

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

**West Sussex
College of
Agriculture and
Horticulture**

September 1996

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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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 the 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

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

FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 121/96

WEST SUSSEX COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE AND HORTICULTURE SOUTH EAST REGION

Inspected February 1995-June 1996

Summary

West Sussex College of Agriculture and Horticulture offers a wide range of courses to meet the needs of industry and the local community. There is a particularly wide range of provision for students with learning difficulties. The college is firmly led by an entrepreneurial senior management team which is well supported by the board of governors. Communications within the college are good. Links with industry are strong. The college has developed an extensive range of initiatives to improve access to education and training. Staff are committed to the college's mission and to providing students with an environment which helps them to succeed. Teaching of practical work is of high quality. There are effective pre-enrolment and admission procedures for students. Specialist equipment and accommodation are good in most curriculum areas. The college's estate provides a valuable resource for the teaching of agriculture, horticulture and conservation. The college should improve: co-ordination of students services, including tutorial support; its computerised information systems; recruitment, retention rates and examination results on some part-time courses; and the quality of some classrooms. In addition, the college should: rationalise the roles of the senior management team; ensure more consistency in the practice of quality assurance; and make its computing and library facilities more readily available to students in residence at the college.

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

Aspects of cross-college provision		Grade
Responsiveness and range of provision		1
Governance and management		2
Students' recruitment, guidance and support		3
Quality assurance		3
Resources:	staffing	1
	equipment/learning resources	2
	accommodation	3

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Floristry and horticulture	2	Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and student support	2
Agriculture, conservation and business studies	2		
Equine studies and animal care	2		
Engineering	3		

INTRODUCTION

1 West Sussex College of Agriculture and Horticulture was inspected in various stages. Some specialist inspection took place in February and July 1995. In May 1996, six inspectors spent 21 days on the inspection of specialist subjects. They visited 82 classes and examined students' work and documentation about the college and its courses. The college's induction procedures were inspected over two days in September 1995. In June 1996, six inspectors spent 18 days on inspection of aspects of cross-college provision. Inspectors held meetings with governors, college managers, teaching and support staff, students, parents, and representatives from industry, Sussex Enterprise, the local training and enterprise council (TEC) and the community.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 The West Sussex College of Agriculture and Horticulture, also known locally as Brinsbury College, celebrated its golden jubilee in 1990. It was first used as a training centre for women in the Land Army. In 1952, it was acquired by West Sussex County Council and became established as a college serving the local farming community. In recent years it has diversified its curriculum to provide education and training for all kinds of land-based industry. Twelve years ago, the college faced closure but has grown rapidly since then, to become one of the larger colleges of its kind.

3 The college has land on either side of the A29 trunk road between Pulborough and Billingshurst in the heart of the Sussex countryside. Sussex is a rural county. Its few large centres of population are situated along the coast and in the metropolitan fringe to the north. Rural businesses provide one of the larger sources of employment in the county and they include large arable and dairy farms, traditional mixed farms, riding stables, garden centres, golf courses, woodland and conservation activities. There were once many small flower and vegetable growers in the locality but these have gradually merged into larger concerns and have moved to the Sussex coast or further afield. With the growing use of the countryside for leisure and the changing patterns of farming, the college has had to face demands for new and different kinds of courses from a wider range of students.

4 Most students come from West Sussex and from the borderlands of Hampshire, Surrey and East Sussex. Recruitment from the rest of Britain and the European mainland is rising with the growth of more advanced courses. The college is in competition with four other agricultural colleges within a 40-mile radius. At the time of the inspection, the college had 634 full-time students and 1,018 part-time students funded by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC), and 1,482 other students. Enrolments by age, by level of study and by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figures 1, 2 and 3, respectively.

5 The college is organised in eight vocational teaching sections: agriculture; animal care and veterinary nursing; business studies; conservation; engineering; equine studies; floristry; and horticulture. In addition there are two other sections; one caters for students with learning difficulties and the other provides general learning support for all students. The college has 230 full-time and part-time staff and is the largest employer in the area. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4. The mission of The West Sussex College of Agriculture and Horticulture is to provide education and training to enable people to achieve their full potential in work and society.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

6 Senior staff respond energetically to the national targets for education and training, and have developed a well-considered strategy for expansion. Although other staff are not so well aware of the targets, they fully accept that it is important for the college to increase its recruitment for both financial and educational reasons. Staff at all levels recognise the importance of innovation. Any reasonable proposal for a new course is pursued, providing that market intelligence has identified demand for the course and that pilot studies confirm its viability. The college's targets for growth have been exceeded and full-time equivalent student numbers have grown by 71 per cent over the last three years.

7 The college is a member of the National Association of Farms for Schools. Visits, careers days and 'taster' sessions which enable prospective students to sample the college's courses, are provided for year 10 pupils and about 5,000 children visit the college every year. Talks and careers events are given by staff who are chosen to work with specific schools and build stable relationships with them. Schools are complimentary about the college's collaboration with them, and particularly value the link courses on rural skills. School pupils undertake work experience, and carry out General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level) project work, on the college's farm and estate. Contacts are particularly good with schools for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The college has franchised National Proficiency Test Council courses in horticulture and equine studies to other centres and to special schools, and has enrolled almost 200 students on these this year. On the college site, there is a specialist training unit owned by social services, the Acorn centre, which caters for adult students with severe learning difficulties. These students are taught by the college staff and they play a full part in the life of the college.

8 The college has built up productive links with the local TEC. There are programmes for jobskills and modern apprenticeships, and the college has recently joined the business links scheme. The TEC views the college as active, innovative and a good manager of its contracts. The college was awarded competitiveness funding to develop a new centre for construction plant operation and maintenance training for which the college is now approved by the Construction Industry Training Board.

9 There are close relationships with employers through a comprehensive structure of advisory committees, through the involvement of college staff in the industry, through an extensive programme of work experience for students, and through the many part-time students and part-time teachers who are in land-based work. The college estates test products and crops for a number of companies. The college was runner-up in *The Grower* magazine's 'best horticultural college of the year' competition in recognition of the quality of its National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) in commercial horticulture which are taught on employers' premises. More off-site courses are planned, including NVQs in packhouse operations and management. A division of the college, Brinsbury Training Services, offers a wide range of full-cost short courses, primarily helping employers to deal with legislative change. Training needs analyses are carried out for companies.

10 The college has a European office, with a multilingual team of five full-time staff. They manage the college's involvement in 25 projects sponsored by the European Social Fund in 12 different countries. They quote the Treaty of Rome as their mission statement because of their considerable success in widening vocational training through involvement with a network of European centres. Initiatives include the New Opportunities for Women course, which is designed to encourage and train women to set up businesses in rural areas; membership of a British consortium led by Mencap which is adapting NVQ units at level 1 and 2 in horticulture and other subjects to suit the needs of people with learning difficulties; and 'Youthstart', a scheme which uses a purpose built exhibition vehicle to contact and train unemployed young people among the rural communities of Sussex in information technology. European Social Fund programmes have provided a development budget for open learning technology to help students who wish to study on their own at times which suit them, using materials tailored to their individual needs. Facilities for open learning include video conferencing, electronic mail and interactive multi-media. The college's curriculum now has a strong European dimension. All full-time students have regular European studies classes and the opportunity to study one of four European languages. Ninety-five per cent of full-time students visit other European countries during their courses. Over half the staff travel abroad to do business for the college. Other international links have grown from contacts which individual staff have made in America and elsewhere.

11 The college has many contacts with the local community. For example, members of the public use the college's golf course. The college is hired for weddings and social events. Many local charities, and organisations such as the parish council, are supported by the college. Members of the local community have contributed to the college's work in launching a countryside museum. The college rents out office accommodation to 'The Taste of the Southeast', an organisation which makes the college a focus for growers and consumers. Representatives

from the community say that the college has an increasingly important local role and a good reputation.

12 A wide range of courses for part-time and full-time students is well matched to careers in the land-based industries. In most curriculum areas, courses range from foundation to advanced level. The college encourages all students to gain qualifications in addition to the main qualification for which they are studying. The achievement of extra competency certificates is particularly encouraged. There are higher education programmes including a higher national diploma in animal science, a degree in applied animal science, and a degree in equine science. There is a range of courses for students with learning difficulties.

13 The college sends out questionnaires to industry and carries out market research in partnership with the Rural Development Commission and the TEC, and through Brinsbury Training Services. Good use is made of other labour market information culled from published sources. The college has an effective approach to marketing strategy which relates closely to the aims of its strategic plan. All staff are involved in marketing. There is a good range of promotional materials and these are produced to a high standard. The college achieves a regular press coverage. Throughout the year there is continuous promotional activity, including stands at country shows and competitions, a mobile roadshow, an annual open day and specialist events such as lambing weekends. The college has won, or has been runner-up for, several prestigious awards in the past year, including the Meridian business of the year and Sussex company of the year.

14 There are two separate equal opportunities policies, one for staff and one for students. There is evidence of the value of the policy for staff in, for example, good practice in recruitment. Recently, staff have responded to a questionnaire about their attitudes to equal opportunities issues. A training day on these issues for staff and governors is planned for next term.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

15 The board of the corporation is active and effective. It has 18 members, including the principal, two elected staff members and the student union president. The 14 business governors are professionally involved in land-based industry or have experience in the provision of education for it. There are six women members. Members include the chief executive of a horticultural business, the chairman of the Country Landowners' Association, a representative of the local TEC, a chartered accountant, a trade union representative who works as a farm foreman, a former chairman of the county council education committee, a member of the Citizens' Advice Bureau with an interest in students with learning difficulties and a chief examiner of the British Horse Society. Most members have been governors for more than eight years.

16 The chairman of governors brings committed leadership to the board and works closely with the principal. They appraise each other formally. The board has five committees: finance and general purposes; personnel; audit; remuneration; and capital development. All governors are members of at least one committee. Corporation board meetings are well attended. A small group of governors, which includes the chairman and the principal, acts as a search committee to review the corporation's membership and to recommend new members when vacancies arise. It is the group's policy that members of the college's 10 industrial advisory committees should be invited to fill vacancies, in the first instance. The clerk to the governors is also the principal administrative officer of the college; the search committee intends to review the compatibility of these two roles. Governors are given useful briefings and detailed documentation by managers to help them in their work. The board evaluates its own effectiveness.

17 Most governors are also members of an industrial advisory committee. The advisory committees meet once each term, enabling governors to work with college staff and other representatives from the industry. The committees monitor college courses, policies and development plans. Governors are also involved in end-of-year course reviews. Industrial advisers are committed to furthering the best interests of students; they provide work experience and other valuable help. A number of industrial advisers teach. Governors who are members of advisory committees represent the interests of teaching sections at corporation meetings when decisions are made which affect them and, in so doing, they help to ensure that strategic planning is well informed. The corporation's central aims have been to sustain and strengthen the college's financial position. Members endorse the entrepreneurial zeal of senior managers.

18 The senior management team consists of the principal, the vice-principal, the assistant principal (estates and finance), the assistant principal (curriculum), the director of premises and admissions, the principal administrative officer, and the director of domestic services. This team meets at least once a week to formulate policy, review the curriculum, debate college issues and plan expenditure. Although senior managers understand their places in the team and work well together, there is scope for the review and rationalisation of their roles. The premises manager is also responsible for student admissions; another manager has responsibility for marketing and staff development; and respective responsibility for financial management and financial administration rests with different people. The overlapping of duties has led to some uncertainty over where responsibility primarily lies for some aspects of the college's provision, such as guidance and support for students. This has sometimes resulted in delays in planning and developing new initiatives which support the college's rapid growth.

19 Each week, senior managers meet the heads of section, the librarian and other middle managers. There are 24 members at these meetings where not only day-to-day matters form the agenda, but also policy development for marketing, funding, and quality. Section heads also meet separately to formulate proposals for the senior management team or to debate curriculum issues. Section heads meet their staff weekly to pass on issues raised at their meeting with the senior management team. The academic board has 26 members, including all college managers, the student union president and elected members from the teaching and support staff. Individual governors take it in turn to attend. The board is chaired by the principal who encourages open debate. It is an important forum for consultation and formulation of policy. There is a complex network of committees with overlapping interests which fosters good communications in the college. The committees, however, take up a substantial amount of staff time.

20 Heads of section manage effectively those areas of the curriculum for which they are responsible. They market courses energetically and readily take responsibility for ensuring that students receive support for their learning. Each section has targets for enrolment and student retention which are carefully monitored. The college is still developing its capability to monitor student destinations.

21 Financial planning is based on student numbers and the resources needed to implement and develop the curriculum. Unit costing is being devised. Funding for materials and equipment is delegated to sections. Budgeting is systematic and understood by staff. Expenditure is closely monitored by the senior management team. In 1995-96, the college's average level of funding is only £16.00 per unit, compared with a national median for agricultural colleges of £23.15. The college's estimated income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1996 are shown in figures 5 and 6. Nearly half the college's income was earned from sources other than the FEFC.

22 The college's management information system is not yet adequate to meet the demands placed upon it. Plans for improvement in this area foundered with the bankruptcy of the company supplying a new software system in late 1995. The college has yet to establish a means of providing computerised data needed for efficient planning and quality assurance.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

23 Links with schools are close. Individual members of staff liaise with secondary schools throughout West Sussex. There are 'taster weeks' for year 11 pupils which enable them to gain first-hand experience of the college's courses. These end with a parents' evening, and open days which help potential students choose the right courses. Students and their parents speak well of the help they receive. The college keeps in touch with applicants who are waiting to start their courses by sending them

termly news bulletins. Close liaison with local special schools includes opportunities for pupils to attend the college in their last year at school. There is a policy for student admissions and the procedures and documentation for enquiries and applications are thorough. Arrangements for advising and enrolling both full-time and part-time students work well.

24 The college offers an optional four-week 'taster' and assessment programme at the end of the summer term for new full-time students, during which they receive an introduction to their chosen careers. They are trained in basic health and safety practice, and their first assignments are assessed over the four weeks to ensure that they have made the right choices. Students draw up training plans with their tutors, setting out the qualifications they seek so that their progress can be monitored later on during individual tutorials. About 80 per cent of new students take part in this programme and the remainder go through a similar process during induction at the beginning of the autumn term.

25 There is a detailed induction procedure and staff are well briefed so that they can follow it exactly with the help of a checklist of activities. Students are issued with the college's charter and with a learning agreement which they sign. There are comprehensive handbooks for students which set out information about courses and the telephone numbers of agencies which can help with personal problems. Students returning to the college for a further course take part in induction with new students and some say that it is irritating to go through the same procedures for a second time. There are means to help students who want to change their courses.

26 Students are allocated to a course tutor and a tutorial group. There is a recently established tutoring policy which is monitored by heads of section. Tutorial groups are timetabled to meet their tutors each week. Most students also have individual reviews with their tutors although in a few cases, these have not taken place. Sections arrange individual tutorials in different ways. Some arrange for students to have individual tutorials once a term, some arrange them twice a term or each month and some provide them when necessary. Tutors do not always keep full records of students' progress. There is no system which ensures that tutors regularly discuss and apply best practice.

27 Students' attendance is registered at the beginning of the morning and at the beginning of the afternoon. Attendance at individual lessons is not normally registered. There is a clear policy about dealing with absences but staff differ in deciding when to contact parents. Absences of a day or half a day can be identified, but patterns of absence from individual lessons are often difficult to monitor. Some students reported that they appreciated the friendliness of staff but were sometime frustrated by their leniency in dealing with absences.

28 There is a lack of consistency in the way the college reports to students, parents and employers. Some sections prepare annual progress

reports on their students. Some report on their students twice a year and others do so once a term. Some parents and students said they had never received a report. Some sections arrange parents' evenings when tutors are available for consultation but others do not. The parents to whom inspectors spoke were unanimous in wanting to hear about their children's progress. A few had telephoned tutors because they had received no reports. The college's charter promises employers reports on the progress of employees whom they are sponsoring on courses. A similar promise is, however, not made to parents of students aged 16 to 18 who are supporting their children while they are at college. Some employers said they received regular reports from the college about the progress of their employees but others reported that they had not.

29 Two chaplains visit the college every week. An external professional counsellor is available to students on request. Four members of staff and the vice-principal act as the first points of contact with the service. The student union executive works hard to involve students in college life. It has raised funds for a range of charities and has recently organised a lively student performance of the musical 'Grease'. It has also made arrangements for the Samaritans to visit the college once a week to offer support for students. There are three wardens for residential students. Both students and their parents are, however, very concerned about some of the arrangements within the hostel accommodation. There is poor public transport in the area. Few residential students have cars and they are dependent on college transport.

30 The college has held the Basic Skills Agency kitemark since 1994. All full-time students take basic skills tests on entry and those who have problems with literacy or numeracy are recommended to attend student support sessions. All who agree to accept help are assigned to support tutors and personal programmes are prepared for them. The student support section is energetic and students speak very positively about it. Attendance at support sessions is monitored and absences are notified to tutors. Resources for student support are limited. The student support area is uninviting. There are no computers available in the support centre and the room used for storing materials is small. There are drop-in sessions, but only at lunch times. About three-quarters of the students who were identified as having literacy or numeracy skills at or below level 1, have taken up the offer of help. Subsequent monitoring of these students has indicated that they are more successful in achieving the qualifications they want than students who have not availed themselves of support.

31 Careers advice is given by tutors and the college has recently made arrangements with Vosper Thornycroft West Sussex Careers for a professional careers officer to visit the college once a week. There is a good section in the library on careers, which includes audio-visual material. Students' destinations are published in statutory government statistics but the college does not disaggregate the data or give information to schools about the progress of their former pupils.

32 The management of student services is fragmented, with various committees and groups associated with different aspects of the work. Four people share the management of the service but they do not meet regularly to discuss its co-ordination. There is an advisory committee for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and student support but there is no college committee which plans and reviews the work of student services as a whole. The lack of such a committee is significant because advisory committees play a key role in strategic planning within the college. Whilst there are policies for course tutoring and for student admissions, there is no overall policy or development plan for student services. There is scope for greater integration of student services with the student support service.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

33 Seventy-one per cent of the 82 teaching sessions inspected had strengths which outweighed weaknesses, and a further 21 per cent had a balance of strengths and weaknesses. This outcome is better than the national average identified in the *Chief Inspector's Annual Report 1994-95*. Eight per cent of sessions had weaknesses which outweighed strengths. Student attendance in the classes inspected was 84 per cent. The following table summarises the grades given to the teaching sessions inspected.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
NVQ		5	6	2	0	0	13
Other vocational		12	19	10	6	0	47
Basic education		2	7	4	1	0	14
Other		2	5	1	0	0	8
Total		21	37	17	7	0	82

34 Both the practical and the theoretical components of most courses are well planned. There are informative handbooks for all full-time courses. Teachers prepare schemes of work, although in some areas these consist of little more than lists of subject headings or references to the syllabus and give little specification of teaching methods, resources and methods of assessments to be used. Timetabled private study periods are a significant component of many courses. However, assignments to assist students to make the best use of private study periods are not well planned.

35 Practical teaching is a particular strength in all areas. There are good relationships between students and staff. Students respect the technical expertise of their teachers. Most practical lessons were conducted with enthusiasm. They were well organised and vocationally relevant. For example, landscape students were creating and tending gardens in the college grounds, and a part-time teacher with a landscape

business was able to give lessons a commercial perspective. He arranged for students to draw up a maintenance contract for the estate and then to take it in turns to act as college managers or the landscape contractors during subsequent negotiations about its implementation.

36 There is good teamwork in many practical lessons and high regard for safe working practices. In one lesson, nine students in an engineering workshop were divided into two groups working on separate projects. Five students were mounting a large diesel engine on a test rig so that it was safe to operate and its various functions could be monitored. The second group of four was making a tractor-mounted waste management system. Each group had elected a project manager who led a discussion at the start of the lesson to explore possible solutions to the problems they would encounter and to allocate the various jobs. They made good progress and the results of their work will be useful additions to the equipment of the section. During the lesson, the teacher checked each group's work for safety, progress, quality of workmanship, standards of tool care and cleanliness, costs, and efficient use of time.

37 Theory and practical teaching are normally well integrated. In a lesson on genetics, students successfully calculated Mendelian ratios using pea plants they had grown themselves. Teaching aids are normally well prepared and good handouts, specimens and models are used in most lessons. Most teachers varied their approach to give opportunities for group and team work. The aim of one lesson on conservation was to improve students' awareness of wildlife in urban areas. The lesson began with a question and answer session in which students gave examples of wildlife habitats in cities; they were then provided with a map and asked to identify the most likely places for such habitats. Students had to present a talk on their findings and write a report. Some lessons were particularly challenging. For example, in a series of lessons, students carried out a group project effectively in which they planned a dog show in preparation for the college's open day. Lessons in European studies were particularly lively and successful.

38 Information technology is imaginatively integrated with the rest of the curriculum in most areas, despite some lack of access to computers. Most of the students' work that was inspected had been wordprocessed. A group of students on the horsemasters course created a database for the equine yard at the college in one class, and their interest in the task was well sustained because they found it relevant.

39 A minority of lessons was slow or dull. Many of these lessons were poorly managed and failed to provide students with sufficient opportunity to participate in learning activities such as projects or discussion. In one poorly-directed floristry lesson, students were not fully engaged in classroom activities for much of the time. During the last 10 minutes, the teacher attempted to involve the class in a brainstorming activity in order to provide ideas for one student who had difficulties with her assignment.

The value of this activity was lost because there was no time to summarise or discuss the students' ideas. Some handouts were of poor quality and they were used inappropriately. Although the teaching of practical work was generally of a high standard, in a few instances, teachers missed opportunities to relate theory to practice; students who were pruning apple trees to remove canker and identify pests and diseases were unsure about the appearance and significance of mildew and spider mite eggs. Science teaching in conservation was relevant to the course and stimulated the students' interest. Science teaching in agriculture, however, failed to engage the students' interest and make the best use of available resources. In engineering, both teachers and students displayed a lack of enthusiasm for theory work and students performed badly in several of their theoretical subjects. The quality of preparation of the teaching for some theory lessons in engineering was poor and contrasted with the high standards of preparation for the teaching of practical work in this section.

40 Teachers set appropriate standards for assessment and assignments. However in many subjects assignment briefs are not clearly written. The grading criteria are not always set out and marking is often poor. Some students said that their teachers failed to mark and return work promptly. Whilst engineering projects are often challenging and many floristry projects are well presented, in horticulture, equine studies and animal care many assessment records were not up to date. Core skills are often neglected and there is little evidence of effective internal verification of either the setting or marking of assignments. Many of the work-experience diaries of students on floristry courses are anecdotal in style, and contain references to coffee breaks and other personal matters which are largely irrelevant.

41 Many students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities successfully follow mainstream courses. They are enabled to do so through the provision of additional support for their learning both in class and through one-to-one teaching. Students receiving individual support were given well-planned work which was relevant to their needs and was effectively assessed. Students from a school for those with severe learning difficulties mixed feed and fed the lambs, and walked them to the weighing station where they recorded their growth. The accompanying teacher took photographs to include in the students' records of achievement. The college also has some separate courses for students with learning difficulties, which place an emphasis on practical work. Students are stimulated by their experiences and they acquire skills for work. Assignments were not, however, well adapted to the needs of each individual student. Teachers missed opportunities to record learning and help the students to develop a portfolio of their achievements.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

42 Most students are enthusiastic about their courses. Many are articulate when they speak about their work and about the college.

Students show a high level of personal responsibility during practical work. There is work experience on all courses and many students help to find their own placements. Employers report that most students take their work seriously. Students caring for animals and crops on the college estate are conscientious and keen, even though this work involves early morning duties and tasks at weekends. Farm and yard staff comment favourably on students' punctuality and reliability.

43 Students on conservation courses have carried out many substantial projects on the farm and the estate. These include restoration of an old barn and its conversion into a museum; the creation of a nature trail; establishment of a tree nursery; and hedge laying and planting. Conservation staff and students regularly visit Madeira to assist with a landscape rehabilitation project there. Work on this project counts towards assessment for NVQs in conservation. Landscape students use the estate to carry out realistic maintenance contract work to commercial specifications and the greenkeepers have taken part in the construction and maintenance of a nine-hole golf course. Floristry students exhibit work of a high standard at regional and national shows. In January 1996, students following the national certificate course in professional floristry won a competition at the Spring Florist Event at the National Exhibition Centre. In June 1996, floristry students won a gold medal at the Chelsea Flower Show.

44 Examination results achieved by most full-time students are good. In 1995, every student who completed the national diploma course in agriculture and the national diploma course in environmental conservation passed. Over 80 per cent of students taking the national diploma course in animal care, the national diploma course in landscape studies and the national certificate course in horticulture gained the full qualification. For the past two years nearly 90 per cent of floristry students on full-time courses have passed their examinations. Students on full-time equine studies courses do well in the British Horse Society stage 1 award and they develop a high degree of practical ability. Retention rates have been very good on all these courses. The pass rates of full-time students completing the national certificate in agriculture and the national certificate in countryside studies were below 70 per cent in 1995. Retention rates on the national certificates in countryside studies and equine business administration were lower than those on most other courses. Results on the Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) first diploma course in horticulture were very poor in the two years after its introduction and the college withdrew the course for a year in order to redesign it. The marks students have received for their assignments to date are a great improvement on those achieved by their predecessors on the earlier form of this course.

45 Results for part-time students are much more variable. For the past two years, between 80 and 100 per cent of students on the seven main

part-time floristry courses have passed their examinations. Results on part-time flower arranging courses have been variable and those on the Society of Floristry intermediate certificate course are particularly poor. The part-time pre-veterinary nursing courses have high enrolments, high retention rates and good pass rates. Whilst results in 1994 on the two-year course in veterinary nursing matched the national average, results were significantly lower in 1995 and only 29 per cent of students who completed the course, gained the qualification. Whilst most of the students passed the theory paper for which the college had prepared them, they failed the practical test that they have to take at work. There have been 80 to 100 per cent pass rates over the last two years on part-time courses leading to certificates in canine care and dog grooming. The results of the few students who take an NVQ in animal care are poor. Overall retention rates in the college have improved over the last year but there are very low retention rates on some part-time courses.

46 There are low numbers of students on some part-time horticulture courses and fewer than half of those who enrolled gained a qualification. There is a low level of achievement on the course leading to the amateur gardening certificate of the Royal Horticultural Society. Both students and staff accept that results on this course will be poor and most students regard it as a recreational activity. The college does not know the full results achieved by many part-time students on the equine studies course. Most of these students are mature. Some of them take the examination at other centres after they have left the college and others cannot afford the cost of the examination fees. The college has not provided students with clear guidance on how they can progress from one award to another and sustain continuous achievement. The college should encourage all students on courses funded by the FEFC to obtain an appropriate qualification.

47 Engineering staff provide excellent practical training for full-time and part-time students on nearly all courses including those in plant machinery, agriculture, horticulture, forestry and conservation. There are only a few courses leading to qualifications in engineering itself and students do not do well on these. Although the number of students who achieve the first diploma is higher than the national average for engineering courses, results on the national diploma course and the national certificate course have been poor. Dropout from these courses has been high but some of the students who left went into employment. Although many students excel in their practical work, the theoretical aspects of the syllabus are often too demanding for them. The college is introducing craft courses leading to NVQs alongside the national diploma and national certificate courses in engineering as an alternative for students with largely practical aspirations.

48 Most students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities on separate courses aim to obtain the National Proficiency Test Council's foundation certificates for rural skills at levels A and B. Their levels of achievement

are high and almost 80 per cent of both the younger students and the adults from the Acorn centre gain the qualification. This year, students are working towards NVQ level 1 in agriculture and horticulture. Students receiving help from the student support section have their progress accredited for wordpower and numberpower awards. The college also offers South East Accreditation Network accreditation for areas such as literacy, numeracy, study skills, and kitchen competencies. Students are only entered for this accreditation when their portfolios are complete and all have been successful. The data summarising all the achievements of these students had not been collated at the time of the inspection.

49 During the past year, individual students or groups of students have gained credit for achievements other than examination results. A group of rural skills students were presented with an Active Citizens Award by the National Federation of Young Farmers Clubs for their work at a local nursing home. First diploma agriculture students won the Dalgety Calf challenge, a national competition for animal rearing. A number of students have set up their own businesses immediately after completing their college course. For example, a floristry student who progressed through NVQ 1 and 2 on to the Society of Floristry course, opened her own florist shop this summer and nine of last year's conservation students have set up their own businesses in forestry, tree surgery, landscaping and fencing.

50 Of the 171 students aged 16 to 18 gaining qualifications in 1995, 50 per cent continued in further education either at the college or elsewhere; 21 per cent went into employment; and 1 per cent went into higher education. Of the 174 students aged over 19, 36 per cent went into employment; 14 per cent continued in further education; and 1 per cent went into higher education. The destinations of 27 per cent of full-time students and 46 per cent of part-time students were unknown. There is scope for the college to improve its data on students' destinations.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

51 Staff regard students as customers who are of paramount importance. Although staff know that it is essential for customers to receive good service, they have defined few quality standards for the provision which the college offers. Staff are aware of the *National Charter for Further Education*, and of their own charter which accurately reflects the aims of the college. A working party has just revised the college's charter with the aim of making its statements sharper and defining the college's obligations to those whom it serves more precisely. The extent to which students were consulted over the revision of the charter was limited.

52 The college is accredited by external agencies, including the TEC's Sussex Quality Management System, and it achieved the Investors in People award in 1995. A member of the senior management team is responsible for quality assurance. The quality assurance framework is simple and clear. The responsibilities of all staff are documented and there is a

straightforward reporting structure. There is a system of annual reviews of courses. These reviews are carried out with varying degrees of rigour across the college. In the best reviews, action points for the next academic year are summarised and used as part of the planning process. Course review documents include statistical data about students' achievements and retention rates. Each section head reports the outcome of the review to an academic standards committee consisting of three senior managers who investigate matters of concern. The review documents are then presented to the academic board. In some instances, the reviews take place when there are no students present. The review documents contain a section where action points should be recorded, but in many instances this is sketchily completed. Statistical information, with the recent exception of retention rates, is not used systematically in the setting of targets. The review process only covers all full-time courses and does not yet apply to part-time courses.

53 The academic standards group receives the reviews and recommends action for improving the college's provision. There is evidence that improvements have taken place as a result of the review process. For example, courses in two areas were considered too academic for students who wanted to acquire practical skills. These have been replaced by more appropriate provision. The academic standards group does not keep satisfactory records of its decisions, however, and it cannot easily chart progress on the implementation of the recommendations it makes.

54 Students are asked to answer questionnaires three times a year about the quality of the college's provision. The students' responses are considered initially by the course teams responsible for administering the questionnaires. Statistical analysis of the responses is carried out centrally and the results of this are reported to section heads and the academic board. Tutors are encouraged to discuss the outcomes of this analysis with their students but they do not always do so. In addition to these questionnaires, some sections such as the library, domestic services and student support gather opinions about their services, although this work is not co-ordinated centrally. The questionnaires are general and are not designed to highlight particular difficulties in courses or service areas.

55 Staff development is linked to the course review process. All course review documents, and the form on which the minutes of course team meetings are recorded, include sections on staff development. Staff are aware of various ways in which they can apply for further training. The annual appraisal scheme, which covers all staff, was remodelled in 1994 and appears to work well. All staff have an appraisal interview, at which action points are recorded and these are reviewed subsequently. Some staff are about to have their third annual appraisal and they speak warmly about the support they have received and the professional progress they have made. Appraisal is used to identify the training needs of individual staff and these influence the staff-development plan. Training is often organised at the college during days when there are no classes, so that the

majority of staff can benefit from it. A staff development committee regularly reviews the effectiveness of staff development.

56 A self-assessment report was produced by the staff responsible for each area of the college's work. It reflects the variable effectiveness of the quality assurance procedures in general. Some sections are analytical and concise, whilst others are descriptive and over-generous in their judgements. Some sections follow the format set out in Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*, but others do not. The college's approach to self-assessment is not consistently rigorous.

RESOURCES

Staffing

57 Teaching staff are appropriately qualified and have relevant industrial experience for the work they undertake. Forty-seven per cent of staff hold first degrees. Of the 42 full-time teaching staff, 87 per cent have a teaching qualification. A quarter of the teaching is undertaken by 78 part-time staff who have valuable specialist skills and current industrial experience. Many staff are members of professional associations related to their subjects and they keep abreast of national trends and policy. Twenty-eight staff have been accredited to assess NVQ competencies and a further 15 are working towards gaining the necessary award. There are 13 full-time learning support staff who are assisted by 11 part-time staff. Fifty-eight staff have administrative and other support roles, and 13 full-time and 12 part-time staff are responsible for the halls of residence. Three of the seven members of the senior management team are women and five of the 12 middle managers are women. There is an equal balance between male and female staff across the college.

58 Staff are loyal and committed to the college and they believe in its mission. They are well informed about college policies and they attend the termly review and planning sessions. Personnel management is effective. There is a new computerised system for keeping personnel records although ways of analysing data from this have not yet been established. The college's application form for new staff is an example of good equal opportunities practice. All staff receive a copy of a comprehensive staff handbook which is regularly updated and reviewed. Contracts for staff are based upon an averaging of demand for provision across the year. Some courses with small numbers are allowed to run and these are balanced by those with large numbers. Staff are effectively deployed but engineering students are not always taught mathematics by a mathematics specialist. Section leaders regularly monitor, and report termly to the vice-principal on, the workloads of staff. Many staff work beyond their contracted hours to help their students and they run activities such as overseas visits, open days and national shows or displays.

Equipment/learning resources

59 The college farm and estate provide a good teaching and learning resource for agriculture, business and conservation courses. Students develop practical skills by working on the farm enterprises and these are a source of information about the operation and finances of land-based industry. Conservation students have developed a nature trail on the college estate which is popular with school parties and other visitors. Each course is given responsibility for maintaining a section of the trail, which passes through one of the woods on the estate so that students are able to carry out projects and trials in woodland management and gamekeeping.

60 There are well-equipped animal care and equine facilities, with an appropriate range of tools, equipment, and saddlery. The stable yard houses 37 horses of differing types and temperaments; many have competition experience. The yard is well managed. There is some capacity in the new herptile unit for a wider range of reptiles and amphibians and exotic specimens will be acquired as they become available. The demonstration operating theatre and x-ray room are suitable for training purposes. The commercial dog grooming salon is well equipped with electrically-operated tables, clippers, kennels and a range of associated equipment. The stable and animal care unit records are not widely available for use by students. There is scope for the computerisation of the animal care records.

61 There is an extensive range of engineering equipment to assist training in agriculture, horticulture and construction. Some is old but it is still a good teaching resource. The many heavy tracked and wheeled machines include diggers, tractors, dumpers, fork-lift trucks and many farm implements. The college is able to borrow or lease some equipment from companies, and it exchanges some equipment with the estate farm. Welding, foundry and fabrication equipment is good and there is a wide range of hand and machine tools. Laboratory facilities are inadequate for agriculture and conservation courses at national diploma level. Engineering students use the laboratories at a local school.

62 The quality of equipment for use by students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is variable. For practical lessons, these students have access to a wide range of learning resources including tractors they can drive, animals to feed, groom and house, and gardening tools. However, classrooms lack appropriate equipment and none of the rooms used for learning support has computers.

63 The library and resource centre has been expanded steadily. It is easily accessible to wheelchair users. There are 9,500 specialist books, 130 current journals and a collection of 327 video cassettes, including commercially produced items and off-air recordings. There are appropriate specialist titles on the compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) database. A wide range of audio-visual equipment is available from a central store adjoining the library. All classrooms have an overhead projector. There is a qualified full-time librarian who is supported by

three part-time assistants and a college technician who works in the centre for part of the week. The system for issuing books is computerised. The centre seats 70 students but in hot weather it is not always a congenial place in which to study because of its poor ventilation.

64 The information technology facilities of the college meet the needs of most students. There are 52 computers in three business studies rooms linked to the library and resource centre. Access to the computers in two rooms is limited because they are heavily timetabled for classes but students can use vacant machines if they need them. Computers in the third room can be booked through the library staff but they are not available beyond 19.00 hours or at weekends. The library has 14 computers of various types, one of which is connected to the Internet. Two computers give access to CD-ROM material.

65 An assets register is maintained centrally and it includes sectional inventories. There is no systematic planning or programme for the replacement of equipment except for vehicles and audio-visual resources.

Accommodation

66 The college estate is situated at Pulborough and it was first used for educational purposes during the second world war to train women in the Land Army. The college farm and estate provide 252 hectares of land for practical and demonstration purposes for students. The farm is run commercially and it has 90 hectares of arable land, 120 hectares of grassland, 9 hectares of maize for silage and a vineyard. It has a dairy unit of 94 Fresians, a flock of 360 sheep, and 1,000 pigs. There are six hectares of woodland; six natural ponds; a coppice of oak, ash and hazel; natural marsh and wetland adjacent to streams; and a trout lake. A nine-hole golf course is available for club membership and students' use. Caravanners and hot-air balloons use the fields.

67 The college inherited a mixed set of buildings including 15 workshops, 23 general teaching buildings and two laboratories. There are 10 cottages occupied by the staff. The college has made good use of limited funds to make improvements to its buildings and these include conversion work at Brinsbury House to create administrative offices, staff workrooms, an extension to the library, and provision of five rooms for student support work. A former grain store has been converted into a student social centre and a refectory. There is a new hostel block with 124 en-suite bedrooms, dining halls, and recreation areas.

68 An accommodation strategy was prepared in 1994 and it has been updated. Two buildings and their surrounding land have still to be transferred to the college's ownership. There is a planned maintenance schedule but it has proved too costly for the college to implement. Most general teaching takes place in huts which are in poor structural condition. Their interiors, however, are pleasantly decorated with learning materials or displays which celebrate students' work and achievements. Workshops are well maintained.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

69 The particular strengths of the college are:

- its extensive range of courses
- a wide range of opportunities for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- strong European links
- effective pre-enrolment and admission procedures
- its active and effective governors
- strong leadership provided by the senior management team
- its committed staff
- good internal communications
- its strong links with industry
- good teaching of practical work
- its estate and new hostel accommodation.

70 If it is to improve its provision further, the college should address the following issues:

- rationalisation of senior management roles
- the inadequacy of computerised management information system as an aid to making good management decisions
- the lack of co-ordination of the different aspects of student services
- inconsistent practice in quality assurance
- the low recruitment, poor student retention and poor results of a number of part-time courses
- the inaccessibility of learning resources outside the normal teaching day
- the poor quality of some teaching accommodation.

FIGURES

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- 1 Percentage enrolments by age (as at July 1996)

 - 2 Percentage enrolments by level of study (as at July 1996)

 - 3 Enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area
(as at July 1996)

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

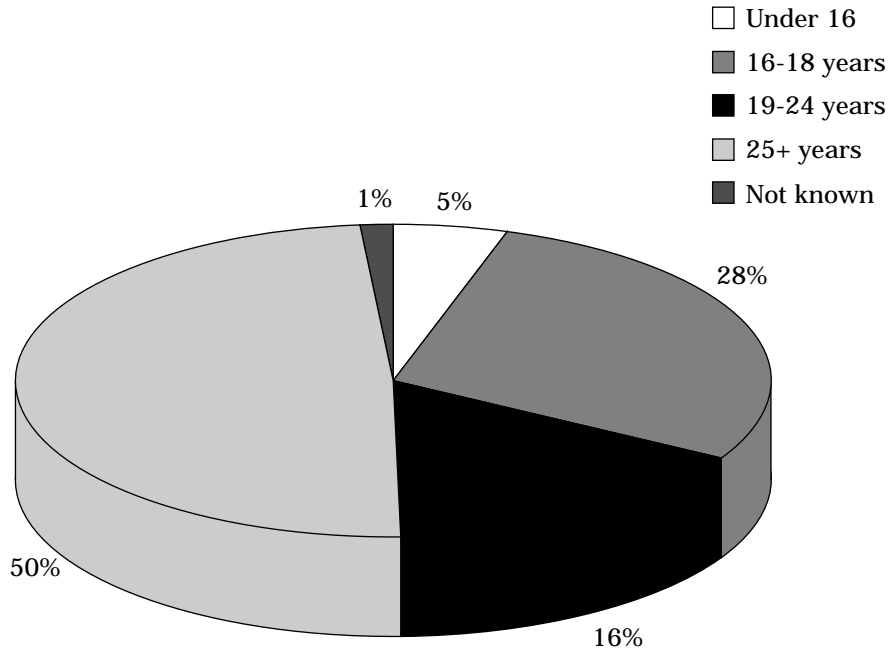
 - 5 Estimated income (for 12 months to July 1996)

 - 6 Estimated expenditure (for 12 months to July 1996)

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

Figure 1

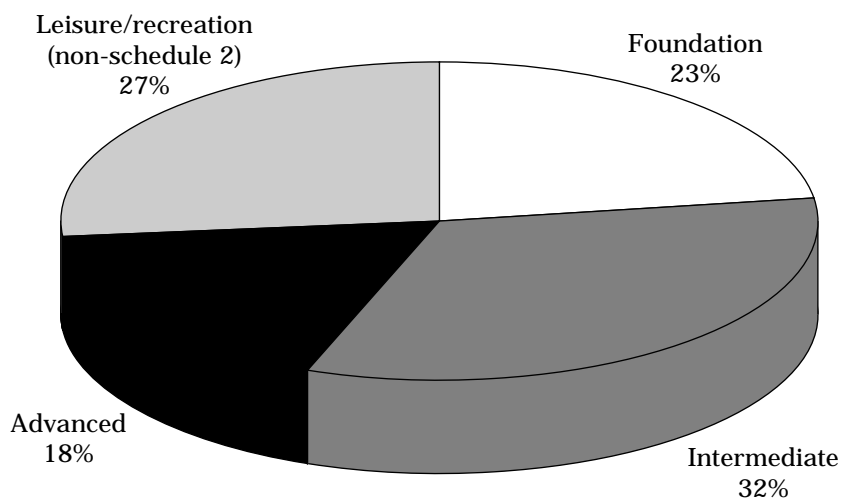
West Sussex College of Agriculture and Horticulture: percentage enrolments by age (as at July 1996)



Enrolments: 3,134

Figure 2

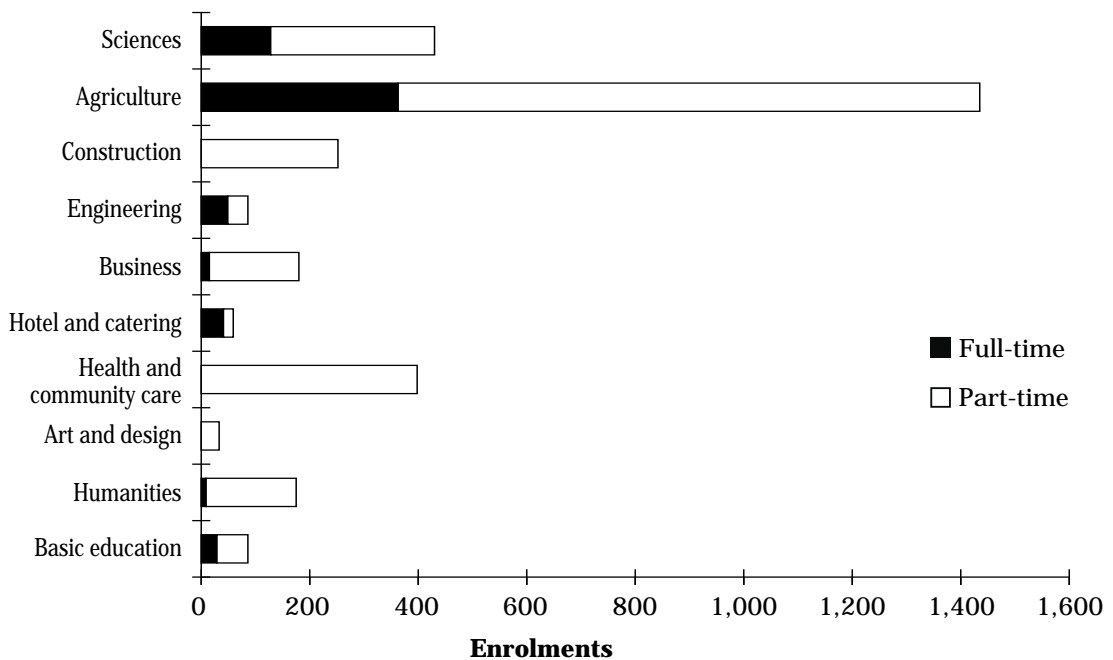
West Sussex College of Agriculture and Horticulture: percentage enrolments by level of study (as at July 1996)



Enrolments: 3,134

Figure 3

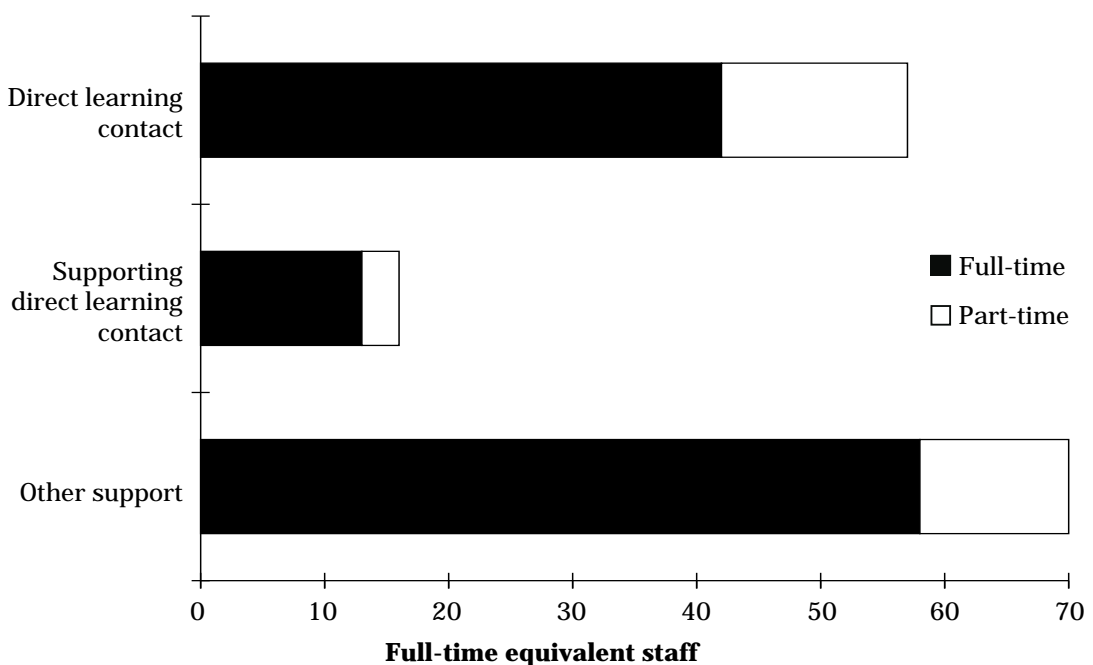
West Sussex College of Agriculture and Horticulture: enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at July 1996)



Enrolments: 3,134

Figure 4

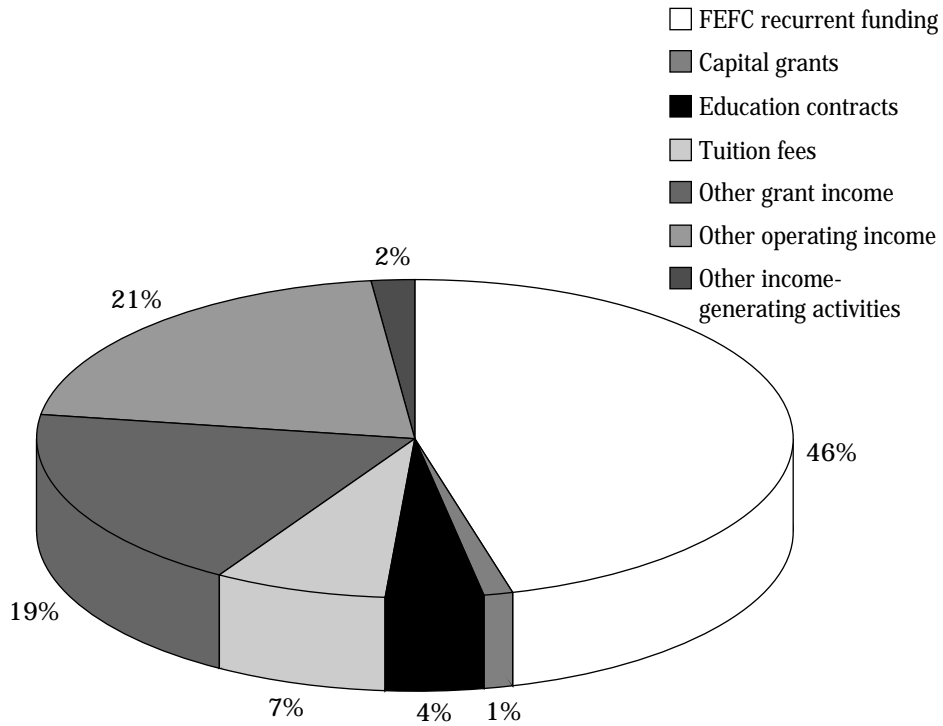
West Sussex College of Agriculture and Horticulture: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1995-96)



Full-time equivalent staff: 143

Figure 5

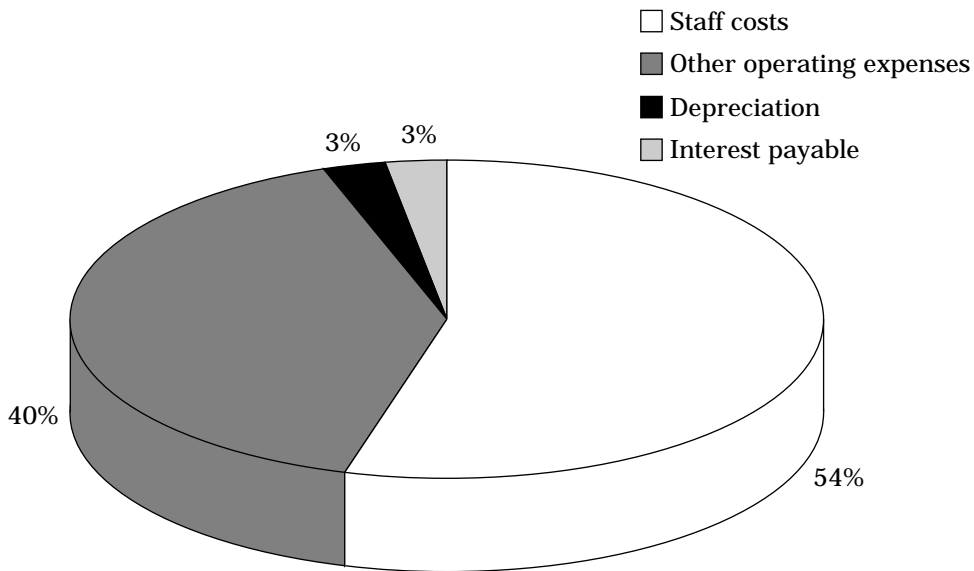
**West Sussex College of Agriculture and Horticulture: estimated income
(for 12 months to July 1996)**



Estimated income: £5,561,000

Figure 6

**West Sussex College of Agriculture and Horticulture: estimated expenditure
(for 12 months to July 1996)**



Estimated expenditure: £5,249,000

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