

Askham Bryan College

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1998-99**

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL**

The Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) has a legal duty to make sure further education in England is properly assessed. The FEFC's inspectorate inspects and reports on each college of further education according to a four-year cycle. It also inspects other further education provision funded by the FEFC. In fulfilling its work programme, the inspectorate assesses and reports nationally on the curriculum, disseminates good practice and advises the FEFC's quality assessment committee.

College inspections are carried out in accordance with the framework and guidelines described in Council Circulars 97/12, 97/13 and 97/22. Inspections seek to validate the data and judgements provided by colleges in self-assessment reports. They involve full-time inspectors and registered part-time inspectors who have knowledge of, and experience in, the work they inspect. A member of the Council's audit service works with inspectors in assessing aspects of governance and management. All colleges are invited to nominate a senior member of their staff to participate in the inspection as a team member.

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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.

Audit conclusions are expressed as good, adequate or weak.

Aggregated grades for aspects of cross-college provision and curriculum areas, for colleges inspected during 1997-98, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1	2	3	4	5
	%	%	%	%	%
Curriculum areas	9	60	29	2	-
Cross-college provision	18	54	24	4	-

Source: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1997-98: Chief inspector's annual report*
Sample size: 108 college inspections

Student Achievements

Where data on student achievements appear in tables, levels of achievement are shown in three ways:

- as expected completions, which is the number of initial enrolments on qualifications where the student expected to complete the qualification in a given year. For example, a student on a two-year programme who began their programme in October 1995, would appear in the results for 1996-97 because this is the year in which they expected to complete their qualification
- as a retention rate, which is the percentage of qualifications which the students have completed as expected (or are continuing with the prospect of late completion). For programmes of study of two years or more, retention is calculated across the whole programme, that is, from the start to the end of the qualification
- as an achievement rate, which is the number of qualifications students have fully achieved as a percentage of completed qualifications with a known outcome. Partial achievements are not shown.

Summary

Askham Bryan College

Yorkshire and Humberside Region

Inspected April 1999

Askham Bryan College, near York, is a major provider of further education courses for the land-based industries. The college's self-assessment report was thorough and comprehensive. It derived from well-founded procedures for quality assurance and its production involved staff at all levels and the governors. Strengths and weaknesses were clearly identified and supported by a range of evidence including statistical data. Inspectors agreed with almost all the strengths and weaknesses in the report, but considered that insufficient weight had been given to some poor retention and achievement rates.

Since incorporation, the college has developed its curriculum and there are now courses in nine of the 10 FEFC programme areas although the main emphasis remains in the agriculture programme area. Work in two programme areas was inspected, together with aspects of cross-college provision. Considerable progress has been made since the previous inspection. Governance is now outstanding. Governors take a full part in setting and monitoring the strategic direction of the college, and in its academic and financial performance. Overall management of the college is good. Senior managers provide strong leadership and a clear sense of purpose. The college's finances are sound and its

financial management is good. The general accommodation, learning and IT resources and social and sporting facilities are excellent. Teaching in practical lessons was generally better than in the classroom. In almost all lessons there was an appropriate emphasis on relating theory to practice. Good use is made of the college's estate and off-site facilities. Links with industry are strong and there are beneficial collaborative arrangements with other educational institutions. Students are well supported by staff in their studies and their opinions are taken seriously. There was a sharp decrease in the overall college achievement rate in 1997 and some achievement and retention rates on the courses inspected were poor in 1998. The college should improve: management at course level; retention and achievement rates on underperforming courses; the rigour of course reviews in relation to retention and achievements; and the consistency of tutorial support.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Agriculture	2	Support for students	2
Horticulture	3	General resources	1
Engineering	2	Quality assurance	2
		Governance	1
		Management	2

Context

The College and its Mission

1 Askham Bryan College, situated near York, was established in 1948 to serve the education and training needs of the local farming industry. It is the only college in North Yorkshire specialising in courses related to land-based industries. Bishop Burton College, the nearest similar specialist college, is located about 30 miles away near Beverley. In addition to the main site at Askham Bryan, the college has out-centres at Bedale, Guisborough, Harrogate and Pickering. These were built between 1962 and 1972 to provide agricultural training for day-release students from outlying rural communities. The out-centres now provide a wider range of vocational and non-vocational part-time courses. The Harrogate out-centre also offers a one-year full-time course related to the land-based industries.

2 The college's farm, located at Askham Bryan, is 174 hectares in area and is managed as a commercial enterprise. It provides students with a range of practical arable and livestock resources including cereal and root cropping, a dairy herd, and sheep and pig production. Horticultural resources extend to 16 hectares and include amenity grounds, outdoor nurseries, glasshouses, tropical and temperate display houses and a micropropagation unit which provides feeder stock and generates income for the college. At the time of inspection, the college was developing a commercial plant centre. Teaching accommodation for practical skills includes agricultural and horticultural engineering workshops, a unit for training in the care of small animals, and science laboratories. A local riding school is used for some practical training.

3 The college has diversified its provision in recent years and now enrolls students on further education courses in nine of the 10 Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) programme areas. It also provides higher education courses and is affiliated to the University of Leeds which validates the college's degree programmes.

It has contracts with North Yorkshire and Tees Valley Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) to provide work-based training. Students are recruited locally, regionally and nationally. The college has residential accommodation for 248 students.

4 The senior management team comprises the principal, vice-principal, the director of corporate and commercial affairs, and the director of curriculum. The finance manager, who is also clerk to the corporation, and the human resources manager are co-opted members of the senior management team. The curriculum is organised into four academic schools, each managed by a head.

5 In March 1999, 50% of the students enrolled at the college were following a vocational further education programme (including work-based training funded by TEC contracts), 4% were following higher education programmes and 21% were engaged on non-vocational programmes. A further 25% of enrolments were on self-financing programmes. Total enrolments stood at 4,987 students, 580 of whom were attending on a full-time basis. In 1997-98, the college employed 195 permanent and fixed-term full-time equivalent staff and four staff on a casual basis.

6 The college's mission, which was revised in 1997, is 'to realise individual potential and increase opportunities within rural businesses and the wider community, by fulfilling lifelong learning needs'. Its main strategic aims are to:

- continue to develop and market a range of courses and progression opportunities
- further improve physical resources and accommodation
- continuously develop staff
- maintain financial health
- further improve the application of new technologies
- build on existing partnerships and collaborative arrangements
- achieve continuous improvement in all areas of activity.

Context

The Inspection

7 The college was inspected in April 1999. The inspection team had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and information held by other directorates of the FEFC. For 1996 and 1997, inspectors used data on students' achievements derived from the college's individualised student record (ISR) returns to the FEFC. The college submitted data on students' achievements for 1998. These were checked against primary sources such as class registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies. These data were found to be accurate. The college was notified in February 1999 of the sample of provision to be inspected.

8 The inspection was carried out by eight inspectors and an auditor working for a total of 37 days. It covered aspects of work in two of

the FEFC's programme areas. Inspectors observed 39 lessons and examined students' work and college documents. Members of the inspection team met with college governors, managers, staff, students and a representative of North Yorkshire TEC. A team from the Training Standards Council (TSC) inspected the college during the same week as the FEFC inspection. The TSC team inspected provision in which the great majority of students are funded by TECs. A separate report is published on this provision.

9 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1997-98. The proportion of grade 1 lessons is below average, but the combined proportion of grades 1 and 2 is 69% compared with the national average of 65%.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GNVQ	0	7	0	0	0	7
NVQ	0	3	0	0	0	3
Other vocational	4	13	10	2	0	29
Total (No.)	4	23	10	2	0	39
Total (%)	10	59	26	5	0	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1997-98 (%)	19	46	29	6	0	100

Source for national average: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1997-98: Chief inspector's annual report*

Context

10 The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1997-98.

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Askham Bryan College	9.6	83
National average, all inspected colleges 1997-98	10.4	77

Source for national average: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1997-98: Chief inspector's annual report*

Curriculum Areas

Agriculture

Grade 2

11 The inspection covered full-time and part-time courses in agriculture, but excluded courses on which the majority of students are funded by TECs. Inspectors agreed with the majority of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- good teaching in practical lessons
- high level of vocational relevance in most teaching
- good pass rates on the national diploma course
- successful progression to employment or courses at a higher level
- improved access to courses
- good use of specialist resources and off-site facilities

Weaknesses

- poor retention in 1998
- shortcomings in some classroom teaching
- some weaknesses in course management

12 The college provides a range of full-time and part-time courses in agriculture at intermediate and advanced level. Courses are appropriately structured. Course files are maintained well and handbooks are informative and comprehensive. The majority of full-time courses are now modularised. Students can study the courses on a part-time basis and achieve either the full qualification or credit for individual modules. Modularisation has widened choice at the college's out-centres but its potential flexibility has yet to be fully exploited. Some aspects of course management are weak. Guided learning hours have been

reduced since the last inspection: course content has been amended but little consideration has been given to reviewing teaching and learning methods. Some schemes of work are merely a list of topics with no indication of teaching methods. Some students' timetables are inconvenient; for example on one day, national diploma students are timetabled for only one hour of tuition.

13 Practical lessons are well organised and well taught. Students are given an appropriate range of tasks which ensure progressive development of their practical skills. In the better theory lessons, teachers make frequent and knowledgeable references to practical and commercial applications and students are given the opportunity to make contributions which draw on their own work experience. Most teachers give an appropriate introduction to each lesson topic, but some do not check students' previous learning or relate the lesson to other elements of the course. In the weaker lessons, students' interest is not always maintained and they are not encouraged to participate through questioning and discussion. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the work experience programme is well managed. Teachers make good use of the college's practical resources and off-site facilities. Active advisory committees contribute to the close links with industry. Industrialists are fully involved in planning the curriculum, but not in course reviews.

14 A wide range of methods of assessment is used, but students are not issued with an assignment schedule and their workloads are uneven. Most assignment briefs are clear, comprehensive and have appropriate assessment criteria. Work is marked accurately, but teachers miss opportunities to help students improve their work by providing them with detailed written feedback. Some tutors are insufficiently rigorous in reviewing progress and agreeing individual action plans with students.

Curriculum Areas

15 Most students develop appropriate levels of knowledge and understanding. Their assignments are researched and presented well. Achievement rates on the national diploma course have been consistently good for the past three years. However, retention on this course was poor in 1998. On the national certificate course, the achievement rate was poor in 1997 but improved in 1998 to the national average for the sector. The retention rate is around the national average. The first diploma course recruits few students; retention and achievement were poor in 1998. The self-assessment report identified the range of vocational qualifications which students may take in addition to their main course as a strength, and inspectors agreed. Almost all successful students progress to related employment or courses at a higher level.

16 Teachers are appropriately qualified and experienced. Good use is made of the college estate. Students are required to take part in a rota of routine duties to enable them to gain direct experience of farm working practices. There is a good range of machinery and estate workshops. The stock of library books and other learning resources is adequate. There are multiple copies of some texts but some are outdated.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in agriculture, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
National certificate	2	Expected completions	25	11	16
		Retention (%)	68	82	75
		Achievement (%)	100	56	83
National diploma	3	Expected completions	*	29	29
		Retention (%)	*	90	66
		Achievement (%)	87	92	95

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

*three-year courses, data not available

Curriculum Areas

Horticulture

Grade 3

17 The inspection covered full-time and part-time courses in the school of horticulture, but excluded courses on which the majority of students are funded by TECs. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses listed in the self-assessment report. The college underestimated the importance of some weaknesses.

Key strengths

- good teaching in practical lessons
- good use of specialist resources and off-site facilities
- valuable links with industry
- improved access to courses

Weaknesses

- some low retention and achievement rates
- poor attendance on some courses
- some weaknesses in course management

18 The school of horticulture offers courses from foundation level to higher education. They include specialisms such as greenkeeping and urban forestry. Opportunities for progression are good. Courses are offered at out-centres and in conjunction with other colleges in the region. The adoption of modular courses has encouraged the further development of part-time routes. The school's advisory committee helps to ensure that courses meet industrial needs. Retention and achievement data are insufficiently analysed by course teams. Many students are non-resident and travel considerable distances to college. Course timetables do not always take this into account.

19 Practical teaching successfully develops competences and imparts underpinning

knowledge. Many of the tasks undertaken by students and teachers also enhance the college's estate. Wherever possible, students are allocated team leadership responsibilities. Students propagate plants in a variety of ways either for use on the grounds or for sale to the public. They volunteer to participate in selling plants at events which promote the college. Students' understanding of their subjects is further enhanced by a range of visits. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that off-site facilities are used effectively to complement the college resources and to develop practical skills and experience, particularly in urban forestry programmes.

20 Most classroom-based lessons are well planned. Teachers make frequent references to practical and industrial applications of the topic under discussion. In the better lessons, students are encouraged to demonstrate knowledge drawn from all aspects of the course and from their own experiences. In others, opportunities to engage in group work and discussion or to utilise the students' own experience are lost. Teachers sometimes fail to check sufficiently on students' learning and note-taking skills. A 12-month industrial placement between the first and final years of the diploma is managed well and valued by students and staff. The internal verification system is applied to assignments but it has failed to remedy some weaknesses. For example, some assignment briefs are not easily understood; opportunities are missed to develop key skills and to help students improve by providing detailed feedback.

21 The quality of students' work in assignments is appropriate. The better work is wordprocessed and well presented. In 1998, retention rates on most part-time courses, and on the full-time national diplomas, were significantly lower than the previous year and in many cases well below the national average. Retention on the national certificate has improved steadily since 1996, but achievement rates have declined considerably over the same

Curriculum Areas

period. Some part-time courses at levels 1 and 2 have partially recovered from low achievement rates in 1997. College records show that overall attendance on the full-time courses is well below the national average. These weaknesses in attendance, retention and achievements were not given sufficient weight in the self-assessment report. Individual students have achieved considerable success in national competitions. Students can gain vocational qualifications in addition to their main course which enhance their employability within the sector.

22 As noted in the self-assessment report, links with industry are strong. Students undertake practical work for industry, for example, during the inspection one class conducted a tree inspection survey for a major

local employer. The horticulture industry supports the development of college resources. A unique facility is a children's play area with equipment donated by several manufacturers. It has a number of surfaces to test wear and safety features. It is a demonstration area for college students and the North Yorkshire Playing Fields Association, and a recreation area for visitors. The grounds and specialist resources on the main campus provide a wide range of realistic horticultural work environments. Specialist facilities and equipment are of good quality. The plant collection is labelled well and a comprehensive database assists plant identification. Teachers are effectively supported by technical staff. The horticulture unit manager attends the school management team meetings.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in horticulture, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
Certificates in gardening and garden design	1	Expected completions	91	56	198
		Retention (%)	68	79	35
		Achievement (%)	95	40	51
National certificate in horticulture	2	Expected completions	19	11	15
		Retention (%)	68	82	93
		Achievement (%)	100	88	57
Other FEFC-funded courses	2	Expected completions	38	51	39
		Retention (%)	82	71	46
		Achievement (%)	80	57	67
National diplomas in horticulture and urban forestry	3	Expected completions	*	45	36
		Retention (%)	*	84	58
		Achievement (%)	90	82	86

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

*three-year courses, data not available

Curriculum Areas

Engineering

Grade 2

23 The inspection covered the college's full-time courses in engineering and some engineering teaching on other full-time courses. It did not include courses on which the majority of students are funded by TECs. Inspectors broadly agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- high-quality teaching
- effective learning through practical activities
- good achievement and retention rates
- extensive use of information technology (IT)
- good course management

Weaknesses

- insufficiently constructive marking
- poor recruitment

24 The provision is intended for students who are employed in, or wish to enter, the land-based industries. It is limited to general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) intermediate and advanced courses in engineering and a programme of national vocational qualifications (NVQs). Engineering teachers also contribute to aspects of other courses in the college. A consortium of five colleges collaboratively determined the most appropriate way to teach the GNVQ advanced. Assignment briefs for this course are common across the consortium. Additional units have been agreed by the consortium which meet the specialist needs of agricultural engineering. Although it is not mandatory, students are encouraged to undertake an extended period of summer work experience between the first and

second years of the course. Those who do so are visited during their placement by teachers. The school's courses are well managed. Issues relating to teaching, and to the performance and support of students are pursued and dealt with promptly.

25 In 1997-98, recruitment to the GNVQ intermediate and advanced courses was so poor that the two groups of students were taught together for a year. After consultation with parents, students on the GNVQ advanced course agreed to a second year of work placement and should rejoin another advanced group for their final year in 1999-2000. This difficult situation was handled sensitively, but students are not experiencing the programme for which they enrolled. Staff are concerned about low recruitment and participate fully in a range of whole-college promotional activities. However, the team does not have a coherent strategy for addressing its particular recruitment difficulties. The self-assessment report did not mention the problem of low recruitment.

26 Course and lesson planning are of a high standard, and this strength was identified in the self-assessment report. Teaching is consistently good. Teachers prepare comprehensive schemes of work which are agreed between members of the course team. Detailed lesson plans include information on the learning objectives, the proposed teaching methods, the resources required and an estimate of the time needed for each part of the lesson. Teachers include suitable practical exercises and demonstrations in lessons in order to develop students' skills and reinforce learning. For example, during a lesson dealing with thermal expansion, students measured the valve clearances and temperatures on a diesel engine when it was cold and again after it had been running. Students were able to observe the effects of temperature rise on the engine parts, understand the importance of valve clearances and calculate the change of valve clearance due to temperature rise. Relationships between staff

Curriculum Areas

and students are good, but some teachers fail to comment sufficiently in their marking of students' work and miss this opportunity to reinforce learning.

27 Retention and achievement rates on the GNVQ courses have improved over the past three years, and over the last two years they have been substantially better than the national average for the sector. Students make effective use of IT to research and present their assignment reports, for example by using the internet to obtain information about machinery suppliers' products. They also use the internet and a digital camera to select or create suitable pictures to illustrate their assignments. Most written work is wordprocessed but some hand-written or hand-illustrated work is poorly presented. Students keep comprehensive portfolios which are rigorously indexed and referenced.

28 The wide range of agricultural machinery available for teaching is well maintained and up to date. Workshop accommodation is extensive. Staff are appropriately qualified. Technicians hold, or are working towards, assessor qualifications. They support teaching staff well in the supervision of students during lessons and when students work on the maintenance of college farm machinery. Engineering students have good access to general purpose IT. The college has recently upgraded its software package for computer-aided design.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in engineering, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GNVQ advanced	3	Expected completions	20	13	14
		Retention (%)	75	92	100
		Achievement (%)	50	75	93

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 2

29 Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses listed in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- effective pre-entry guidance
- well-organised enrolment and induction procedures
- wide range of support services

Weaknesses

- inconsistencies in the quality of tutorial support
- low proportion of students taking up learning support

30 The management of the student support service was restructured and strengthened in 1997-98. A department for student support was created and is addressing the weaknesses identified in the last inspection report. New accommodation for student services staff is conveniently located for students. The development of the service is the responsibility of the student support services manager. The responsibility for the implementation of the tutorial system lies with the heads of school. There are insufficient opportunities for the tutors to meet formally with the student support services manager.

31 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that there are good arrangements to inform students about the college's provision. A wide range of publications provides information about the courses. An open day and a series of 'taster' days provide opportunities for potential students to undertake practical and other activities. Parents are also invited to these events, and a separate programme is devised for them. Checklists and proforma are provided to ensure that interviews

cover common ground and that alternative provision is considered where appropriate. Careers officers from a wide area are invited to the college. College staff regularly visit schools, both within and outside the region.

32 As the college identified in its self-assessment report, full-time and substantial part-time students receive an appropriate induction to the college's facilities and services, and to their courses. Students speak positively of their induction experience. On some courses, imaginative practical activities related to their studies enable students to get to know one another and the teachers.

33 Effective procedures are used to identify students who need additional support. Full-time and substantial part-time students are assessed in numeracy and literacy. The self-assessment report recognised that only half the students who were identified as needing numeracy and literacy support in 1997-98 subsequently took up the support offered. Other support needs, for example for hearing impairment and dyslexia, are identified during enrolment. Students identified by these processes are interviewed by the learning support team and an appropriate support plan is agreed. Students who applied for intermediate level courses to start in 1998 were invited to a summer school where tuition in numeracy and literacy was provided. A high proportion of the students who attended this summer school subsequently enrolled at the college and are still attending.

34 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the range of other support services available to students is a strength. A confidential counselling service provided by external staff is augmented by a chaplaincy. Careers guidance is provided by the York and North Yorkshire Careers Guidance Service who work from a well-resourced careers centre in the college library. Students comment favourably on the guidance they receive, but the number of students who use the service is small. College industrial liaison officers provide good

Cross-college Provision

help for students seeking work experience; they oversee the finding of the placement and visit the students. The college provides financial help to some students through a number of bursaries and scholarships.

35 Teachers spend significant amounts of their free time helping students. For example, teachers continued to advise students after they had left one course to enable them to complete outstanding work satisfactorily. Students comment very favourably about the high level of informal support provided by staff. A team of eight wardens, three of them women, are responsible for the care of residential students. This team is augmented by four student wardens. The wardens have a good knowledge of the residential students and provide a supportive and appropriately disciplined environment.

36 Full-time students have a weekly timetabled period for group and individual tutorials. Guidance leaflets are issued to students and tutors to clarify the purpose of individual tutorials which are used to review progress. Attendance patterns for each student are provided to tutors to support their discussions. Many individual tutorials are well managed: the tutor and student are well prepared, a thorough discussion of progress takes place and an appropriate action plan is agreed. Some tutors carry a heavy caseload and a few students do not get their entitlement to regular individual tutorials. Action plans are sometimes insufficiently specific. Group tutorials are designed to encompass a pastoral curriculum which includes careers education, study skills and health issues. However, some tutors do not use schemes of work to ensure that all these aspects are adequately covered, and some group tutorial periods are poorly planned. There are few teaching materials to support tutors in this work. Students' attendance is sometimes poor at group tutorials. The self-assessment report identified variability in the quality of tutorials as a weakness.

General Resources

Grade 1

37 The college has excellent resources to support students and staff. Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- conveniently located main site with well-maintained and attractive grounds
- good-quality teaching rooms
- well-equipped learning resource centre
- modern IT facilities
- extensive sports and recreational facilities
- good-quality residential and conference accommodation

Weaknesses

- under-utilisation of teaching accommodation

38 Since the last inspection, the college has given high priority to maintaining, updating and improving its resources. Improvements have included the construction of recreational facilities for students, a new animal care unit and substantial investment in IT facilities.

39 The main site is situated close to a major trunk road and the ring road for the city of York. It has well-managed and attractively landscaped grounds. Many of its buildings are of recent construction. These include a lecture and seminar room block and a 120-seat lecture theatre. A 360-seat auditorium with excellent audiovisual equipment and well-furnished meeting rooms provides high-quality conference facilities which attract a wide range of external clients. General teaching rooms are well equipped. The four out-centres comprise purpose-built teaching blocks with additional temporary classrooms. Most buildings are in good condition, maintained to a high standard

Cross-college Provision

and kept clean. The college's overall room utilisation is low and this weakness was recognised in the self-assessment report. As part of its accommodation strategy, the college is disposing of surplus accommodation and re-investing in new buildings and facilities. People with restricted mobility can use most buildings but cannot reach the first floor in the learning resource centre. Few buildings on the main site have toilets suitable for people with disabilities.

40 The learning resource centre includes the library, which holds a good stock of over 28,000 books, audiovisual materials, a wide range of periodicals and computers connected to the college's network. The books and periodicals budget, at about £30 a year for each full-time equivalent student, is high compared with many similar colleges. The centre has over 100 study spaces, and self-study language training and video viewing equipment. Students' use of these facilities is carefully monitored. The centre is managed well by a qualified librarian who is supported by five part-time staff. Its extensive opening hours, which include weekends, meet the needs of students. The provision is rated highly by students and staff. The self-assessment report identified the strengths of the learning resource centre. Poor co-ordination between teachers and the library staff occasionally leads to shortages in learning materials for students to use in their assignments. Since the last inspection, the college has improved library staff facilities at its out-centres.

41 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the college's computing resources are a significant strength. The college has modern and appropriate IT equipment with good technical support. Most computers used by students are on a common network with suitable software to match the curriculum. There are sufficient computers for the number of students, who can use electronic mail and internet facilities, and a good range of CD-ROMs.

In the science laboratories, microscopes and cameras can be linked to computers and information can be transferred to the network for students' use outside the lesson. The out-centres have additional IT resources of comparable quality. Computers, which will be connected to the college network, are being installed in all staff rooms.

42 As indicated in the self-assessment report, recreational and sporting facilities are outstanding. A recently constructed students' centre contains a fully-equipped fitness suite, lounge, bar and games rooms together with a shop and offices for the student union. A new sports hall is due to open shortly after the inspection. The extensive range of sporting facilities includes football, hockey and cricket pitches, a squash court, tennis courts, golf greens and a bowling green. Students' residential accommodation is of a high standard. There are no childcare facilities, but students at the main site can use a nursery and crèche at a nearby further education college. The college runs a small fleet of minibuses for off-site educational visits.

Quality Assurance

Grade 2

43 Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements contained in the self-assessment report. By the time of the inspection, good progress had been made addressing some of the weaknesses. One key weakness was not included in the report.

Key strengths

- the detailed policy and clear framework for quality assurance
- effective committee structure for quality issues
- thorough consideration of students' opinions

Cross-college Provision

- comprehensive and evaluative self-assessment report
- staff development arrangements which support strategic objectives

Weaknesses

- insufficient evaluation of students' achievements in course reviews
- infrequent monitoring of charter standards
- cross-college performance standards not fully established

44 Significant progress has been made in addressing the weaknesses in quality assurance identified during the previous inspection. A policy for quality assurance appropriately emphasises the importance of quality in provision, compliance and performance. A manual covering quality assurance in the curriculum provides a clear framework for monitoring and improving the academic work of the college. The manual is revised annually. Tutors in each school act as quality managers for their courses. Quality monitors from outside the school provide an external perspective on the quality of course reviews. The profile of lesson grades awarded in this inspection is significantly better than those awarded in the previous inspection.

45 Annual course reviews are detailed and include an assessment of strengths and weaknesses. This assessment is informed by quantitative indicators of performance such as retention and achievement rates, the results of students' perception questionnaires, external verifier reports and a record of lesson observations. Separate action plans respond to the outcomes of questionnaires and external verifier reports and an overall action plan addresses what are seen as the main weaknesses. However, a significant number of the course reviews do not pay sufficient attention to pass rates, or make appropriate references to achievements where performance

is unsatisfactory or poor. This weakness was not recognised in the self-assessment report.

46 Questionnaires are used at three points in the year to seek students' perceptions. They are wide ranging and appropriately evaluative. The results for each course are compared with those for the college as a whole and comments are required from course teams where scores are significantly different. The college has recently piloted a questionnaire from an external agency. The results reflect positive views from students, especially in relation to the individual support provided by teachers. The self-assessment report acknowledged that the student charter is not explicitly linked to the quality assurance framework. Although reconstituted, the charter monitoring group has not met for over 18 months and no report on charter performance has been produced recently.

47 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the work of a number of committees effectively supports the monitoring and promotion of quality issues across the college. The academic standards committee closely scrutinises reports from external verifiers, and action plans resulting from course reviews. The programmes committee examines new course proposals and includes reference to labour market information in its considerations. Both these committees report directly to the academic board. The cross-college services committee has recently approved a draft manual outlining service standards for key functional areas. However, the full monitoring of performance against these standards has not yet taken place. Some standards have still to be documented, for example those relating to premises.

48 The self-assessment report demonstrated the commitment the college has made to developing appropriate structures to assure quality. It was comprehensive, well presented, and structured according to the main headings of the FEFC inspection framework. Each section contained an informative position statement

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which summarised the key features of that aspect of provision. Appendices included a range of statistical data, evidence sources, an analysis of internal lesson observations and action plans for each of the graded aspects. The action plans appropriately addressed the identified weaknesses. A revised version of the report, which showed progress made by the time of the inspection, was also provided for inspectors. The evidence sections were detailed and contain a range of quantitative performance indicators including attendance and retention. The curriculum reports were derived directly from the course reviews relating to 1997-98. The profile of internal lesson observation grades used in the report overestimated the quality of teaching and learning.

49 Three development weeks are provided for all staff during which the strategic training priorities for the college are addressed. They also provide time for school and cross-college meetings. As indicated in the self-assessment report, these arrangements work well. All permanent staff have an annual entitlement of 10 days for professional development which may include activities selected from the development weeks. A new and effective appraisal scheme for teaching and support staff was approved by the academic board in 1997. It is managed and evaluated by an appraisal monitoring group which is led by the human resources manager. Although appraisal identifies individual staff training needs, schools do not draw up separate formal training plans to meet their needs. The college was awarded Investor in People status in April 1999.

Governance

Grade 1

50 The governance of the college is outstanding. Inspectors agreed with the strengths included in the self-assessment report. The weaknesses identified in the report had been acted upon or were overstated.

Key strengths

- full involvement in setting the mission and developing the strategic plan
- effective monitoring of progress towards the achievement of targets
- close monitoring of the college's financial and academic performance
- open governance
- extensive and appropriate involvement in the work of the college
- thorough evaluation of the operation of the corporation

Weaknesses

- no systematic review of training needs

51 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is good. 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.

52 The corporation has a determined membership of 19. Recruitment to four recent vacancies has been deliberately delayed pending the outcome of national discussions on accountability in further education. Membership of the corporation includes two staff and the president of the student union. The corporation publicly advertises vacancies and has an effective appointment process. Induction is tailored to the individual needs of

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new governors. It includes an information pack, a tour of the site and meetings with staff. The clerk gives new members a thorough introduction to the items scheduled for their first corporation meeting. Governors submit an annual statement of eligibility. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the membership broadly represents the interests of land-based industries and the local community. Individual governors' expertise and experience includes agriculture, agricultural engineering, horticulture, the equine industry, banking and finance, higher education, industrial relations, law, and property and general business skills.

53 The corporation meets five times a year. Clerking arrangements are efficient and effective, as noted in the self-assessment report. The corporation has committees relating to finance and general purposes, audit, remuneration and search and employment. The finance and general purposes committee meets at least 10 times each year. It closely monitors the college's management accounts and the progress made towards the implementation of action points in the strategic plan. Members of the corporation have helped to develop more effective financial reporting, for example by requiring graphical presentation of data and trends. The remuneration committee did not consider the senior staff salaries at its most recent meeting, as required by its terms of reference.

54 The corporation responded positively to weaknesses identified in the previous inspection. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that members have an excellent awareness of the key strategic aims of the college. They are involved in setting the mission and in strategic planning. The chair of governors negotiates the forthcoming year's targets for the senior management team with the principal. The corporation carefully monitors the academic and operational performance of the college through comprehensive reports from the principal twice

yearly and through other regular reports from individual managers. These reports are related to the agreed strategic aims and operational objectives.

55 Most weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report had been satisfactorily addressed by the time of the inspection; for example, a code of conduct has been agreed which includes the principles laid down by the Nolan committee. The corporation has standing orders and a public interest disclosure procedure. All governors and appropriate members of the college's senior management team have completed a comprehensive and publicly available register of interests. Confidential minuting of corporation and committee business is restricted to appropriate items. Corporation and committee minutes and papers are advertised as available for inspection in the college's library.

56 Governors evaluate their own performance. A 'performance indicators and self-assessment' working group of governors has undertaken a review of the performance of the corporation. As part of the first self-assessment process, the group developed a questionnaire for members which provided a good basis for their self-critical review of governance. This review includes a measure of governors' attendance against a set target figure. The corporation is aware that the attendance of some members is low and that it has not met the attendance target it has set for itself. Partly as a consequence of some low attendance at separate corporation training events, a decision was made to have regular training during corporation meetings: managers give presentations to governors on a variety of matters including college and national priorities. However, governors have not carried out a systematic and formal review of their training needs.

57 Inspectors consider that governors have been overcritical in their judgement that they have few direct links with students. The

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corporation keeps closely in touch with the college's work in a variety of other ways. Individual members are linked to curriculum areas of interest to them and are well known by staff. They chair advisory committees associated with each out-centre and sit on advisory committees associated with each curriculum area. A governor is a member of the academic standards committee.

Management

Grade 2

58 Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- effective leadership and a strong sense of purpose
- thorough strategic planning
- effective management structure
- productive links with external organisations
- effective out-centre management arrangements
- good financial management

Weaknesses

- sharp decrease in achievement rates in 1997
- shortcomings in course management in some curriculum areas

59 A new management structure was introduced after the last inspection. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report judgement that it is well understood by all staff and is effective. Members of the senior management team work well together. Their leadership gives the college a strong sense of purpose. The relatively small size of the college helps formal and informal communications. Staff surveys show that there has been considerable improvement in communication

across the college since 1997. Staff are well represented on college committees and working groups. All meetings are well minuted and action points are followed up. Advisory groups for each out-centre have a membership drawn from the college staff, industry and the local community. Senior managers meet at the out-centres on a rota basis. Heads of the out-centres meet regularly with each other and with heads of school. They report to the director of curriculum on all matters relating to the delivery of courses, and to the director of corporate and commercial affairs on the management of the sites. These arrangements successfully integrate the work at the out-centres with that on the main site.

60 Some general weaknesses exist in course management. For example, timetabling arrangements do not always meet the needs of students and the setting of retention and achievement targets is not well developed. The self-assessment report noted that course managers are provided with retention and achievement data, but that they do not all make full use of the data in managing their courses. Inspectors agreed with this assessment. Staff deployment is well monitored. A report for 1997-98 identified some widely differing teaching workloads. Deployment reports for 1998-99 provide a clearer picture of overall workloads and this is enabling managers to distribute duties more equitably.

61 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the strategic planning process is thorough and effective. Staff at all levels are involved. Regular reports on local market information guide the long-term strategy. New operational plans for curriculum and cross-college areas follow a consideration of the success in implementing previous plans. They are collated and contribute to the college's overall plan. College-wide and course-specific targets for enrolments are set. Enrolments on specific courses have varied greatly from year to year but funding targets have been consistently

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exceeded. Students' achievements in 1997 showed a marked decline. According to FEFC performance indicator data, the total achievement rate was 92% in 1995-96 falling to 65% in 1996-97.

62 The computerised management information system generates returns to FEFC that are received on time and are generally accurate. Individual and course attendance is regularly monitored and audits of all registers take place monthly to ensure that central information is up to date. Currently, not all information can be accessed electronically by managers.

63 The college's comprehensive set of policies and procedures, each with review dates, provides helpful direction to staff. This strength was included in the college's self-assessment report. The implementation of some of these policies results in regular reports; for example, substantial accounts relating to health and safety issues go to the corporation. There is less progress on the implementation of the equal opportunities policy. A recently-appointed human resources manager has a remit to raise the profile on equal opportunities issues.

64 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report, that the college's liaison with external organisations is wide ranging and productive. Links with universities include collaboration with the University of Leeds in the development of a degree in food production, processing and marketing. The college works well with employers and TECs. It co-operates successfully with other further education colleges: a higher national certificate in bioscience is taught in conjunction with York College, and horticultural training takes place at Dearne Valley College and Selby College. The college has good links with the central science laboratories of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which are situated near York.

65 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is good, as indicated in

the self-assessment report. The college is financially sound and has large reserves to support its planned developments. It has achieved an operating surplus in the last two years and expects to break even in 1998-99. The current three-year financial forecast, which was prepared on a prudent basis, highlights a deteriorating financial position from 1999-2000. The average level of FEFC funding has reduced from £25.19 per unit in 1995-96 to £21.82 per unit in 1997-98. Approximately two-thirds of the college's income derives from non-FEFC sources. Members of the finance team are well qualified and experienced and work to clearly-defined objectives. The comprehensive financial regulations were recently updated. Budget holders receive timely monthly reports on actual and committed expenditure which show any variance to the approved budget. The internal and external auditors did not raise any significant control issues in 1997-98. Detailed management accounts include a good commentary which provides a range of financial performance indicators. They are prepared monthly for review by the finance and general purposes committee and the senior management team.

Conclusions

66 The self-assessment report and the review of progress under action plans provided valuable planning and inspection tools for the inspection team. The report was thorough and comprehensive, and precise evidence was provided to support most of the judgements. Inspectors agreed with the great majority of the strengths and weaknesses in the report but they placed more emphasis on retention and achievements than the college had done. Inspectors agreed with two of the three curriculum area grades in the report, and with four of the five grades for cross-college provision. They judged that one curriculum area grade was too high and one cross-college grade was too low.

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67 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 (March 1999)

Age	%
Under 16	1
16-18 years	16
19-24 years	10
25+ years	68
Not known	5
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (March 1999)

Level of study	%
Foundation	22
Intermediate	17
Advanced	9
Higher education	4
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	48
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (March 1999)

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	0	301	6
Agriculture	479	1,758	45
Engineering	24	238	5
Business	57	211	6
Hotel and catering	20	248	6
Health and community care	0	54	1
Art and design	0	1,466	29
Humanities	0	113	2
Basic education	0	18	0
Total	580	4,407	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 8% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (July 1998)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	53	16	2	71
Supporting direct learning contact	21	4	0	25
Other support	96	5	2	103
Total	170	25	4	199

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1996	1997	1998
Income	£6,943,000	£6,870,000	£6,422,000
Average level of funding (ALF)			
Out-turn to 1997; funded 1998	£25.19	£21.71	£21.82
Payroll as a proportion of income	55%	52%	50%
Achievement of funding target	101%	113%	103%
Diversity of income	61%	62%	62%
Operating surplus	-£427,000	£100,000	£47,000

Sources: Income – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), 98/43 (1997), college (1998)

ALF – Performance Indicators 1996-97 (1996 and 1997), Funding Allocations 1997-98 (1998)

Payroll – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), 98/43 (1997), college (1998)

Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1996-97 (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

Diversity of income – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), 98/43 (1997), college (1998)

Operating surplus – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), 98/43 (1997), college (1998)

Students' achievements data

Level	Retention and pass	Students aged 16 to 18			Students aged 19 or over		
		1995	1996	1997	1995	1996	1997
1	Expected completions	25	41	65	173	673	1,044
	Retention (%)	88	88*	83	90*	83*	80
	Achievement (%)	100	81	32	86	82	61
2	Expected completions	137	332	304	184	516	460
	Retention (%)	88*	89*	82	89*	88*	81
	Achievement (%)	88	92	76	82	91	74
3	Expected completions	–	154	192	–	168	159
	Retention (%)	–	75*	86	–	85*	79
	Achievement (%)	83	72	76	81	94	79
4 or 5	Expected completions	–	0	0	–	30	29
	Retention (%)	–	n/a	n/a	–	93	62
	Achievement (%)	95	n/a	n/a	84	72	88
Short courses	Expected completions	63	24	91	164	3,834	3,188
	Retention (%)	100	96	100	91*	100	99*
	Achievement (%)	97	100	38	77	100	93
Unknown/unclassified	Expected completions	4	33	34	56	48	32
	Retention (%)	100*	97	88	96*	94	94
	Achievement (%)	100	97	43	95	100	93

Source: ISR

–ISR data not collected

*ISR data may not be reliable

n/a not applicable

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