

# Brackenhurst College

**REPORT FROM  
THE INSPECTORATE  
1997-98**

THE  
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EDUCATION  
FUNDING  
COUNCIL

***THE FURTHER EDUCATION  
FUNDING COUNCIL***

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*Cheylesmore House  
Quinton Road  
Coventry CV1 2WT  
Telephone 01203 863000  
Fax 01203 863100*

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## College statistics

## 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

## Brackenhurst College

### *East Midlands Region*

#### Inspected February 1998

Brackenhurst College in Nottinghamshire is concerned mainly with education and training for the land-based industries. A 'quality review' group produced a self-assessment report for the inspection. Their work was out of sequence with the college's annual planning cycle. The findings were in general agreement with those of inspectors but some strengths were overstated and some weaknesses were overlooked. Students' achievements are accurately recorded by the college. There are established quality assurance procedures, which are applied to some, but not all, of the college's activities.

The college offers a wide range of full-time courses. However, the narrow range of part-time provision does not meet the needs of all prospective students. The quality of teaching is satisfactory for theory and high for practical work. The range of specialist facilities is good. Work experience is well managed. There are productive links with industry. Pass and retention rates are good for most full-time courses. Students' achievements on the majority of part-time courses are poor. The documented tutorial arrangements are satisfactory but they are not implemented consistently. Comprehensive individual student records are maintained. There is effective

learning support for groups of students but not for individuals. The well-resourced library provides a pleasant learning environment. There are insufficient study spaces and some learning resources are inadequate. Utilisation of the accommodation is efficient. The quality of some of the accommodation is poor.

Corporation members have strong agricultural expertise but lack expertise in a number of other key areas. The current negotiations towards a merger have led to a postponement of key reviews and to uncertainty in the relationships between governors and senior managers. Senior managers are effective at an operational level, some middle managers are less so. Monitoring of targets, supported by timely and accurate management information, is effective. The college should: clarify the relationship between governors and senior managers; improve the effectiveness of middle managers; extend the quality assurance procedures to all college activities; improve the teaching of theory and the effectiveness of feedback to students; tackle the weaknesses in the learning resources and accommodation; and improve students' achievements on part-time courses.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Equine studies	2	Support for students	2
Agriculture and countryside	2	General resources	3
		Quality assurance	3
		Governance	3
		Management	2

# Context

## The College and its Mission

1 Brackenhurst College is near Southwell in Nottinghamshire. It is concerned mainly with education and training for the land-based industries. The college has been an associate college of Nottingham Trent University for five years and, at the time of the inspection, was at the public consultation stage of a proposed merger with the university. Brackenhurst College has a wide catchment area; in 1996-97, 19 per cent of its students came from local education authorities (LEAs) other than Nottinghamshire. The college has increased its Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) funded activity by 105 per cent between 1993-94 and 1996-97. At the time of the inspection, 819 students were enrolled on programmes funded by the FEFC, of whom 61 per cent were over 19 years old. A further 240 were enrolled on higher education courses in association with the university.

2 The college farm is primarily a teaching resource, but is managed as a commercial enterprise. The college estate also provides facilities for horticulture and floristry, woodland and countryside management, environmental and conservation studies and the development of equestrian skills. The recent growth in student numbers has been achieved by the introduction of courses in floristry, countryside management and animal care and the expansion of horticulture provision. Numbers on agriculture courses have remained fairly constant. The 'pathways' programme provides opportunities for students with moderate learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

3 The college has contracts with the North Nottinghamshire and Greater Nottingham training and enterprise councils (TECs). The college is involved in a project to develop the use of computers for communication and learning in partnership with Newark and Sherwood College and small rural industries. It is also involved in partnerships with conservation organisations

and young farmers' clubs and in overseas work in Scandinavia, the Baltic and Poland. College staff helped to develop a vocational curriculum, in harmony with European qualifications, for the national dairy training centre in Wrzesnia. The Polish government has recognised this as a 'centre of excellence'.

4 A revised mission statement was approved by the corporation in July 1997. It states that 'Brackenhurst College will provide a specialist learning environment, supporting individuals and organisations to progress to their full potential and achieve success'. The main strategic aims of the college are to maintain existing levels of further education provision; expand higher education provision; maintain the financial health of the college; and operate in a manner which is sensitive to the environment.

# Context

## The Inspection

5 The college was inspected during the week beginning 2 February 1998. The inspection team had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and reviewed information about the college held by other divisions of the FEFC. The college submitted data on students' achievements for the three years 1995 to 1997 which were checked against primary sources, such as class registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies. The college was notified of the sample of its provision to be inspected approximately two months before the inspection. The inspection was carried out by six inspectors working for 21 days, and an auditor working for five days. They observed 23 lessons and examined samples of students' work and a wide variety of college documents. Meetings were held with governors, managers, college staff, employers, parents and students.

6 Of the lessons inspected, 65 per cent were rated good or outstanding. The profile of grades is better than that for all colleges inspected during 1996-97, according to *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1996-97: Chief inspector's annual report*. The average level of attendance during the inspection was 87 per cent; this compares with an average of 84 per cent for the programme area. The following table shows the grades awarded to the lessons inspected.

### Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
Vocational	7	8	7	1	0	23

# Curriculum Areas

## Equine Studies

### Grade 2

**7 Inspectors observed 12 lessons covering courses from foundation to advanced level and including ‘pathways’ provision, first diploma, national diploma and certificate and British Horse Society qualifications. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report relating to strengths in this curriculum area, although the quality of the teaching was sometimes understated and some weaknesses were overlooked.**

#### Key strengths

- wide range of full-time courses and additional qualifications relevant to industry
- high standards of practical teaching
- well-managed work experience
- good pass and retention rates for most full-time courses
- close and productive links with industry
- good specialist facilities

#### Weaknesses

- the needs of part-time students not being met
- the failure of some teaching to take account of students’ ability and experience
- some poor assignment briefings and inadequate feedback to students
- poor students’ achievements on most part-time courses

8 The college offers a wide range of full-time programmes which caters for students with different levels of ability and experience and provides progression to advanced level. However, the provision does not fully meet the needs of part-time students. Many full-time

students, in addition to their main award, gain extra practical qualifications which help them to gain employment. There are productive links with industry. Employers serve on effective advisory committees and are involved in reviewing courses. Inspection findings confirmed the claim in the college self-assessment report that work experience is well managed and effective. Routine duties on the college equine unit provide realistic work experience and placements in other stable yards effectively complement this work.

9 Students are provided with an extensive range of learning experiences. They make visits to other riding establishments and organise competitions and events in which they also participate. Classes are well structured. Practical demonstrations emphasise correct methodology and are linked to theory. The students’ initial practice is carefully supervised and they are given clear guidance on how to improve their performance. Students are often given the opportunity to assess their own performance. Riding practicals are particularly effective and many students demonstrate high levels of competence and knowledge. The self-assessment report understates the strengths of the practical work. The specialist resources for practical teaching are good. The equestrian centre has stabling for 60 horses, a floodlit indoor riding school, an outdoor riding school and a cross-country course. The equine unit is well managed and provides an excellent model for students to study. Students benefit from teachers’ extensive knowledge of the industry. In a minority of lessons the teaching did not take account of the range of ability and experience of the students. Introductions and summary sessions were weak and few checks were made to ensure that all students had understood the topic being covered. Many discussions were dominated by the more able students. A few practical classes were poorly organised and, as a result, students sometimes had nothing to do. There are not enough



# Curriculum Areas

computers or relevant software. These weaknesses were not identified in the college's self-assessment report.

10 Course packs are valued by students for reference and planning purposes. Students are well informed about the assessment programme, which is well balanced. Assignments are vocationally relevant and provide opportunities for students to apply their theoretical knowledge to practical problems. However, the quality of some briefings and feedbacks is poor and the full potential of the assignment work is not fully exploited. Much of the national diploma students' work is well researched and effectively presented. However, they frequently reach inappropriate conclusions. Students have timetabled meetings with their tutors who maintain useful and detailed records of their progress. Many full-time students complete their studies successfully. Consistently high pass and retention rates are achieved by diploma students. National certificate students' performance varies from year to year and last year's retention rate was relatively poor. Retention rates on part-time courses are low, and achievement rates are very poor. Often no students enter for the examination at the end of their studies.

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

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
National certificate management of horses	Retention (%)	79	83	71
	Pass rate (%)	96	80	95
National diploma horse studies	Retention (%)	95	83	95
	Pass rate (%)	95	100	95

Source: college data

# Curriculum Areas

## Agriculture and Countryside

### Grade 2

**11 Inspectors observed 11 lessons covering full-time agriculture and countryside provision including the 'pathways' programme. The self-assessment report did not deal separately with the agriculture and countryside provision. As with the work in equine studies, the inspection showed that the cross-college self-assessment report understated the quality of teaching, but failed to identify a number of weaknesses.**

#### Key strengths

- industry standards of competence and safety
- good course documentation
- supportive feedback on assignments
- high standards of practical teaching
- effective use of practical facilities on- and off-site

#### Weaknesses

- poor retention rates on countryside management programmes
- low standard of work on first diploma programmes
- narrow range of provision particularly at part-time and foundation level
- poor pass rates on part-time courses

12 The quality of practical teaching is high. All except one of the lessons observed were rated outstanding. The teaching is well organised and students are given an appropriate range of tasks to which they respond enthusiastically. On the mechanised crop options, students design and manufacture labour-saving items for use in industry. Teachers make excellent use of the college's practical resources and off-site facilities for simulated and real work experience. Inspectors

concluded that the college's self-assessment report did not give sufficient weight to these strengths. In most practical lessons the setting of tasks such as updating site diaries makes productive use of waiting time; in a few, such as tractor driving, students waste time waiting for equipment.

13 There are close links with the agriculture and countryside industries. Members of advisory committees and providers of work placements support and help to develop the courses. The advisory committees ensure that the courses meet the needs of the industry and that students are taught to industry standards of competence and safety. In addition to providing advice and consultation, committee members provide interview practice for students and give guest lectures. Their commitment was identified as a strength in the self-assessment report, and the inspection team agreed with this judgement. Many students gain national proficiency test qualifications; in 1997, 86 per cent of the students on the national diploma in agriculture gained craft status.

14 Most students' written work is of good quality, particularly on countryside courses. However, on the first diploma programme the quality of work is below the expected standard. Some students are enrolled on inappropriate courses because of the narrow range offered at foundation level. Few part-time courses are offered and enrolment to these is low. Some students construct individual programmes by infilling on to full-time programmes but the college has yet to capitalise fully on the potential flexibility of its modular provision. The college's self-assessment report did not identify these weaknesses.

15 Course documentation is of good quality. Course managers use an assignment feedback pro forma to monitor students' performance and this encourages consistent and constructive feedback and helps students to improve. Students value the course packs: they provide a thorough guide to the course and the

# Curriculum Areas

assignments, and an aid to time management. Full-time courses are timetabled over three days to facilitate attendance by mature students and to allow students to undertake part-time work. The number of teaching hours has been reduced and, to compensate for this, students are encouraged to work on their own using study packs and information technology (IT).

16 Retention rates are carefully monitored and the reasons for withdrawal are well documented; the college's data show that many students leave for personal or financial reasons. Retention rates are often lowest for mature students. The overall pass rate in 1997 for full-time students was 83 per cent. Achievement rates for part-time courses such as City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) phase 4 farm business management are poor.

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

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
National certificate countryside management	Retention (%)	*	88	76
	Pass rate (%)	*	100	56
National diploma	Retention (%)	**	**	**
	Pass rate (%)	100	100	73
National certificate agriculture	Retention (%)	91	79	75
	Pass rate (%)	85	100	87
First diploma	Retention (%)	100	95	85
	Pass rate (%)	86	89	73

Source: college data

\*course not running

\*\*accurate data not available

# Cross-college Provision

## Support for Students

### Grade 2

**17 In general inspectors agreed with the college's judgements about the quality of support for students. However, some of the key strengths and weaknesses identified through inspection were different from those identified by the college in its self-assessment report.**

#### Key strengths

- effective links with schools
- well-structured induction programmes
- effective arrangements for tutorial support
- comprehensive and well-maintained individual student records
- effective learning support and study skills workshops
- effective and comprehensive careers education and guidance

#### Weaknesses

- no systematic recording of the unprogrammed learning support provided for individual students
- insufficient drop-in facilities for learning support
- inconsistent implementation of the tutorial arrangements
- no monitoring of counselling services

18 There are effective links with schools. The college prospectus is attractive and informative. Prospective students are able to visit the college on open days and during events such as the countryside festival. An environmental education centre provides link courses and study visits for schools. The farm, the workshops and the horticultural units are used by school pupils for practical activities.

19 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that induction programmes are well structured and help students to settle in to college life rapidly. From the submission of applications onwards, comprehensive individual student records are kept. Students are encouraged to maintain and update their own record of achievement using a computer software package. A system for collecting and recording the marks from all assignments is effectively managed centrally. This is a strength which is not recorded in the college's self-assessment report. Results for individual students are automatically incorporated into their record of achievement. All students on foundation and intermediate level courses who left the college in 1997 had completed their record of achievement.

20 All full-time students are tested to determine whether they need additional support in literacy or numeracy. Most learning support is provided in timetabled group sessions using material reflecting the requirements of the vocational area. This support is effective. Students are helped with the production of assignments, the completion of projects and the development of key skills. Some students requiring help attend support sessions on a casual basis but there is no systematic recording of their activities. This weakness is acknowledged in the self-assessment report. Students with specific learning difficulties are effectively supported.

21 A varied and established programme of workshops provides support for the development of study skills. In these workshops students learn how to plan and organise coursework, take and keep notes, plan the use of time, revise for exams and handle stress. The learning support co-ordinator meets each full-time group to ensure that all students are aware of the workshops and to encourage attendance. There are insufficient facilities to support students working on their own.

# Cross-college Provision

22 The majority of students feel personally and academically well supported by tutors. A college-wide system of tutorials is underpinned by a comprehensive set of documents including useful pro formas to record students' progress, actions to be taken and issues raised by the students themselves. Monitoring of students' progress is generally effective but some action-planning and recording is poor. All students are entitled to regular individual tutorials but not all receive them. Some, but not all, tutorial schemes include a list of recommended topics related to personal and social development. The inconsistencies in tutorial arrangements were not identified in the self-assessment report.

23 Comprehensive and effective careers education and guidance is seen as a strength by the college and this view was supported by inspection. Four careers advisers from the Nottinghamshire Careers Service work closely with vocational tutors to provide careers education. They provide group sessions on specific topics and interviews for individuals. Members of advisory committees also make a valuable contribution by taking part in realistic role-play interviews based on applications for real jobs. The careers library has been awarded the 'effective careers library' certificate by the Nottinghamshire Careers Service.

24 A team of wardens provides substantial pastoral support for residential students. Team members work closely with an active students' association to organise social events and sports activities. Students involve themselves in rag week and other events such as a horse and dog show to raise money for charities. The senior warden provides a counselling service for all college students. This is supplemented, when appropriate, by the services of an external counsellor. There is no monitoring and recording of the activity of the counselling service, a weakness which is overlooked in the self-assessment report.

## General Resources

### *Grade 3*

**25 The college included specialist resources as well as some aspects of general resources in its self-assessment report but did not cover all aspects of general resources. Some judgements contained in other college documents were not contained in the self-assessment report. Some of the strengths in the general resources were overstated.**

#### **Key strengths**

- well-resourced library
- some good IT teaching resources
- good facilities for full-time staff

#### **Weaknesses**

- underuse of some rooms
- some inadequate learning resources
- poor facilities for part-time staff

26 Many of the practical units and some classrooms are at a distance from the main building. Moving between sites is time consuming and this has been allowed for in the timetable. A few of the classrooms which are further from the main building are underused but overall the space utilisation is efficient. A recent review of the condition of the buildings forms the basis for a planned programme of maintenance. The condition of teaching rooms and equipment is closely monitored. All rooms are provided with basic teaching aids and are generally clean, tidy and reasonably well furnished. There is a shortage of large rooms. Some are cramped and have insufficient furniture to accommodate larger groups. Many of the classrooms are in temporary accommodation and some are reaching the end of their useful life. Maintenance costs are high and heating is poor. The development of a long-term accommodation strategy is suspended

# Cross-college Provision

awaiting the outcome of merger talks. Plans being considered by the property committee of the board were not taken into account in the college's self-assessment report.

27 There has been substantial recent investment in the library, and the stock of books and other learning resources is good. Effective links between library staff and teaching staff ensure that the library stock meets curriculum needs. Students value the help they receive from librarians. The main library area is well furnished and welcoming but the nearby study rooms are basically furnished and not well suited for unsupervised study. On some occasions there is a shortage of quiet study areas, a weakness not identified in the self-assessment report. Students needing to work in groups occupy most of the space available and those wishing to work on their own find the noise a distraction. Almost half of the college's computers are in one room. They are modern machines able to run the latest software. The room they are in is well suited to teaching computing to groups of students. Many of the other computers are older machines which are not able to run all of the software available. The number of computers is relatively low and, at times, students are frustrated by not being able to gain access to a suitable computer to work on their own. The science laboratories are not big enough to accommodate a few of the larger groups and the college has identified the need to improve these facilities.

28 All full-time teaching staff have their own office space, telephone extension and access to a computer. Part-time staff can use secretarial and reprographic facilities but have no workspaces allotted to them.

29 During the last two years the residential accommodation has been redecorated and refurbished to provide lower-cost self-catering rooms. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment of the need to enhance the quality and size of communal facilities for students. The college is aware of the restrictions on access

for students with restricted mobility and action has been taken to redress some of these. Although there is access to most of the central learning resources, the IT room on an upper floor is not accessible to wheelchair users. A survey of teaching rooms carried out by the college judged the access as poor for about one-third of them and inspectors agreed with this estimate. The college has responded to the needs of individual students with moderate learning difficulties and/or disabilities by providing specialist equipment.

## Quality Assurance

### *Grade 3*

**30 The strengths and weaknesses identified by the college were generally consistent with those identified through inspection although some strengths were overstated and some weaknesses were underemphasised or not identified. By the time of the inspection the college had addressed a number of the weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report.**

#### **Key strengths**

- staff commitment to high professional standards
- the involvement of students and external advisory committee members in course reviews
- effective monitoring of course action plans
- appropriate arrangements for monitoring outward collaborative provision
- the regular review and updating of the charter

#### **Weaknesses**

- the self-assessment process not integrated with other quality systems

# Cross-college Provision

- quality assurance systems not applied to all college activities
- variable quality of annual course reports
- limited analysis of students' achievements
- slow progress towards achieving Investor in People recognition

31 The college as a whole is committed to high professional standards. There is a college policy on quality assurance and a manual setting out the quality assurance arrangements. However, the inspection team agreed with the college's assessment that formal monitoring of the quality of provision has yet to be extended to all aspects of the college operations. The existing procedures enable the college to obtain the views of students, staff and some advisory board members on the courses and other college facilities and their comments lead to action.

32 Academic performance is monitored through an annual cycle of reviews that includes all college courses. Although this process is generally effective, it is not applied consistently to all courses. The cycle consists of three reviews during the year: at induction, mid-course and end of year. The inspection team's findings confirmed the college's assessment that students and external members of college advisory committees contribute effectively to the process. The resulting action plans identify staff responsibilities and target dates for completion. Progress is regularly monitored through course meetings and, on occasions, by advisory committees until the actions have been completed. Annual course reports are presented to the advisory committees. These reports vary in their level of detail, amount of critical evaluation and the extent to which course data are analysed. They do not clearly identify key strengths and weaknesses. The annual college curriculum report summarises the course reports, identifies actions required at a college

level, and contributes to the annual operating statement.

33 The academic board receives a variety of information including the annual curriculum report. It confirms curriculum policies and the range of provision to be offered. There is little recorded debate on students' achievements or the overall performance of the quality system. This is not acknowledged in the self-assessment report.

34 Internal verification procedures include cross-marking of assignments and the moderation of examination papers to achieve consistency of standards. In the majority of courses verification contributes effectively to quality monitoring but it failed to identify inadequacies in marking and feedback in one curriculum area. External verifier reports are used effectively. The inspection team agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report that the arrangements for monitoring the quality of outward collaborative provision work well. There are regular visits from appropriately-qualified college staff to monitor the quality of facilities, students' attendance and achievements and responses to students' comments about their courses collected through questionnaires.

35 A 'quality review group' was responsible for producing the self-assessment report for the inspection. The report dealt with all the issues covered by Council Circular 97/12, *Validating Self-assessment*. It was produced out of sequence with the planning cycle and the resultant self-assessment action plan has yet to be included in the annual operating plan. Evidence was gathered through arrangements that were additional to, and in some instances repeated, work undertaken in the existing quality system. Curriculum and course reports contain variable levels of analysis and could not be easily assimilated into the self-assessment report. An effective system of classroom observation covering all staff has been introduced to provide additional supporting

# Cross-college Provision

evidence and identify staff development needs. The findings in the self-assessment report were in agreement with those of the inspection team, but some strengths were overstated and some weaknesses were not identified.

36 The college charter is identified as a strength in the self-assessment report and this judgement is supported by inspection evidence. It is issued to all students in a well-designed student diary. Students are aware of its contents. The charter is reviewed regularly and is currently the focus of a major review to improve its presentation and to add additional performance measures. The existing performance targets cover a range of college activities and are routinely monitored

37 The college has designed, but not yet implemented, an annual staff development and review scheme to identify individual professional development needs. At present staff development requirements are identified through strategic planning, course reviews and individual staff requests. All staff find the system supportive. There is a small but growing amount of identification of professional development needs of staff through the quality assurance system. The college first committed itself to working towards Investor in People in 1994. The self-assessment report acknowledges that progress has been slow. A revised target date for completion of July 1998 has recently been set.

## Governance

### *Grade 3*

**38 The inspection team agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report although a few strengths were overstated and some areas of weakness were not identified. The college had addressed a few of the weaknesses identified through self-assessment before the inspection.**

#### Key strengths

- agricultural expertise of corporation board members
- well-attended corporation and committee meetings
- efficient conduct of corporation business
- involvement of governors in the work of the college

#### Weaknesses

- the lack of specialist expertise in key areas
- limited financial monitoring information and procedures
- lack of progress in strategic and management reviews
- unclear relationships between governors and senior managers

39 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.

40 Agricultural interests are well represented on the board. Some members have national and international responsibilities in the world of agriculture. However, there are some key areas of the college's work in which board members



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do not have specialist expertise and this is not recognised in the self-assessment report. The policy of the board is to appoint business people irrespective of their specialism. The appointment process is not written and hence not publicly available. The search committee has been active but it has not been effective yet in recruiting female governors. This was recognised by the college in its self-assessment report. The corporation lacks the financial expertise that would be provided by a governor who was a qualified accountant.

41 The board and its committees are well attended. There is no job description for the clerk and he does not clerk all of the committees. The business of the corporation is handled efficiently. There are clear and appropriate agendas, papers and minutes. The business of some of the board's committees is not handled to the same consistent standard and this is not recognised in the self-assessment report. Some of the committee's terms of reference do not reflect the current practice of the committees. The board has adopted a code of conduct and a register of interests which has been completed by all governors but not by staff with significant financial responsibilities. There are no standing orders for the business of the corporation.

42 The robustness of the procedures for financial management of the college is overstated in the self-assessment report. The finance committee requests financial monitoring information only once a term. This information is distributed to all governors only for corporation meetings. Information on forecast cashflow is only considered within annual updates to the three-year financial forecast. Governors have charged management with responsibility for notifying the chairman and vice-chairman of problems with the solvency of the college. The corporation does not consider the financial performance of the college farm during the year in detail at every meeting.

43 At the time of the inspection, the board had made a strategic decision to go ahead with a

merger proposal. A number of issues relating to the future strategic direction of the college are being held in abeyance until the outcome of the merger negotiations is known. The result has been a lack of progress in the development of strategies for accommodation, management and staffing. The need for a management review and a major strategic review was recognised in 1995. No action has been taken on the management review. Until the recent merger proposals the board as a whole had not been sufficiently involved in deciding the underlying future needs of the college as a single or merged institution. An accommodation strategy has not been considered by the board, although the property committee has identified the need for a longer-term strategy.

44 The current relationship between the board and senior staff at the college is unclear. As identified in the self-assessment report, there has been no formal appraisal of senior postholders by the board. The acting principal was appointed in April 1997 and his position has been extended until further notice. It was agreed by the board that the acting principal's role would focus on operational issues and that the board would decide upon strategic matters. The chair of the board is taking a lead role in strategy decisions. There are potential difficulties in sustaining this situation. Members of the senior management team are not fully involved in the discussions about the future strategic direction of the college and related preparations.

45 Governors participate in curriculum advisory groups and attend college events regularly. They have a clear understanding of many of the issues facing the college in terms of size and competition. The self-assessment report acknowledged that there was no formal mechanism for informing staff about board decisions. This has since been remedied with the introduction of a bulletin. The chair of the board has attended whole-staff meetings to address and meet staff.

# Cross-college Provision

## Management

### Grade 2

**46 The inspection team identified similar strengths to those listed in the college's self-assessment report, although some weaknesses were not identified, or not stated sufficiently clearly, by the college. By the time of the inspection, the college had addressed fully, or partly, many weaknesses identified through self-assessment.**

#### Key strengths

- clear corporate objectives and an associated operating statement
- an effective operational senior management team
- regular monitoring of targets and their use in financial modelling
- timely and accurate management information
- responsiveness to the recommendations of the internal audit service

#### Weaknesses

- poor links between development plans and the strategic plan
- financial strategy not fully developed
- insufficient co-ordination and poor communication at middle management level
- insufficient staff contribution to the setting of targets

47 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is good. The small finance team is headed by the director of finance and administration who is suitably experienced. Senior managers receive reports and advice when it is requested. Budget holders are provided with regular and timely reports. A good relationship exists with the internal audit

service and management are quick to respond to their recommendations. The corporation is actively pursuing a merger strategy. As a consequence, other options have not been clearly costed and the college has no clear longer-term financial strategy should the merger process not be successful.

48 The strategic plan contains clear corporate objectives for 1997 to 2000 and an associated operating statement. This statement is reviewed regularly at senior management team meetings but, as the college acknowledges, it does not contain a clear timetable for monitoring progress. Unit resource managers prepare development plans which vary in detail and content. They do not directly relate to the corporate objectives and operating statement.

49 The senior managers form an effective operational team. There are weekly senior management team meetings which address an appropriate range of items. Attention is paid to monitoring targets and other performance indicators regularly. The college acknowledges that there are a number of outstanding issues relating to the management structure to be resolved. No formal redistribution of the vice-principal's duties has taken place. Middle managers who fulfil various roles in relation to course and resource management do not always communicate effectively with each other or act in a co-ordinated way. As a result, some standard college procedures are not implemented consistently.

50 The inspection team agreed with the strengths identified by the college concerning the achievement of targets. Targets for the volume of provision have been exceeded in each of the last three years. The targets set for recruitment, retention and attendance are regularly monitored across the college and are used in financial modelling. The college recognised in its self-assessment report that the teaching staff made an insufficient contribution to planning and target-setting. A formal curriculum meeting has recently been

# Cross-college Provision

introduced, at which course managers and all staff have an opportunity to contribute more effectively to planning.

51 Management information is provided through arrangements that are appropriate for the size of the college. Demands for management information for both internal and external purposes are met accurately and on time. Accurate data on students' achievements were collected for the inspection. There were minor problems with the recording of retention data for two-year courses, but the college has now addressed this. Operational management and the development of the strategic plan are supported by useful market intelligence data. There is an appropriate link between marketing strategy and strategic planning.

52 The inspection team found that communication at most levels has improved recently as a result of measures taken after the self-assessment report was produced. There is a heavy reliance on informal communication. The problems in timetabling regular course team meetings were identified in the self-assessment report and have now been addressed. A regular information and action bulletin is circulated to all staff. The introduction of voice mail is seen as an important aid to communication.

53 The college has recently revised its policy on equality of opportunities. The policy includes a statement on positive action. There is a regular procedure for monitoring staff and student profiles through the equality of opportunity management group and subsequent action is taken.

## Conclusions

54 The college produced its first self-assessment report for this inspection. A 'quality review group' was responsible for preparing the report which deals with all the issues covered by Council Circular 97/12, *Validating Self-assessment*. The report was produced out of

sequence with the annual planning cycle. The action plan which resulted from the report has yet to be included in the annual operating plan. The report includes clearly-stated strengths and weaknesses. However, it does not link the sources of the evidence with the judgements. College-wide strengths and weaknesses are identified for teaching and learning and students' achievements. The grading of each curriculum area was not carried out as an integral part of the process but added subsequently by an assessment panel. The findings are in general agreement with those of the inspection team but some strengths were overstated and some weaknesses were overlooked.

55 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	36
19-24 years	10
25+ years	51
Not known	2
Total	100

Source: college data

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

Level of study	%
Foundation	8
Intermediate	33
Advanced	24
Higher education	21
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	14
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	0	54	7
Agriculture	456	245	85
Engineering	0	23	3
Business	0	25	3
Hotel and catering	0	16	2
Total	456	363	100

Source: college data

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

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	29	5	0	34
Supporting direct learning contact	14	0	0	14
Other support	51	2	0	53
Total	94	7	0	101

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

# College Statistics

## Three-year Trends

### Financial data

	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Income	£3,422,000	£3,497,000	£3,552,000
Average level of funding (ALF)			
Out-turn to 1995-96; funded 1996-97	£25.82	£21.38	£25.39
Payroll as a proportion of income	55%	62%	53%
Achievement of funding target	110%	133%	149%
Diversity of income	47%	42%	57%
Operating surplus	-£61,000	-£191,000	£21,000

Sources: Income – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

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), college (1996-97)

Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1995-96 (1994-95 and 1995-96), college (1996-97)

Diversity of income – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

Operating surplus – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

### Performance data for students aged 16 to 18

Qualifications		1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Advanced vocational	Number in final year	101	29	36
	Percentage achieving qualification	83%	100%	97%
	Position in tables	middle third	top 10%	top 10%
Intermediate vocational	Number in final year	*	65	42
	Percentage achieving qualification	*	92%	95%
	Position in tables	*	top 10%	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

### Students' achievements

		1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Advanced vocational	Pass (%)	91	100	96
	Retention (%)	100	67	82
Intermediate vocational	Pass (%)	79	92	89
	Retention (%)	92	81	87

Source: college data

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