made of overhead projector transparencies to illustrate the effects of gravitation, tide and current. The teacher checked regularly on the students' understanding and the students contributed well. Principles of design were emphasised in the creative crafts courses; the students were set challenging tasks and displayed a high level of originality and creativity.

58 The teachers of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities developed good working relationships with their students. They were enthusiastic and committed to teaching this area of work, which is new to the college. However, some of the teachers have limited specialist knowledge. Although the progress of individual students was properly recorded, planning to meet the individual needs of each student was poorly developed. In several classes seen there were insufficient opportunities for the students to exercise choice and take decisions for themselves.

### **STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS**

59 Most students were enthusiastic about their studies and developed appropriate levels of knowledge and understanding. They worked effectively in groups and as individuals, and applied their knowledge to a variety of vocational contexts. For example, in engineering students took measurements of the movement of a tractor in order to compute speed, volume of earth turned and efficiency. A significant minority of students on the national certificate in agriculture programme were not always attentive, with adverse consequences for their achievements in the classroom. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities were not always sufficiently challenged.

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60 Students' work was of an appropriate standard and often based on the collection and analysis of empirical data. In horticulture, although much of the students' work reflected good practice, the scientific principles underlying project work were not always demonstrated. In agriculture there were wide variations in standards on the first diploma course. On the national diploma course, students were developing appropriate research skills but few assignments were well structured or included meaningful conclusions. A range of good-quality work was seen in creative crafts courses.

61 Students' competence in information technology was evident in written assignment work, which included wordprocessed documents and charts generated from spreadsheets. Specific core skills classes to develop information technology, numeracy and communication skills were sometimes linked to vocational units. They were particularly effective in engineering. Numeracy and communication skills were weaker in younger students on horticulture programmes. Opportunities for accrediting core skills were not always clearly articulated by teachers on the advanced GNVQ business course.

62 Most students carried out practical work carefully and with due regard for safety issues. On equine studies courses, students were not gaining sufficient practical experience in stable duties and management to meet industrial requirements. Many also failed to reach the right level of practical competence in riding.

63 There are some significant individual student achievements. For example, in 1991 and 1995 a national award for student greenkeeper of the year was won by a college student. Seventeen students achieved the City and Guilds of London Institute licentiateship award in 1995 and the college gains a high proportion of these awards in the agriculture, horticulture and floristry category. A further 30 students, some sponsored by branches of the National Farmers' Union, were awarded local or regional trophies for practical work. Significant numbers of students achieve qualifications in areas other than their primary learning goal, for example in fork-lift truck driving, food and environmental protection, chainsaw cutting and sheep dipping.

64 For those students who completed their course, pass rates were generally satisfactory. According to the statistical returns submitted by the college to the Department for Education and Employment in 1995, 75 per cent of students aged 16 to 18 in their final year of study achieved vocational qualifications. This would place the college in the middle third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure. One hundred per cent pass rates have been recorded in the national diploma for agriculture over the last two years. Similarly in horticulture, there have been 100 per cent pass rates over the last two years for full-time students entered for the first and national diplomas. Results are also good in greenkeeping and business management. In engineering, 87

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per cent of students in 1995 and 71 per cent in 1994 gained the national diploma qualification.

65 Pass rates in estate skills courses were between 77 and 100 per cent in 1995. They were more variable on creative craft programmes. Dressmaking, yachting and flower-arranging courses averaged over 85 per cent, but pass rates were less than 20 per cent on embroidery and lace-making programmes. Other poor pass rates were recorded on part-time horticulture and floristry courses. The college system of recording data does not take into account part-time students working towards a qualification over a number of years, so that some of the low pass rates, particularly on the adult education courses, do not reflect the true picture. The college self-assessment report recognises the need to allocate resources and provide staff development to improve the recording of students' achievements.

66 In equine studies, pass rates on the first diploma have averaged 77 per cent over the last two years. On the national diploma, the first cohort completed in 1995 with a 73 per cent pass rate. To date, however, no student from the college has achieved a British Horse Society assistant instructor qualification, offered in conjunction with the national diploma course. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are following externally-validated programmes and are achieving some significant passes.

67 Retention rates are low on some courses. At the time of the inspection over 50 per cent of the students who started the national diploma in leisure course in 1994 had left. Similar figures are recorded in rural studies. In agriculture, the retention rate in 1994-95 for NVQ programmes was only 60 per cent. Just over 60 per cent of students completed the national diploma course in equine studies in 1995 and 67 per cent completed the first diploma course. There are low completion rates on some creative crafts courses; figures of 20 per cent or less are recorded for some upholstery, soft furnishing and embroidery groups. The college claims that the reasons for high drop out are generally linked to personal or financial reasons or obtaining employment, and not directly to the course itself. Retention rates are significantly better on forestry and gamekeeping courses, full-time horticulture courses and the national certificate programme in agriculture.

68 Destinations' data over the last two years show that the majority of students have progressed to further education or employment. In 1994, 32 per cent of students left for employment and last year the figure rose to 43 per cent. An increasing percentage of students also continued in education: 28 per cent in 1994 and 34 per cent in 1995. The percentage of students who became unemployed or whose destinations were unknown has remained constant at about 20 per cent. In 1994, about 13 per cent of students left the college for temporary employment. For some courses, for example the national diploma in agriculture, all students progressed to

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employment or further education in 1995. However, over 20 per cent of the students on the national diploma for horse studies remained unemployed after completing their course.

#### **QUALITY ASSURANCE**

69 The college charter contains a list of performance standards which the college has set for itself in relation to student admissions, the quality of teaching and learning, guidance and counselling. A charter monitoring group has been established to review these standards but it has not yet monitored the college's achievements against them all. For example, the group has yet to look at performance against targets for returning assessments to pupils, introducing variety of methods into teaching, and the effectiveness of the tutorial system. There was no report on charter performance in 1994-95.

70 The academic board is not, at present, fulfilling its remit to monitor course quality or consider new course proposals. A quality development group, consisting of the director of education and the two senior managers for curriculum, has reported directly to the directorate on these matters. Its reports have not, however, been systematic or rigorous in their evaluation of college provision. At present, the corporation is not receiving from management the quality of analysis of academic performance that it needs. However, new quality assurance systems are being developed and subcommittees for academic standards and academic programmes have been established to take responsibility for course quality and new courses. The college has yet to develop a systematic approach for the assurance of quality in its cross-college services. There is no effective evaluation of the tutorial system or of staff development.

71 The current quality assurance framework concentrates on course quality. Each programme manager is required to complete a 'programme log' conforming to a standard college format and including a summary of responses to three annual student questionnaires covering such matters as induction, resourcing, and teaching. The log also includes details of enrolments, staff-student ratios, completions, examination pass rates, destinations and additional qualifications obtained. After evaluation of this information by the course team, an action plan is drawn up to include targets and the assignment of responsibility and dates for meeting them. The quality development group produces college summary reports based on these logs. The most recent report conformed to the headings in Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement* and formed the basis of the college's self-assessment report. Issues relating to quality are also raised at course team meetings, held twice a term, to which members of the quality development group are invited, and at monthly meetings of programme managers.

72 There are significant weaknesses in the management of the quality assurance process. Many action plans lack clear targets and the review

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and action planning process itself is not systematically audited by senior managers. External moderators' reports are not always referred to in the reviews. Some action plans fail to address important course issues identified in the student surveys. Some course teams did not complete programme logs at all last year, and the quality development group failed to follow this up. The responses to the student perception questionnaires on resourcing and delivery of courses in 1994-95 have not been analysed. As a result, important issues such as students' critical judgements of the quality of teaching on some courses and inadequate monitoring of staff cover for absence, were not highlighted.

73 There has, however, been significant progress on a number of fronts. Guidelines on the production of course handbooks and a customer care handbook have been drawn up. Questionnaires on students' perception of courses have been revised to make them more useful and suitable for analysis using an optical mark reading system. This year, the first student questionnaires were analysed within 14 days and the overall college data were summarised graphically. An employers' perception questionnaire has been developed, although it has not yet been used.

74 All teaching and non-teaching staff at the college are entitled to a minimum of 10 days staff development each year. A good feature is that part-time staff are paid to attend college training events which take place each term in week-long blocks, outside of student contact time. A particular priority of staff development over the last year has been the gathering of portfolio evidence towards achieving Training and Development Lead Body assessor qualifications. In addition, the establishment of a GNVQ framework in land-based industry courses has been a focal point for a number of course teams. There is no overall plan to integrate staff development with the college's strategic objectives. A system of staff appraisal has been established but, at present, it is limited to academic staff. New policies on staff induction and recruitment have been introduced and implemented

75 The college's self-assessment report uses the headings contained in Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. It includes assessments both of strengths and 'areas for development', with a timetable for improvement indicated. The college's judgements in some areas such as governance and management largely accord with those of the inspectors, but in others, such as teaching and learning and student support, there are significant differences.

## **RESOURCES**

### **Staffing**

76 Teaching staff are appropriately qualified and experienced. Of the 54 full-time teaching staff, 55 per cent have a higher education qualification and 83 per cent have a formal teaching qualification. A few teachers on some new courses currently lack relevant specialist qualifications but they

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are currently undertaking appropriate professional development. Only 15 per cent of full-time teaching staff are accredited to assess NVQ competencies, but many more are working towards the relevant qualifications. Good use is made of the 60 part-time teaching staff who provide specialist skills which are otherwise lacking and enable greater flexibility in the deployment of staff. Many teach on the adult education courses. Ninety-five per cent of full-time staff are working to new and more flexible contracts. There are no female staff in the senior management team and only 11 per cent of the full-time teachers are women.

77 Non-teaching staff provide valuable and effective support for the full range of college activities. The numbers of staff are adequate in most areas and many are well qualified and appropriately experienced. Some of the technician staff are working towards accreditation as NVQ assessors. There is insufficient administrative support for some teachers, particularly those who are responsible for groups of courses. The college recognises this problem and plans to address it during the management restructuring.

#### **Equipment/learning resources**

78 Classrooms are well equipped with overhead projectors and whiteboards and audio-visual facilities are readily obtainable. Following a recent replacement programme, classroom furniture is generally of a good standard. There is modern and appropriate information technology equipment and software available for student use. Plans to update software have been delayed by budgetary constraints. Forty-eight computers are located on the main college campus, most of them housed in two dedicated areas. Students have open access to at least one of these areas throughout the week and at weekends during term time. An additional 45 computers are located in the 'out-centres'. Computer software used by administrative staff requires some rationalisation to improve compatibility. Science laboratories are well equipped with resources which reflect the wide range of the curriculum.

79 The main learning resource centre includes the library, which holds about 27,000 books and a good range of periodicals and audio-visual materials. The centre also includes over 100 study places; self-study language training facilities; a well-resourced careers information centre; and a recently-established flexible learning centre which accommodates 19 of the computers available for student use. The centre is managed by a qualified librarian, supported by an adequate number of staff, two of whom are also qualified librarians. The library facilities located at the 'out-centres' are being improved, but not all have the materials required to support core and basic skills development. One 'out-centre' has an inadequate supply of course text books.

80 In most areas of activity, appropriate hand tools and other practical equipment are available for students' use. The range of farm and horticultural equipment is wide. There is an effective replacement policy

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for tractors but not for the full range of equipment. For example, much of the turf maintenance machinery has not been updated for some years. There have also been delays in providing additional equipment for the new programme in GNVQ engineering. The range of small animals available at the college to support the new first diploma in animal care course is inadequate. In equine studies, although the York Riding School is well equipped, there is little specialist equipment to support theory teaching at the college.

### **Accommodation**

81 The main campus covers an area of approximately 33 hectares. This includes 26 hectares of well-managed grounds and landscape features which add greatly to the attractiveness of the neighbourhood as well as meeting the demands of the college's curriculum and providing for the recreation of its students. The main college building was purpose-built in 1936 and is a well constructed two and three-storey building, modelled around a central quadrangle. Further facilities are provided in a lecture and seminar room complex. Other buildings accommodate science laboratories, students' union facilities, a 120-seat lecture theatre, a 400-seat conference hall and a range of workshops. Most of these buildings are single storey and of more recent construction. Significant improvements have been undertaken recently to satisfy health and safety requirements. There are a small number of temporary buildings used for teaching or additional office accommodation. These are in good condition and provide some degree of flexibility in space allocation. Signposting on the main site is clear and car parking space is adequate.

82 Practical horticultural facilities on the main site provide important resources to support the curriculum. Sports turf facilities include a bowling green, four golf greens, cricket, football and hockey pitches. There is a well-labelled plant collection, the details of which are held on a computer database, to assist students learning to identify plants. The commercial glass area has received no substantial investment over the past 20 years. Consequently its use is limited and its future is currently being reviewed. Forty-eight hectares of productive woodland six miles away, held on lease, are used for forestry operations and students' projects. Significant use is also made of other off-site facilities provided by industry and other organisations to complement the college-owned facilities. This is particularly important to the agricultural programmes provided at the 'out-centres' which have no arable land or livestock.

83 The college farm provides important support to many areas of the college curriculum. It undertakes a range of enterprises typical of the surrounding area. Arable and dairy farming are the major commercial enterprises, and productivity is generally high. The pig unit is relatively small by commercial standards and many of the buildings are old. The sheep unit is similarly small, but it is retained for educational use. The estate is used extensively by agricultural students for practical and

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assignment work. Information about the farm is readily available from the farm office and a weekly summary sheet of farm activities and farm performance is distributed to interested staff and students. There is a sympathetic approach to conservation management and a number of features have been developed in recent years to demonstrate good practice. Conservation margins have been established around some fields, small areas of woodland have been planted and some hedgerows re-established. However, some opportunities to give students a better insight into farm management have been missed, for example, in the development of a systematic approach to conservation management.

84 Residential accommodation is provided in the main building and in purpose-built residential blocks. Student communal facilities comprise a large dining room, a number of lounges, a college bar and games rooms. There are few social facilities for students under 18 years. Some of the residential accommodation is in need of redecoration and refurbishment. These improvements are planned as part of a maintenance programme. Outdoor sports facilities are good and include pitches and tennis courts. There are squash courts, but few other indoor sports facilities. A purpose-built recreational centre is planned to provide additional facilities.

85 The four 'out-centres' comprise purpose-built teaching blocks, some of which have been extended by the addition of temporary classrooms. Social and recreational facilities on these sites are limited; wherever possible off-site facilities are used to make good these deficiencies. Car parking is also difficult at the 'out-centres'. Most of the staff are in good office accommodation and most of the administrative staff are located centrally in the main building. The main college reception area is at the front of the main building but this is no longer the most appropriate position since changes to the road access to the college have made it necessary for visitors to enter by a side entrance. There are no childcare facilities on any of the college sites. There is good access for wheelchair users to the majority of buildings but access to first-floor accommodation is poor.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES**

86 The college is making progress towards achieving its mission to deliver high-quality education and training to meet the needs of the land-based industries. Its strengths are:

- the range of courses in agriculture and horticulture, particularly those which lead to GNVQs and NVQs
- links with many sections of the rural community through a good provision of adult courses
- a wide range of short courses
- the commitment and expertise of the governing body
- the management of resources and 'out-centres'

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- efficient recruitment and enrolment procedures
  - some high levels of achievement by students completing full-time agriculture and horticulture programmes
  - a course review framework which includes wide-ranging student questionnaires
  - effective deployment of teaching and non-teaching staff
  - good levels of equipment and a well-resourced learning centre
  - accommodation, farms, estates and off-site facilities which are effectively and extensively used.

87 In order to continue to raise standards, the college should address the following weaknesses:

- gaps in the range of provision in some curriculum areas
- inadequacies in the strategic planning process
- the role of the academic board in assuring curriculum quality and new course developments
- deficiencies in the reporting procedures used to monitor college provision
- the fragmented system of student support
- inconsistencies in course and tutorial provision
- inconsistencies in the planning and assessment of teaching and learning
- poor levels of achievement on some part-time programmes
- the variable quality of course review and the monitoring of subsequent action
- inadequate planning and evaluation of staff development
- the non-teaching workloads of some academic staff
- poor library facilities in the 'out-centres'
- some accommodation which is in need of refurbishment or replacement.

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## FIGURES

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- 1 Percentage enrolments by age (1995-96)

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  - 2 Percentage enrolments by level of study (1995-96)

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  - 3 Enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1995-96)

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  - 4 Staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1995-96)

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  - 5 Income (for 12 months to July 1995)

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  - 6 Expenditure (for 12 months to July 1995)

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**Note:** the information contained in the figures was provided by the college to the inspection team.

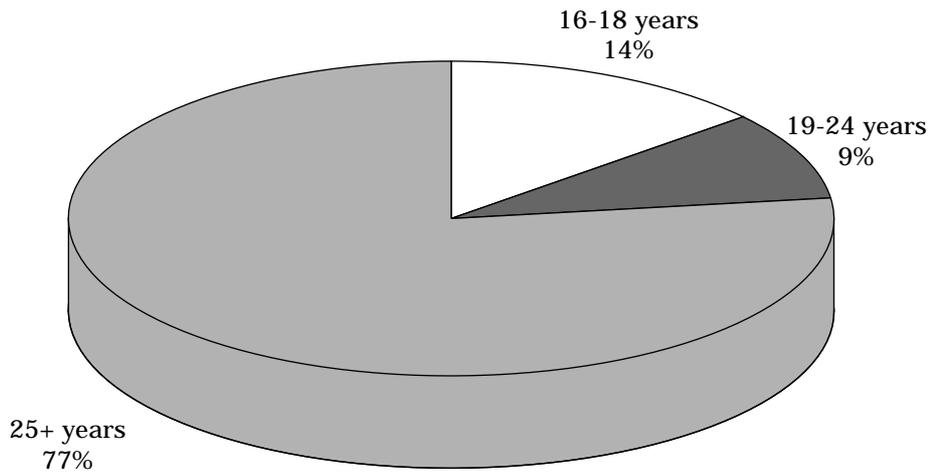
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**Figure 1**

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**Askham Bryan College of Agriculture and Horticulture: percentage enrolments by age (1995-96)**

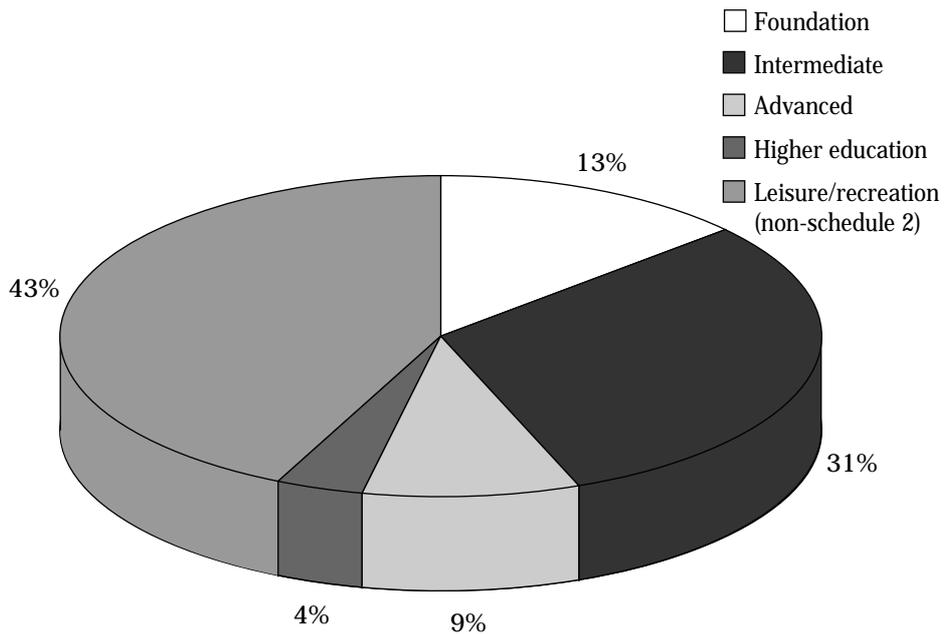


Enrolments: 6,351

**Figure 2**

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**Askham Bryan College of Agriculture and Horticulture: percentage enrolments by level of study (1995-96)**



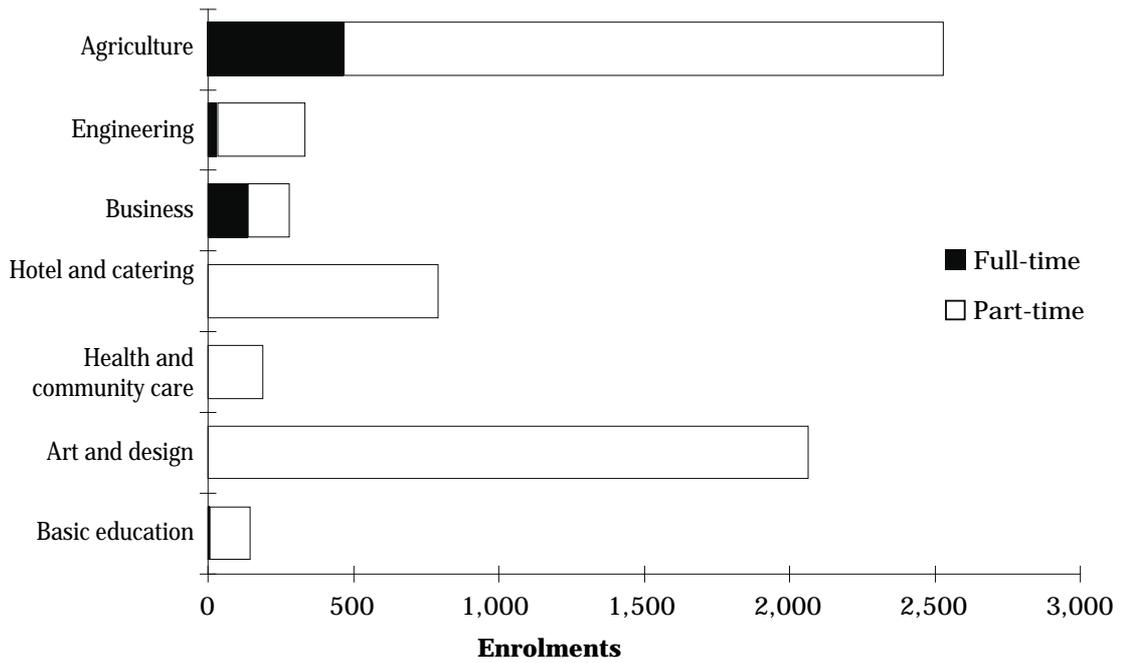
Enrolments: 6,351

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**Figure 3**

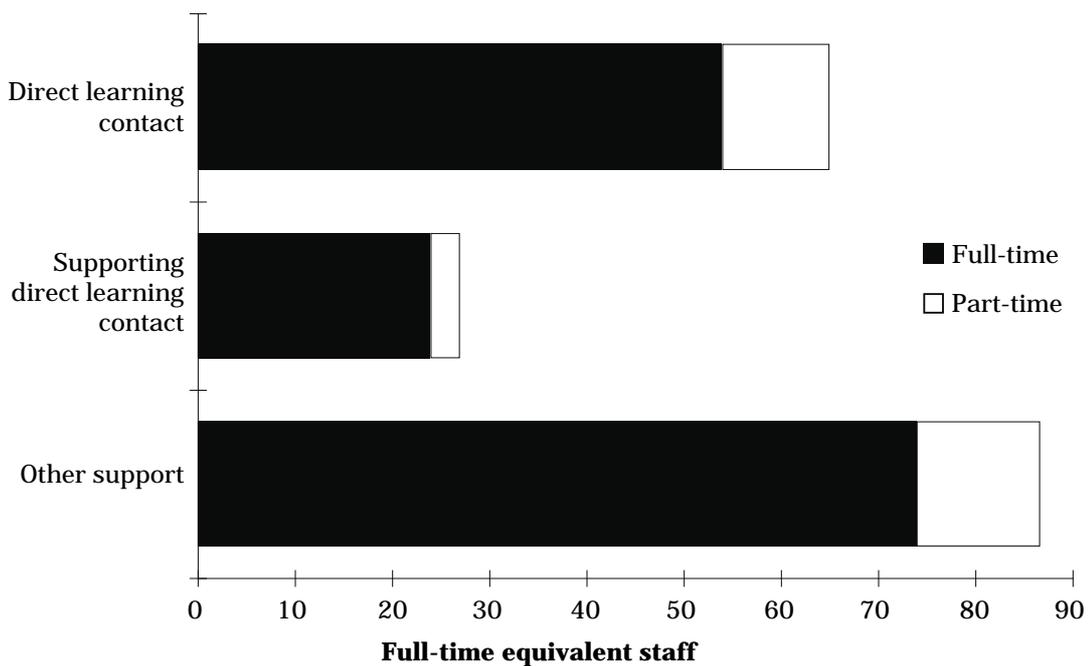
**Askham Bryan College of Agriculture and Horticulture: enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1995-96)**



Enrolments: 6,351

**Figure 4**

**Askham Bryan College of Agriculture and Horticulture: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1995-96)**

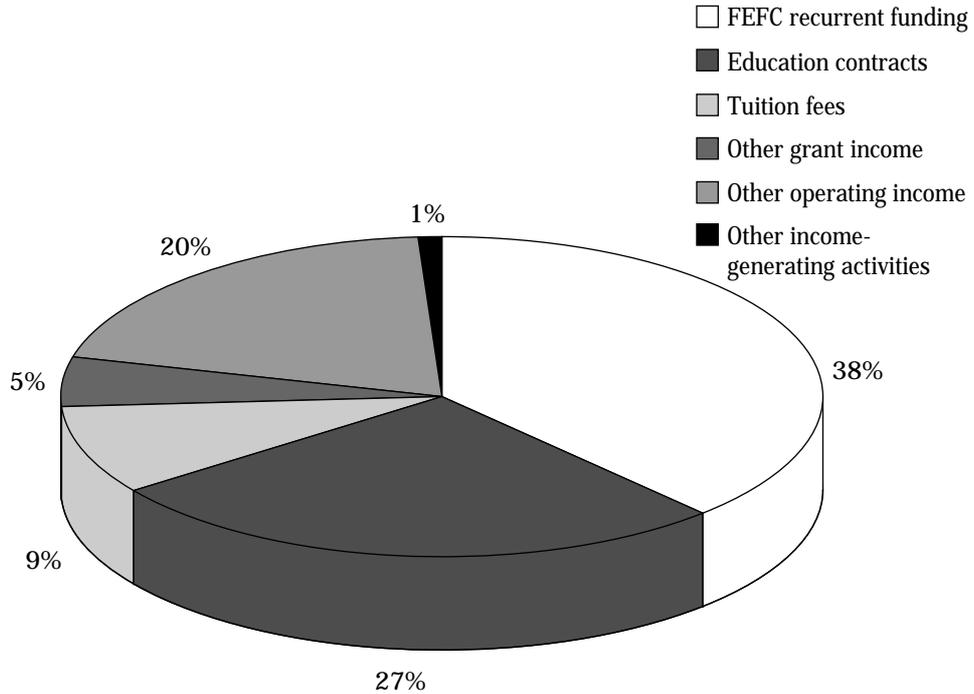


Full-time equivalent staff: 179

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**Figure 5**

**Askham Bryan College of Agriculture and Horticulture: income (for 12 months to July 1995)**



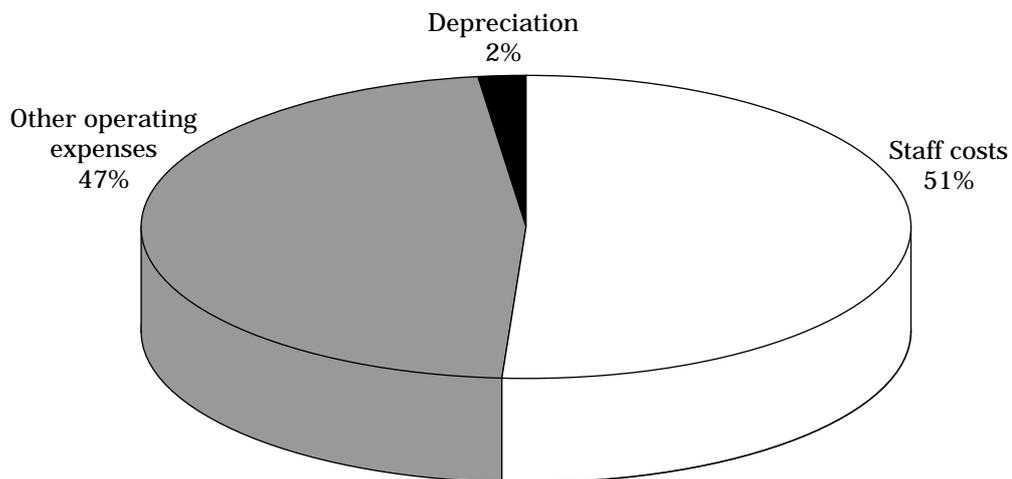
Income: £6,384,000

*Note: this chart excludes £42,000 capital grants.*

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**Figure 6**

**Askham Bryan College of Agriculture and Horticulture: expenditure (for 12 months to July 1995)**



Expenditure: £6,971,000

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