

# Myerscough College

**REPORT FROM  
THE INSPECTORATE  
1997-98**

**THE  
FURTHER  
EDUCATION  
FUNDING  
COUNCIL**

***THE FURTHER EDUCATION  
FUNDING COUNCIL***

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## Grade Descriptors

Inspectors assess the strengths and weaknesses of each aspect of provision they inspect. Their assessments are set out in the report. They use a five-point scale to summarise the balance between strengths and weaknesses.

The descriptors for the grades are:

- grade 1 – outstanding provision which has many strengths and few weaknesses
- grade 2 – good provision in which the strengths clearly outweigh the weaknesses
- grade 3 – satisfactory provision with strengths but also some weaknesses
- grade 4 – less than satisfactory provision in which the weaknesses clearly outweigh the strengths
- grade 5 – poor provision which has few strengths and many weaknesses.

Aggregated grades for aspects of cross-college provision, curriculum areas and lesson observations, for colleges inspected during 1996-97, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1	2	3	4	5
	%	%	%	%	%
Curriculum areas	9	59	30	2	–
Cross-college provision	18	51	27	4	–
Lesson observations	19	42	31	7	1

Source: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1996-97: Chief inspector's annual report.* Grades were awarded using the guidelines in Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*.  
Sample size: 122 college inspections

## Retention and Pass Rates

Where data on students' achievements appear in tables, levels of achievement are shown in two ways:

- as a retention rate, which is the proportion of students who completed a course in relation to the number enrolled on 1 November in the first year of the course
- as a pass rate, which is the proportion of students which passed examinations in relation to the number entered. Pass rates for GCE A level are quoted for grades A to E unless otherwise specified. Pass rates for GCSE courses are quoted for grade C or above unless otherwise specified. Pass rates for vocational and professional awards are for successful completion of the full award.

# Summary

## Myerscough College

### *North West Region*

#### **Inspected February 1998**

Myerscough College is a large college of agriculture and horticulture near Preston. The self-assessment report which the college prepared before the inspection was the first it had produced. The report contains clear statements of strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the report. Some judgements, however, are not supported by clear evidence. In places, the report is descriptive rather than evaluative. It contains few statistics. The college has an established system of observing lessons, but the findings from observations were not fully used in the self-assessment report.

Myerscough College offers land-based courses from foundation level to degree level. Since the last inspection, the college has extended and improved its provision and student numbers have increased. It has greatly improved its resources and support for students. The college is ably managed. Students are well taught. They have many opportunities for practical work and through these, they are enabled to develop their skills to a high level. A few lessons are poorly planned and fail to cater for the needs of all students in the group. Work placements, including those which take place abroad, are well organised. Pass rates on most full-time courses are high. The majority of students progress into employment or higher

education. Staff are unstinting in the academic and pastoral support they provide for students, in particular for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Staff are well qualified and they are encouraged to strengthen their professional skills and knowledge. The college plans the maintenance and refurbishment of its grounds and accommodation well. It is undertaking a major building programme in order to improve the library and other learning resources, including IT. The college should: ensure that IT is an integral part of the curriculum; standardise tutorial practices across the college; increase the focus on teaching and learning in its quality assurance system; and improve the college's management information system.

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

<b>Curriculum area</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Cross-college provision</b>	<b>Grade</b>
Agriculture	2	Support for students	2
Horticulture	2	General resources	2
Equine studies	2	Quality assurance	3
		Governance	3
		Management	2

# Context

## The College and its Mission

1 Myerscough College provides education and training for the land-based industries. Previously known as the Lancashire College of Agriculture and Horticulture, it adopted its current name in 1993, and celebrated its centenary in 1994. The college's main campus is in the rural community of Bilsborrow, approximately seven miles to the north of Preston. There is a second campus at Hutton on the southern outskirts of Preston. The college has extensive grounds and it has farms at both campuses. There is also a hill farm at Dinkling Green some 12 miles to the east. The college is in a predominately rural district, but one which contains some densely-populated urban areas.

2 The college offers further education, higher education and non-vocational and industrial training courses. It is an associate college of the University of Central Lancashire. The college's courses cover agriculture, horticulture, landscape practice, arboriculture, sportsturf, sport and leisure, science, ecology and conservation, equine studies, animal care, veterinary nursing, mechanisation, rural blacksmithing, floristry and management. There are courses from foundation to degree level in many subject areas.

3 The college attracts full-time students from the local area, the whole of the United Kingdom, and abroad. Part-time, foundation, and non-vocational courses mainly recruit local students. In 1997-98, the college had 4,582 students of whom 1,787 were on courses which attracted funding from the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). Of these 1,787 students, 772 students were aged between 16 and 18, 273 were aged between 19 and 24, and 742 were over 25. There were 1,082 full-time students, of whom 356 were on higher education courses. In February 1998, the college employed 165 full-time and 70 part-time staff. The college's senior management team comprises the principal and vice-principal, four heads of academic

departments, two heads of service departments and four other senior managers. The four academic departments consist of specialist sections. Within these sections programme managers are responsible for specific programmes of study.

4 The college's mission is 'to provide high-quality education and training together with research and advisory facilities for the land-based and related industries in the rural and other communities that it serves. The college aims at all times to offer a welcoming and friendly environment which is healthy and safe and which allows freedom of access, equality of opportunity and encourages individuals to develop their full potential'. The mission statement is complemented by a detailed needs analysis and by the strategic planning process.

# Context

## The Inspection

5 The college was inspected during the week beginning 23 February 1998. The inspection team had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and information about the college held by other divisions of the FEFC. The college was notified of the sample of provision which was to be assessed approximately two months before the inspection. The college produced data on students' achievements for the three years 1995 to 1997 which were checked by an inspector against primary sources such as class registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies. The inspection was carried out by seven inspectors working for a total of 26 days and an auditor working for five days. Inspectors observed 32 lessons, and examined students' work and a variety of college documents. There were discussions with governors, managers, college staff and students and the chief executive of the Lancashire West Training and Enterprise Council (TEC).

6 Of the lessons inspected, 66 per cent were good or outstanding. This is above the average of 61 per cent for colleges inspected in 1996-97, according to *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1996-97: Chief inspector's annual report*. The average level of attendance in the lessons inspected was above the average for the sector, according to the same report, at 87 per cent. The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected.

### Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GNVQ and NVQ	3	3	4	1	0	11
Other vocational	5	10	5	1	0	21
Total	8	13	9	2	0	32

# Curriculum Areas

## Agriculture

### Grade 2

**7 Inspectors observed 12 lessons, comprising part-time and full-time courses at intermediate and advanced levels. Inspectors concluded that the self-assessment report for agriculture was not comprehensive. In particular, it lacked comment and judgements on teaching and learning.**

#### Key strengths

- a broad range of full-time and part-time courses
- a good variety of learning experiences
- the vocational relevance of theory lessons
- high pass rates on full-time courses
- productive links with industry

#### Weaknesses

- poor management of learning in some lessons
- declining pass rates on part-time courses

8 The college caters equally well for new entrants to agriculture and for those already employed in the industry. There are courses from foundation to advanced level. In addition to their main course, many students study for additional qualifications in order to enhance their prospects of employment. A steady decline in the demand for agricultural courses is threatening the future of some of the college's programmes. The college is seeking to counter this threat and has modularised the curriculum. It is also examining other ways of making the design and timetabling of courses more flexible.

9 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that there are weaknesses in staffing. The responsibilities of some teachers are not clear. Staff who teach on

courses in sections other than their own do not always receive briefing on what they should be doing. Most course documentation is good. It gives students clear information on how courses are structured and delivered.

10 Students appreciate the readiness of staff to give them help whenever it is needed. Teachers structure programmes of work to enable students to undertake a range of activities which are relevant to their future employment in farming and related industries. Inspectors agreed with the college's claim that the work experience programme for students is well managed and that it is a strength of the college's provision. In most lessons, teachers use their substantial knowledge of farming to good effect and they explain new topics clearly. They frequently and effectively emphasise the relevance of theory to vocational practice. In one lesson, a teacher made good use of historical price changes and trends to analyse aspects of marketing and to stress the importance of these to the farmer when selling milk. In some lessons, teachers do not take into account the differing needs of students. For example, in a lesson in which there were students of widely differing abilities and experience, students spent an excessive amount of time in copying notes. Some students found this difficult and worked very slowly. Terms that were new to some of the students were not adequately explained or illustrated. Some students were unable to give their full attention to the teacher's explanations because they were still copying notes. In practical sessions, a few students were unclear about what was required of them.

11 A wide and appropriate range of assessments is used, and students receive feedback on their interpersonal skills as well as on their technical skills in work. Teachers maintain comprehensive records of students' progress. Assignments and case studies are based on realistic examples from industry. The college's three farms play an important role in

# Curriculum Areas

students' assignment work. Local farmers also provide opportunities for students to carry out practical work and they help in assessing students' performance. In some cases, students are given too little written guidance and feedback on their performance in assignments.

12 Most students carry out thorough research when completing assignments, and they present their work well. Some of the management assignments prepared by national diploma students in their final year are particularly good. Common weaknesses in other assignments are the students' failure to apply their knowledge when attempting to solve problems and their failure to draw conclusions from their research. Most portfolios of students' work are comprehensive and well maintained. Some students take insufficiently detailed notes of lessons. Last year, a high proportion of certificate and diploma students passed their examinations at the end of the course. National diploma pass rates have been high for the past three years. Pass rates have been lower on the other two full-time courses in the last two years. Retention rates on part-time courses are consistently high, but some of the pass rates are low, a weakness noted in the self-assessment report. However, many part-time students gain the qualification for which they are aiming after

the completion date of the course. Most full-time students on one-year courses complete their studies. Over the last two years, the retention rates for the three-year national diploma have been low. A high proportion of full-time students progress to related employment or to further studies. For example, many go on to higher level courses at the college.

## Examples of students' achievements in agriculture, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
National diploma (three-year course)	Retention (%)	85	61	74
	Pass rate (%)	73	100	100
NVQ levels 2 and 3 (part time)	Retention (%)	95	93	88
	Pass rate (%)	73	39	*
Foundation diploma in agriculture and national diploma in agriculture (one-year courses)	Retention (%)	83	96	89
	Pass rate (%)	63	66	88

Source: college data

\*results not available at time of inspection

# Curriculum Areas

## Horticulture

### Grade 2

**13 Inspectors observed 10 lessons and saw a representative sample of the section's work. They agreed with the strengths and weaknesses of provision in the horticulture section stated in the self-assessment report.**

#### Key strengths

- high pass rates on full-time courses
- the effectiveness of the teaching in preparing students for work
- frequent, productive team meetings
- a successful national vocational qualification (NVQ) programme which widens participation
- well-organised work placements
- effective support for students with learning difficulties
- staff with a high level of technical expertise

#### Weaknesses

- the insufficient feedback on some written work and progress
- the failure to make information technology (IT) an integral part of the curriculum
- untidy and uninviting classrooms

14 The horticulture section offers a broad range of courses, including a successful NVQ programme which has been effective in widening participation. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that this programme is a strength of the college's provision. Weekly meetings enable staff to work effectively as a team. They promote good communication and ensure the efficient allocation of resources. Staff responsibilities are clearly assigned. Staff have a high level of technical expertise. Some have a heavy

teaching load in relation to their administrative responsibilities. Technical support for teaching staff is limited to one full-time technician.

Estates charge hands complement the work of academic staff by supervising the practical work of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. For example, a large group of NVQ students with mixed abilities carried out differentiated tasks in a lesson. The six charge hands undertaking maintenance tasks in the glasshouses gave individual attention to the students with learning difficulties whilst the other students were instructed on the use of rotary and cylinder mowers.

15 As well as providing instruction in practical skills teachers on all courses pay due attention to the teaching of theory in order to prepare students fully for work. Students on the national diploma programme spend one year of the course on well-organised and carefully-monitored work placements. Through this programme, the college is able to maintain its links with the industry. Opportunities for joint teaching have been fully exploited. Students do not always receive enough feedback on the quality of their written work. Some teachers are not sufficiently objective when reviewing students' progress. In some instances, there is insufficient formal recording of the action plans which students draw up to improve their performance. There are satisfactory arrangements for the internal verification of students' assessments. Staff who are qualified as internal verifiers, however, have little time to carry out this role. The self-assessment report acknowledges that IT is taught as a separate subject and not as an integral part of the curriculum. There is a plan to address this weakness.

16 The self-assessment report justifiably identifies the support given to students with learning difficulties as a strength. The needs of students are identified at an early stage. Students with learning difficulties have improved their ability to identify plants. Staff

# Curriculum Areas

believe that the students have been able to do this because plants are displayed in the learning support room. Students also develop useful techniques to help them to remember the botanical names of plants. An NVQ level 1 student in horticulture was able to raise his achievement in plant identification from 60 per cent to 89 per cent following guidance from a learning support tutor on revision techniques.

17 Students on courses at all levels make good use of the college's extensive grounds and plant collections in their practical work. An old, but well-maintained, glasshouse unit provides a wide range of controlled environments in which plants as diverse as cacti and bananas grow. Recent industrial sponsorship has provided a computerised turf irrigation system and a growth room for the production of 90,000 plants each year. A plant centre in a converted glasshouse provides opportunities for students to gain retail experience. Some of the classrooms are in converted store rooms, which lack windows. Little effort has been made to enhance the working environment with wall displays and classrooms are cluttered and untidy.

18 Students completing full-time courses achieve high pass rates. Most students who complete the national diploma course achieve a merit or distinction. The majority of students progress to employment or higher level courses. Students at all levels display a sound knowledge of plants and they display enthusiasm for their subject. The quality of the presentation of students' work varies widely.

## Examples of students' achievements in horticulture, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
National diploma	Retention (%)	93	80*	74
	Pass rate (%)	100	75*	100
NVQ level 2 (full time)	Retention (%)	100	73	100
	Pass rate (%)	93	64	100
First diploma in horticulture	Retention (%)	90	100	79
	Pass rate (%)	100	100	91
National certificate in horticulture	Retention (%)	82	81	77
	Pass rate (%)	71	48	54
Royal Horticultural Society general certificate	Retention (%)	76	63	71
	Pass rate (%)	28	37	43

Source: college data

\*fewer than 10 students

# Curriculum Areas

## Equine Studies

### Grade 2

**19 Inspectors observed 10 lessons. They agreed with the strengths and weaknesses of the provision in equine studies, identified in the college's self-assessment report. Inspectors found both strengths and weaknesses, however, which the report did not mention. They concluded that the report makes insufficient reference to the quality of teaching and learning.**

#### Key strengths

- the high standard of practical riding instruction
- good-quality, plentiful resources
- high retention and good pass rates on most full-time courses
- the success of most students in progressing to employment or higher level courses
- high pass rates in British Horse Society examinations

#### Weaknesses

- some undemanding theory teaching
- poor retention and pass rates on NVQ courses
- insufficient use of IT on courses

20 The college has offered equine studies since 1990. In 1996, provision of equine studies was expanded to include part-time and full-time courses leading to NVQs at levels 2 and 3. Students can progress within the college to higher national and degree courses in equine science. As the self-assessment report states, all students are encouraged to enter appropriate British Horse Society examinations, and staff provide training in their own time to help students prepare themselves for these. The riding school is recognised by the British Horse Society as a level 4 'where to train' centre.

21 Lessons are thoroughly planned. Whenever possible staff relate their teaching to the equine unit and they draw on their own professional experience. The quality of practical riding instruction is consistently high. Students are streamed according to their riding ability. Inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that the requirement for students to complete an equine induction programme represents a strength of the equine studies provision. Staff place much emphasis on safe working practices, particularly during practical lessons and when students are carrying out yard duties. Students enjoy and value the practical activities they undertake outside college, and those provided at weekends by other organisations which use the equine unit. There is some imaginative teaching of theory. In one lesson, a teacher illustrated the difficult concept of mitosis and meiosis by putting either red or blue ropes around students' waists and then asking the students to form differently sized groups on mats to imitate the behaviour of cells. In a minority of lessons, teaching failed to extend the students' learning. Students were given too few tasks which required them to use their existing knowledge and experience to the full and to further their understanding in a stimulating way. The self-assessment report fails to acknowledge that staff do not make enough use of IT in their teaching. All students receive assessment schedules and schemes of work. Teachers mark and return students' work promptly and they provide students with helpful feedback on their progress. The documentation to support teaching and learning is good.

22 Retention and pass rates have been high on all three full-time courses over the past three years. Students have done well in the British Horse Society examinations, especially those students on the national certificate course. In 1996-97 retention and pass rates were less satisfactory on the part-time courses leading to NVQs and no student gained a full qualification at level 3. Substantial numbers of students

# Curriculum Areas

progress into employment or on to higher level courses from the national certificate and national diploma courses. Students' practical work in the equine unit and their written and assignment work are of a consistently good standard.

23 The equine unit is built to a high standard. It is centred around one building which includes a large indoor riding school, stabling, a classroom and a tiered viewing area. An outdoor manège and adapted farm buildings nearby provide additional stabling. The unit is ably managed and well maintained. It is used effectively for teaching practical skills, as a resource for assignment and project work and to illustrate theory teaching. Students are provided with work experience in the unit. The staff who work in the unit are well qualified. The section head is an instructor and chief examiner for the British Horse Society.

## Examples of students' achievements in equine studies, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
NVQ level 2 (part time)	Retention (%)	*	*	50
	Pass rate (%)	*	*	78
National certificate in the management of horses	Retention (%)	100	80	83**
	Pass rate (%)	100	88	100**
National diploma in equine studies	Retention (%)	100	75	88
	Pass rate (%)	94	95	100
First diploma	Retention (%)	83	73	100
	Pass rate (%)	100	100	89

Source: college data

\*data not available

\*\*fewer than 10 students

# Cross-college Provision

## Support for Students

### Grade 2

**24 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment of the strengths and weaknesses in the provision of support for students. A few of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report were, however, understated. Since the last inspection, the college has greatly improved this aspect of provision.**

#### Key strengths

- extensive links with schools
- high levels of support for all students
- comprehensive careers and higher education guidance for students
- good pastoral support for students, including those in residence
- effective and supportive arrangements for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities

#### Weaknesses

- inconsistent tutorial practice
- poorly co-ordinated records of individual progress

25 The college pays careful attention to the recruitment of students. As recognised in the self-assessment report, it has won a number of awards for its marketing and publicity. Some departmental publicity materials, none the less, use technical language that is difficult for prospective students to understand. Information about the college is widely and effectively disseminated through open days, 'taster' courses and careers events. All prospective students are offered an interview. The college is careful to include the parents of younger students in open days and interviews. Enrolment procedures are efficient and welcoming. Staff consider each student's requirements thoroughly before

suggesting a programme of study. The college recognises that the assessment and accreditation of students' prior learning need further development.

26 During induction, all students receive a useful handbook about the services that the college provides. The college welcomes students of all abilities and provides a broad curriculum that caters for all students' needs. As a result of their close relationship with a number of schools, teachers are able to identify those school-leavers who will need additional learning support when they join the college. Learning support and support for students with special learning difficulties and/or disabilities is managed by the learning support co-ordinator. Since the last inspection, the provision of learning support has both improved and increased significantly. Some 20 students with severe learning difficulties and 40 students with moderate learning difficulties benefit from attending the college. On entry to the college, all students are entitled to be screened in order that their needs for additional learning support in literacy and numeracy may be identified. As claimed in the self-assessment report, the close liaison between learning support staff and some course teachers is a strength. Responsibility for diagnostic screening has been delegated to members of programme teams and some students have not had their needs for learning support assessed.

27 Tutorial practice has improved since the last inspection. The tutors' handbook sets out a well-defined tutorial programme. Tutors have received training in ways of implementing this programme. It is not used to the same extent by all tutors, however. In a number of curriculum areas, some staff give their students individual and specialist tuition during tutorial sessions but other staff do not. Records of tutorial sessions are insufficiently detailed. In some subject areas, students are not encouraged to maintain their records of achievement.

# Cross-college Provision

28 The inspectors agreed with the college's assessment of the strengths of the advice and guidance given to students about careers and higher education. The careers advice is co-ordinated by the college's careers and training liaison officer. She maintains effective working relationships with the staff of Careers Link, the local careers company. Careers Link staff provide careers interviews for individual students and sessions on careers for groups of students. Subject teachers also give specialist careers advice, and each of the college's departments has its own careers adviser. Tutorial sessions provide opportunities for external speakers from industry to offer students valuable careers advice. Full-time students are provided with well-planned work experience and, in some instances, this helps students to make their career choice. Students on sandwich courses are encouraged to work abroad and they receive support from the college if they do so. The library maintains a wide range of printed and electronic information on careers, job vacancies and courses in further and higher education.

29 A team of wardens provides pastoral care and support for the substantial number of students who live in college accommodation. The wardens give generously of their time and often provide counselling outside normal working hours for students, many of whom are under 18 years of age. The senior warden and the college counsellor are strengthening the co-ordination of the support they provide. The college has no crèche, but it is planning to introduce after-school activities for the children of staff and students.

## General Resources

### *Grade 2*

**30 The self-assessment report gives a detailed account of the strengths and weaknesses of the college's general resources. Statements of some of the strengths are misplaced, however, because they refer to other aspects of cross-college provision, and not to resources. Some refer to the new learning resource centre which had not been built at the time of the inspection.**

#### **Key strengths**

- improvement of general resources since the last inspection
- close monitoring of the use of accommodation
- much good accommodation on the Myerscough campus
- a well-stocked library

#### **Weaknesses**

- underuse of accommodation
- insufficient IT facilities

31 Since the last inspection, the college has undertaken a major reorganisation of its accommodation with the aim of rationalising it and of concentrating provision on one site. This reorganisation is not yet complete. In the main, rationalisation has been well planned and the college has a clear view of the improvements needed if it is to accommodate the growing numbers of students on this site. A significant development is the large new learning resource centre on the Myerscough campus. Construction of the building is well advanced and is due to be completed in September 1998.

32 There have been significant improvements on the Myerscough campus. The grounds are well maintained and they provide a pleasant and welcoming environment. The general

# Cross-college Provision

teaching rooms are well furnished and in good decorative order. There is a planned maintenance programme. In its self-assessment report, the college identified a weakness in the way accommodation was used. The college therefore undertook a survey of room utilisation. The findings from this survey indicated that there was significant under-utilisation of accommodation and some poor control over the way that rooms were allocated. The college is piloting a computer-based timetabling system and the use of rooms is now monitored more effectively. Some accommodation, however, is still under-used.

33 All new buildings and older accommodation which has been substantially improved, can be used by students who have restricted mobility. Much of the accommodation is now accessible to people who use wheelchairs. The library remains inaccessible to them, but this problem will be resolved when the new learning resource centre opens. The college's residential accommodation is spacious, clean and well furnished. The bedrooms added since the last inspection include some which are suitable for students who have restricted mobility. The college has extensive sports fields and the recently erected 'Centenary Centre' includes extensive recreational facilities. There are inadequate social facilities for the students. The college has allocated funds for the conversion of the old sports hall in order to address this problem.

34 As the self-assessment report acknowledges, the library has plentiful resources. Students have direct access through a computerised link to the catalogue of the county library's stock of half a million books. Since the last inspection, the library stock has been significantly improved by the addition of networked CD-ROMs. Students have free access to the internet. The library staff have effective links with teachers and through these, they monitor that the library is able to assist students' learning and that its bookstock is

relevant. Students are encouraged to use the library and they are introduced to its facilities as part of their induction. Library usage is monitored and it has increased significantly. The library is overcrowded at peak periods and it does not have enough study spaces.

35 There are too few computers in the college for students' use. The college has a target of one machine for every 10 students. At present the ratio of computers to students is 1:14. The shortage of computers has held back developments in the delivery of the curriculum.

## Quality Assurance

### *Grade 3*

**36 Inspectors generally agreed with the college's judgements about its quality assurance arrangements. They identified a number of weaknesses, however, which were not mentioned in the self-assessment report.**

#### **Key strengths**

- well-established procedures for quality assurance
- the college's compliance with ISO 9001
- staff development activities linked to college priorities
- an effective staff appraisal system

#### **Weaknesses**

- overcomplex quality assurance procedures and documentation
- the failure of quality assurance procedures to cover important areas of the college's work
- insufficient attention to the quality of teaching and of support for students
- underdeveloped use of performance indicators

37 The college's mission statement and strategic plan make clear reference to its

# Cross-college Provision

commitment to offer high-quality education and training. These are underpinned by a formal quality policy statement. The college is accredited under ISO 9001 and continues to be successfully audited for compliance. Responsibility for quality assurance is clearly assigned. Procedures are overseen by the quality assurance committee.

38 The college's self-assessment was the first it had undertaken. It was based largely on existing quality procedures. Staff at all levels were involved in the preparation of the report, which started in the summer term of 1997 and took several months. The governors, helped by external consultants, evaluated their own role and submitted a draft section for the report. They also debated an early draft of the full report. Senior managers carried out a final review of the document.

39 Many of the statements in the self-assessment report are descriptive rather than evaluative, and not all are explicitly linked to evidence. Lesson observations take place but do not inform judgements on teaching and learning in the great majority of curriculum area reports. The action plan at the end of the report is insufficiently detailed and focuses on reviewing procedures rather than on addressing identified weaknesses.

40 There are well-established quality assurance procedures and most staff comply with these. However, these procedures are complex and do not apply to all the college's provision. There is an annual review system for full-time courses which involves analysis of a variety of data and other information. The course reviews are summarised in a report which evaluates the provision against 60 quality statements and includes an action plan. Improvements have resulted from the implementation of action plans. Departments carry out their own reviews and use evidence from course reviews in these. Both course and departmental reviews give insufficient emphasis to the important areas of teaching, learning, students' achievements and support for

students. Reviews are not rigorously checked and some of the judgements in them are insufficiently supported by evidence. The quality assurance committee uses departmental reviews as a basis for an annual report on the quality of provision which it presents to the academic board and to governors. This report does not refer closely to course reviews, however, and governors are not given a detailed picture of the quality of provision. The quality assurance procedures do not apply to most part-time or short courses, or to the majority of non-teaching areas. They cover the library, however. Inspectors could not agree with the statement in the self-assessment report, that the use of performance indicators is a strength of the college's quality assurance procedures. Other than in the charter there are few explicit statements by the college of the standards it is seeking to achieve.

41 In addition to its annual reviews, the college carries out a five-yearly cycle of internal inspection. The internal inspection process involves a check that the college's quality assurance procedures are being carried out properly. It also includes lesson observation. Lessons are graded on the same scale as that used by the FEFC's inspectors. Findings from lesson observations were not included in the self-assessment report. There is no evaluation of the effectiveness with which courses and departments have assessed their own performance. A short report of some three or four pages summarises the main findings of this quinquennial internal inspection. Like the college's other quality assurance reports, the quinquennial report contains limited evaluation of teaching, learning, students' achievements and support for students. The quinquennial report does not have a major impact on the quality of the college's provision.

42 A college charter sets out the overall standards of services the college intends to provide for students. It is reviewed regularly. The commitments in the charter are generalised and the college does not monitor the extent to

# Cross-college Provision

which they are fulfilled. The self-assessment report makes no reference to these weaknesses.

43 The college has a staff development policy which is clearly linked to the strategic plan. The college has made a formal commitment to spend a minimum of 1 per cent of its total pay expenditure on staff development in 1997-98. A senior member of staff acts as the staff development officer and is accountable to the academic board and senior management team. Staff development priorities are identified through the staff appraisal system and the departmental reviews, and they also arise from developments in the college, such as the introduction of new courses. Current priorities include technical upgrading, curriculum development, management training, teacher training and the development of IT skills. Staff are provided with an adequate and appropriate range of staff development activities. Half a day a month is set aside for staff development activities which take place in the college. There is scope for further evaluation of the effectiveness of staff development activities. A staff appraisal system has been in place since 1991. It covers all staff, including support staff and part-time teachers. Systematic records are kept of appraisal interviews. The appraisal system is regularly reviewed and updated. The college secured Investor in People accreditation in January 1996. The strengths and weaknesses of staff development and appraisal are understated in the self-assessment report.

## Governance

### *Grade 3*

**44 Inspectors broadly agreed with the strengths in governance, stated in the self-assessment report but considered that a few were overstated. In addition to some minor weaknesses which are clearly acknowledged in the self-assessment report, the inspectors found some more significant deficiencies which the college had failed to identify.**

#### Key strengths

- the governors' strong commitment to the mission of the college
- the governors' clear vision of the strategic direction of the college
- an effective committee structure
- effective oversight of strategic planning and developments

#### Weaknesses

- an incomplete register of governors' interests
- the ineffective operation of the remuneration and search/nomination committee
- deficiencies in financial monitoring
- the potential conflict of interests in the clerk's role

45 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is adequate. The corporation substantially conducts its business in accordance with the instrument and articles of government. It also substantially fulfils its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC.

46 Governors share a vision of the college's strategic direction, which is being implemented through the rationalisation and improvement of the college's physical resources. The effective role which the corporation plays in strategic planning is acknowledged in the self-assessment report. Governors understand and exercise their strategic role. Governors make frequent, welcome and unobtrusive visits to the college.

47 The corporation has 20 governors, comprising: one student; one TEC nominee; two staff; four co-opted and 11 independent governors; and the principal. At the time of the inspection, there was a vacancy for one of the co-opted governors. The expertise of the governors is in keeping with the needs of the

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college. It covers education, business, farming, finance and land management. There are 16 male and three female governors, two of whom are recent appointments. The self-assessment report makes mention of the 'gender imbalance' and the corporation is taking steps to redress it. One of the newly appointed governors and the student member are female.

48 Corporation and committee agendas and supporting papers are sent out in good time in advance of meetings. The minutes of meetings are written up promptly. Although agendas and minutes are informative they are also very lengthy. Corporation papers, apart from confidential items, are freely available for the public to consult. The clerk to the corporation is the head of personnel at the college. He has to take the minutes of both corporation and committee meetings. The clerk to the corporation is faced with a potential conflict of interest in view of his role as head of personnel. For example, the clerk has spoken at meetings of the finance and employment committee in his capacity as head of personnel.

49 The corporation has established four committees comprising finance and employment, audit, remuneration and search/nomination, and land and properties. The finance and employment committee is responsible for the detailed monitoring of the college's financial position. Although the members of the finance and employment committee receive copies of the monthly management accounts, the committee itself does not often meet in order to consider them formally. The finance and employment committee did not formally review the July 1997 management accounts to ascertain the college's financial position at the end of the year and it did not receive any financial monitoring information in respect of the college's capital projects. The audit committee has complied with the key aspects of its terms of reference. In 1997, however, its most important meeting, at which a number of significant reporting and

planning issues were due for consideration, was inquorate. The remuneration and search/nomination committee has, since its establishment in June 1996, only considered governor vacancies on one occasion. At other times, vacancies have been considered less formally.

50 The self-assessment report notes that the financial profile of the college is monitored on a monthly basis and that all governors receive a monthly statement on the college's financial position. In practice, governors who are not on the finance and employment committee do not receive the monthly management accounts. The corporation receives the minutes of the finance and employment committee together with the management accounts which the committee has considered at its meetings. However, the corporation only formally considered the college's financial position itself, on one occasion during 1997-98. Similarly, although the corporation receives the minutes and supporting papers of the land and properties committee, the corporation has not formally monitored the actual cost of the current building projects against budget. In addition, the finance and employment committee did not receive any financial monitoring information in respect of the college's capital projects.

51 The corporation has introduced training days for both new and experienced governors and it intends to make these annual events. Governors also receive comprehensive induction packs. The inspectors agreed with the finding in the college's self-assessment report that training for governors needs to be more regular and better planned. The corporation's self-assessment report considers the register of governors' interests to be a strength. However, the majority of the governors have not completed it. Furthermore, governors are not required to disclose details of financial transactions they may have had with the college. The corporation produces an annual report and holds an annual open meeting. It has no

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standing orders. In its self-assessment report, the corporation identifies its code of conduct for governors as a strength, but this is in need of updating.

## Management

### Grade 2

**52 Inspectors concluded that, in its assessment of management, the college omitted some strengths and overstated certain weaknesses.**

#### Key strengths

- managers' clear vision and strong sense of purpose
- the significant growth in student numbers and the extension of provision
- a comprehensive and well-informed planning process
- the strong and effective links with external organisations
- an effective marketing unit
- good communications within the college
- well-qualified and suitably-experienced finance team
- robust financial controls
- an appropriate system of financial delegation

#### Weaknesses

- shortcomings in the implementation of cross-college initiatives
- ineffective co-ordination of activity to promote equality of opportunity
- the failure of management information systems to meet the college's needs fully

53 The college is well managed. Its managers and staff have a clear vision of the way in which the college should develop and they have a strong sense of purpose. The college has consistently exceeded its funding targets since

incorporation and the numbers of full-time and part-time students have increased significantly over this period. At the same time, the college has extended the range of its provision significantly.

54 The college has an effective management structure. The full senior management team of 12 meets monthly. The meetings have extensive agendas and they serve to maintain good communications between managers. Weekly meetings of the four senior executive staff assist prompt decision-making. Three committees of senior staff deal with finance, support services and operations. The academic board meets six times a year. It operates effectively. The college's self-assessment report identifies that the academic board has insufficient representation from the teaching staff and from students. The college has taken steps to address this weakness since the report was completed.

55 The structure of the college is departmental and it has proved effective. In its self-assessment report, however, the college concludes that this departmental structure is holding back the implementation of a number of important cross-college initiatives that are essential to the college's continuing progress and development. The new principal has initiated a debate on restructuring in a wide-ranging discussion paper that sets out the challenges and opportunities that lie before the college. Steps have already been taken to modify the management structure to address the issues that the paper identifies.

56 The planning process is well developed and the strengths identified during the previous inspection are still evident. The strategic plan is detailed and comprehensive and is developed through wide consultation. It is informed by a thorough needs analysis which makes use of national and local labour market information. The college also undertakes its own market research. Staff are familiar with the college's objectives which they are working to fulfil.

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57 The college has a long history of involvement with external organisations and institutions relevant to its mission. Its main links are with industry and employers, schools, further and higher education institutions, careers services, local authorities, TECs and a large number of rural organisations. Lancashire West TEC values the working relationship it has with the college and recognises the full part it plays in local initiatives. As the college has diversified its provision, it has supplemented its traditional links with the farming community with links with other sectors of the land-based industries. The college's technical advisory boards enable representatives from industry to review the college's provision and consider proposals for new courses.

58 The college's small but active marketing unit is not mentioned in the self-assessment report, despite its strengths. The unit works effectively and efficiently and has a well-researched and professional approach to publicising the college. It produces the detailed labour market information and needs analysis which underpin the strategic planning process. The unit has launched a number of initiatives, funded through the European Union, which aim to extend participation in education and training to the employees of isolated small and medium-sized rural enterprises.

59 Communications within the college are good, and in some respects, exemplary. There are regular meetings at course, section and department level as well as meetings of all staff in the college. Minutes of formal meetings have been streamlined and an emphasis has been placed on the value of informal communication. A system of weekly newsletters and monthly bulletins is particularly useful and keeps staff informed of developments and issues affecting the college. Inspectors considered that the college's self-assessment report understates the effectiveness of communications within the college.

60 The college monitors the effectiveness and efficiency with which it deploys and uses its resources. It subscribes to a national benchmarking service and uses the data to monitor its financial performance and to compare it with that of other colleges. Data show improvements in the college's efficiency.

61 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is good. The finance team is appropriately structured, qualified and experienced. Managers have introduced an appropriate scheme of financial delegation and they have monitored the college's financial position by formally reviewing the college's monthly management accounts. Currently, the college is financially sound.

62 Management accounts are prepared promptly each month, in accordance with a timetable set out in the financial regulations. However, there is considerable room for improving the quality of the management accounts. The college has robust financial controls as indicated by the positive conclusions contained in both the 1996-97 annual internal audit report and the 1996-97 external audit management letter. The college's financial regulations are appropriate to the college's needs and were last updated in December 1997.

63 The college's management information systems do not fully meet the institution's needs. There are inconsistencies between the data that course managers hold and data held centrally. Some data collection and initial analysis are duplicated. Staff do not make the best use of available data in planning and quality assurance processes. Managers clearly recognise the need to develop the college's management information systems in order to make them more effective. In its self-assessment report, the college has acknowledged that its current management information systems represent a weakness. The principal is leading the efforts to develop systems which are more appropriate for the college.

# Cross-college Provision

64 Inspectors could not agree with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the college's promotion of equal opportunities amounts to a strength. Although there is activity to further equality of opportunity across the college, this is not well co-ordinated. A development plan for promoting equal opportunities in the college over the next four years has been produced. At present, however, insufficient attention is given to assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the college's promotion of equality of opportunity and to the pursuit of the objectives which the equal opportunities committee has set.

## Conclusions

65 The self-assessment report provided a useful starting point for planning the inspection. Inspectors agreed with many of the findings in the report, but found that strengths had been overemphasised and weaknesses underplayed in a number of areas. Inspectors agreed with all but one of the curriculum grades awarded by the college. In two areas of cross-college provision they concluded that the college had been overgenerous in its grading.

66 Strengths and weaknesses identified during the inspection are listed under each section of this report. The main strengths and weaknesses are identified in the summary.

# College Statistics

## Student numbers by age (November 1997)

Age	%
Under 16	1
16-18 years	21
19-24 years	17
25+ years	61
Not known	0
Total	100

Source: college data

## Student numbers by level of study (November 1997)

Level of study	%
Foundation	10
Intermediate	16
Advanced	19
Higher education	9
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	46
Total	100

Source: college data

## Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (November 1997)

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	6	421	9
Agriculture	1,063	2,097	69
Engineering	0	97	2
Business	0	13	1
Health and community care	0	179	4
Art and design	0	544	12
Basic education	0	131	3
Total	1,069	3,482	100

Source: college data

## Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (November 1997)

	Permanant	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	53	45	0	98
Supporting direct learning contact	16	5	0	21
Other support	88	28	6	122
Total	157	78	6	241

Source: college data, rounded to nearest full-time equivalent

# College Statistics

## Three-year Trends

### Financial data

	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Income	£7,023,000	£7,436,000	*
Average level of funding (ALF)			
Out-turn to 1995-96; funded 1996-97	£24.75	£22.68	£26.03
Payroll as a proportion of income	52%	52%	*
Achievement of funding target	122%	127%	*
Diversity of income	59%	57%	*
Operating surplus	-£49,000	£127,000	*

Sources: Income – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96)

ALF – Performance Indicators 1995-96 (1994-95 and 1995-96), Funding Allocations 1996-97 (1996-97)

Payroll – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96)

Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1995-96 (1994-95 and 1995-96)

Diversity of income – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96)

Operating surplus – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96)

\*data not available

### Performance data for students aged 16 to 18

Qualifications		1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Advanced vocational	Number in final year	23	37	65
	Percentage achieving qualification	96%	78%	82%
	Position in tables	top 10%	middle third	top third
Intermediate vocational	Number in final year	*	113	95
	Percentage achieving qualification	*	81%	85%
	Position in tables	*	top third	top 10%

Source: DfEE

Note: the majority of the college's students are 19 years of age or older

The achievements of these students are not covered in published DfEE performance tables

\*1994-95 intermediate vocational results not available

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