

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

Cambridgeshire College of Agriculture and Horticulture

February 1996

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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The Further Education Funding Council has a legal duty to make sure further education in England is properly assessed. The FEFC's inspectorate inspects and reports on each college of further education every four years. The inspectorate also assesses and reports nationally on the curriculum and gives advice to FEFC's quality assessment committee.

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

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GRADE DESCRIPTORS

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

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

College grade profiles 1993-95

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

FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 17/96

CAMBRIDGESHIRE COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE AND HORTICULTURE EASTERN REGION

Inspected June-November 1995

Summary

Cambridgeshire College of Agriculture and Horticulture has increased the range of courses offered in the last three years by the development of additional full-time courses in animal care and equine studies. Effective consultation by management promotes a good team spirit among all staff. The college has a welcoming and friendly atmosphere and students are well cared for. Effective tutorial support is provided to all students. Staff are well qualified and demonstrate a thorough knowledge of current commercial practice. Equipment is of a good standard and well maintained. Practical facilities enable learning to be set in a realistic context. Equine facilities and the countryside areas are of high quality. Practical teaching is effective. Additional support for numeracy and literacy is not well managed. Insufficient attention is given to co-ordinating support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Although the college is committed to the achievement of high quality, much needs to be done to realise the practice outlined in the college policy documents and quality assurance framework. College plans do not include clear criteria by which the performance of the college can be measured nor do they provide a sufficient framework for managing college development. More effective college planning and implementation of college policies is needed. The college should address the variable completion and pass rates and monitor the destinations of students more closely.

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

Aspects of cross-college provision	Grade
Responsiveness and range of provision	3
Governance and management	3
Students' recruitment, guidance and support	2
Quality assurance	4
Resources: staffing	2
equipment/learning resources	3
accommodation	3

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Animal care	2	Horticulture, countryside and floristry	3
Equine studies	1		
Agriculture and machinery	3		
Horticulture, countryside and floristry	3		

INTRODUCTION

1 Cambridgeshire College of Agriculture and Horticulture was inspected during the period June to November 1995. Curriculum area inspections took place in June and October. Guidance and induction procedures were inspected in September. Inspectors spent a total of 61 days in the college, including 35 days inspecting aspects of cross-college provision from 13-17 November 1995. An inspector with experience outside the world of education was involved in the inspection process.

2 Inspectors observed a total of 75 learning sessions, examined samples of students' work and held discussions with students, staff and members of the college corporation. A meeting of the college corporation was attended during the inspection of aspects of cross-college provision. Meetings were also held with careers advisers, staff from local schools, representatives of local land-based employers, community organisations and the South Cambridgeshire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC).

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

3 The Cambridgeshire College of Agriculture and Horticulture, was formed in 1987 by the amalgamation of two existing centres of agriculture and horticulture, the Cambridgeshire Farm College at Milton, and the horticultural station of the Isle of Ely College at Wisbech. The Milton site, five miles to the north of Cambridge, was originally established in 1968 by the Cambridgeshire County Council as the county's agricultural and horticultural day-release training establishment. At the time of inspection the site comprised teaching and office accommodation, a small farm, a workshop complex, glasshouses, a unit for small animals, an equine unit consisting of indoor and outdoor arenas, two stable yard complexes and fenced paddocks. The Wisbech site is close to the borders of Cambridgeshire, Norfolk and Lincolnshire and is about 35 miles north of Milton. This site contains a small animal unit, housed in a converted horticultural pack-house, and a number of glasshouses. The horticultural facilities have recently been extended to include a 'countryside' park comprising both woodland and lake areas. The college has an agreement to use a local Cambridge farm to complement the livestock demonstration units at Milton and provide a realistic working environment for agriculture students.

4 Within the county of Cambridgeshire there are four general further education colleges; Cambridge Regional College, Peterborough Regional College, Huntingdonshire Regional College and the Isle College in Wisbech. The nearest agricultural colleges are De Montfort University at Lincoln, with a centre 35 miles to the north of Wisbech, and Easton College in Norfolk, some 50 miles to the east of Cambridge. More distant are Moulton College in Northamptonshire to the north-west, Otley College in Suffolk to the south-east, and Writtle College in Essex to the south. Within Cambridgeshire two other institutions offer land-based studies. These are the Wood Green Animal Shelter at Godmanchester, offering animal care

courses, and Peterborough Regional College which has an equestrian option in one of its leisure and catering courses.

5 The college's mission is to provide a comprehensive range of high-quality learning opportunities in land-based and related subjects in response to identified industrial, commercial and individual needs. Further education courses are provided for a range of land-based occupations including agriculture, animal care, veterinary nursing, amenity horticulture, floristry, sports turf management, wildlife and countryside management, agricultural and horticultural engineering, and equine management in riding schools, livery yards and breeding establishments. In addition to its further education provision, the college offers adult education evening courses at four centres in Cambridgeshire. These courses cover a range of areas from business studies to leisure courses on rock and organic gardening.

6 The college has three teaching sections: agriculture, animal care and machinery; horticulture, countryside and floristry; and equine studies. Courses are managed in seven vocational areas: agriculture, agricultural machinery, animal care and veterinary nursing, horticulture, floristry, countryside and wildlife management, and equine studies. There are a number of supporting units including learning resource centres at Milton and Wisbech, and finance and administration based mainly at Wisbech.

7 At the time of inspection there were 1,520 enrolments at the college. Of these, 256 were on full-time courses. Enrolments by age, by level and by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figures 1, 2 and 3, respectively. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

8 Staff are aware of national policy initiatives in further education and the college's planning documents take account of national targets for education and training. The college has a clear commitment to improving access and increasing participation. However, managers and teachers are not all sufficiently aware of further education developments in agriculture and horticulture and this has affected course planning and development. Insufficient attention has been given to systematically identifying training requirements throughout the college catchment area. Course planning has not taken sufficient account of the benefits of operating on two sites.

9 The range of courses offered has increased in the last three years. Provision for further education covers all the main vocational sectors in land-based industries. Full-time courses leading to Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) first diploma and national diploma awards are offered in all the areas except agricultural machinery, where only the first diploma is available. City and Guilds of London Institute national certificate courses are also offered in horticulture and equine studies and include advanced national certificate in equine studies.

Part-time courses for employed students are offered in all the college's curriculum areas. There are good opportunities for students to gain practical qualifications in addition to their main award. The development of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) has had little impact on full-time courses except in equine studies.

10 The number of full-time students has increased in the last year. The largest area of growth has been in animal care courses where enrolments are well above target and account for over a third of full-time students. Targets have not been achieved in other vocational areas and the college has been unable to sustain its full range of courses due to low recruitment. The college response to changes in demand for agriculture and agricultural machinery courses has been partially successful. However, there was insufficient demand to run the first-year part-time course in agriculture. Representatives of the animal care industry expressed the view that the college should give more attention to part-time provision. There is a good range of both full-time and part-time courses in equine studies.

11 Low recruitment has resulted in a first diploma not being available in three of the college's main vocational areas. The absence of these courses has resulted in students taking first-year courses which are not matched to their career aspirations or abilities. Insufficient attention has been given to identifying aspects of courses common to different vocational areas. For example, the college has not developed a first diploma programme aimed at students with an interest in working in the land-based industries but undecided about their vocational choice. There is an appropriate range of short updating courses in agriculture for those employed in industry. This work is underdeveloped in horticulture and floristry.

12 The college actively promotes itself and its range of courses. A clear marketing policy identifies responsibilities and procedures for the promotion of the college. A comprehensive prospectus provides an introduction to the college and information on individual courses. Courses are publicised by staff attendance at local shows and exhibitions, college open days and careers conventions organised by the careers service in schools. A college 'roadshow' providing a mobile exhibition with practical examples relevant to its courses visited about 20 local schools last year. Regular advertising is carried out and the college often features in news articles in the local press. The college has not systematically evaluated the effectiveness of these activities.

13 A good working relationship has been established with a number of special schools. Staff of these schools are complimentary about the responsiveness and flexibility of the college in meeting their requirements. The college provides staff and facilities to support pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in conjunction with the schools. Close links with special schools have resulted in the development of a proposal for a two-year full-time course in land-based studies for these students.

Consultation with the schools and careers service indicated a demand for the course. However, the college decided not to offer the course this year as it was unable to allocate appropriate resources. There are very few curriculum links with other schools. A link programme is provided for one school which uses college facilities for General Certificate of Secondary Education students.

14 The strength of links with employers varies between sections. Local employers provide valuable support through the loan of equipment, provision of off-site facilities for practicals and involvement in assessment. Industrial liaison groups are established in most vocational areas. The equine section has comprehensive and effective links with industry through the industrial liaison group and through the professional involvement of teachers. These have led to constructive co-operation in curriculum development. Consultation to inform planning, marketing and quality assurance is less effective in other areas. There are no liaison groups for floristry or horticulture and links with industry are underdeveloped. The college supports a number of local community and professional groups. For example the national charity, Riding for the Disabled, makes use of the college's facilities and members of staff provide voluntary help for events organised by the British Horse Society.

15 The college's positive attitude to TECs has led to working relationships being established with Greater Peterborough TEC covering Wisbech and the north of Cambridgeshire and South Cambridgeshire TEC for the Cambridge area. The South Cambridgeshire TEC, with which the college has all its training contracts, is complimentary about the college's responsiveness. However, concerns over the college's systems for monitoring quality delayed the signing of this year's contracts. These concerns have largely been resolved and the South Cambridgeshire TEC has now agreed the college's strategic plan. The number of trainees sponsored by the TEC has reduced in the last few years and there is an unusually small number of students with special training needs.

16 There are some links with other further and higher education colleges. The college maintains links with the nearby Cambridge Regional College and the two sixth form colleges in Cambridge through its associate membership of the Cambridge Collegiate Board. This is a consortium of post-16 providers and secondary schools which co-ordinates progression from school to further education in Cambridge. Study tours and exchanges are undertaken with other further education colleges, including visits to other countries to broaden the students' range of experience. Liaison with other colleges has led to courses first developed by colleges in Gloucestershire and Wales being offered in agriculture and animal care. Opportunities for joint work with higher education are being considered in animal care.

17 There are comprehensive and detailed papers covering the college's approach to equal opportunities in the staff handbook, including policies

for race, gender and disability. However, the college's policy is at an early stage of formal implementation and monitoring. An action plan has recently been approved by the academic board and some staff development has taken place. The college's commitment to equal opportunities is promoted effectively; students and staff consider that the college provides equality of opportunity.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

18 There are 13 of the 20 corporation members in post, including the principal. Six are independent members: three bring direct experience of local farming, fruit growing, and farm machinery businesses; one is from a local National Trust facility; one is from a trade union; and one is from the veterinary school of Cambridge University. Three co-opted members provide experience from business and there is a representative of the South Cambridgeshire TEC. There are two elected staff members. Exceptionally, permission was obtained from the secretary of state for two student members to allow student representation from each of the two centres. Current members provide a good mix of skills and experience. However, governors have limited links with college curriculum areas and the governors wish to strengthen their industrial representation in line with the curriculum. There is currently no representation from floristry, amenity horticulture or equine-related enterprises. The search for potential members is being undertaken through an informal network of staff and corporation member contacts. Progress to date in filling the vacancies has been slow. A code of conduct and register of member interests has not been established.

19 The corporation's governing body is committed to the success of the college. It has three committees; policy and resources, audit, and remuneration. These have helped to establish administrative, financial reporting and budgeting systems, and a remuneration policy. Regular reports are received on college activities and events. However, the record of meetings indicates limited monitoring of the quality of provision. The governors have not routinely received information to enable them to evaluate students' achievements. The governing body did not contribute to the college's self-assessment report and has not formally reviewed its own performance.

20 The college senior management team comprises the principal, the heads of the three teaching sections and the finance and administration officer. Staff are well informed about the work of the college. The consultative management style promotes team spirit and good levels of formal and informal communication. It also makes staff feel valued. Full staff meetings are held each term and a wide range of reports is presented to staff. A network of committees and working groups enables many staff to become involved in cross-college issues. The purpose, composition and operation of most of these groups, including the college management team and the academic board, are clearly defined in the staff handbook.

Management team members are in the majority on several groups but the expertise of other staff members is properly used. The large number of group meetings consume a significant amount of senior staff time and are not always effective in supporting the development of the college. All staff are invited to attend corporation pre-meeting receptions but few take up the opportunity to do so. Clear records are generally kept of all college meetings.

21 The management of college developments has not been effective in some areas. The development of the curriculum is primarily the responsibility of a curriculum planning forum comprising the three section heads and a curriculum support officer. The achievements of this group have been limited partly as a result of changes to, and a current vacancy in, the post of curriculum support officer. Little progress has been achieved in implementing joint group teaching or in developing more cost effective methods of delivery. Where individuals are charged with cross-college responsibilities these responsibilities have been discharged effectively. Day-to-day management of the curriculum is the responsibility of programme managers who report through curriculum team leaders to heads of section. Section and programme teams meet regularly. Comprehensive student records are kept and course administration is generally effective. Course management is more variable. It is strong in the equine section, but in other areas co-ordination of the curriculum is less effective.

22 The strategic plan provides general direction for college developments. It does not provide specific measurable targets and there is no quantitative appraisal of strategic options that takes account of the potential market demand, the range of delivery methods, income sources, and resource factors. College plans do not clearly identify criteria by which the performance of the college can be measured and do not provide a clear framework for managing college development. Operating statements cover cross-college and section developments. These statements are not always specific about target dates for the completion of tasks, the responsibilities of individuals or the resources required. Some sections have not prepared statements.

23 College policies, including those for health and safety, environmental issues, and equal opportunities, are set out in the staff handbook. Each policy identifies responsibilities for its implementation and arrangements for monitoring its impact on the work of the college. In many cases policy objectives are not stated with sufficient precision to enable progress to be monitored. In some cases managerial responsibility is inappropriately allocated to working groups. In others, monitoring and reporting procedures have not been established or followed. A wide variety of matters is dealt with at the monthly meetings of the academic board but some key academic issues relating to the implementation of college policies have not been discussed.

24 The college's level of funding has reduced significantly in the last three years. The level of funding in 1993-94 was £39.02 per unit. The average level of funding per unit in 1995-96 is £26.29. The national median for agricultural and horticultural colleges of £23.15 per unit. Some work has been undertaken to analyse course costs. The policy and resources committee and the corporation receive termly reports on income and expenditure accompanied by a comprehensive and easily understood commentary. Budgets are delegated to section heads to support the curriculum. Management of these budgets is generally effective. The college's income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1995 are shown in figures 5 and 6.

25 The college has recognised the need to exploit the potential of computer-based systems to support its management and administration. The college student records system has been updated to meet the requirements for individualised student records. There is little routine reporting of performance indicators other than enrolments. Programme teams keep records of students and their achievements. Some attention is paid to retention and outcomes. The college is developing its use of management information to inform decision making and there is a growing awareness of the information that can be provided.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

26 The college provides a welcoming and friendly atmosphere. Effective tutorial support is provided by tutors and students feel well cared for. Students receive good impartial advice and suitable pre-entry guidance. Students are well informed about their courses and have good opportunities to express their views to tutors and through their representation on college committees. The curriculum support officer co-ordinates all aspects of students' recruitment, guidance and support.

27 Enquiries are dealt with promptly and each applicant is invited to an interview with a tutor. Response time in arranging interviews is good; usually between two and four weeks of completed applications being received. Course tutors interview students using a common checklist of points to be covered and create a standard interview record. Entry criteria for all courses are clearly stated and are generally in accordance with awarding body requirements. The college also takes into account students' prior experience when recruiting to courses. However, development of procedures to enable students to gain accreditation for their prior learning or experience is limited. Students and parents value the briefing evenings which are organised before students start their studies. These are held for students in equine studies, animal care and agriculture but this good practice is not consistent across the college. Comprehensive packs covering course and general college information are distributed to students at briefing evenings and sent to those unable to attend.

28 Induction sessions are generally well planned and often include specific practical activities. For example, equine students have a riding

assessment and agriculture students have a tractor driving assessment. Countryside students visit a water sports outdoor centre as part of their safety training and as a team building exercise. On most courses, returning and new students undertake duties jointly to encourage group working and to build the confidence of new students. Mature students are particularly appreciative of the time and effort staff commit to arranging events which help them settle into college life. All students receive an informative and helpful course handbook and a college diary which they are encouraged to use throughout the course. Full-time students are given an induction checklist which gives the main topics and documentation to be issued during induction. This is not available for part-time students.

29 Initial diagnostic assessment of numeracy and literacy is carried out for all full-time students. Tests are analysed centrally and course tutors inform students of the results. Arrangements to provide the identified additional numeracy and literacy support are inadequate. Procedures to monitor the progress of students identified as requiring additional learning support are applied inconsistently. Some students in need of assistance are not receiving the support required to enable them to cope with course demands. The college has been slow to provide support for basic skills. In the last academic year, students were one-third of the way through their course before support was available. This same pattern is being repeated this year. There are informal arrangements with the Isle College at Wisbech which allows students to attend workshop sessions. There are plans to employ a part-time member of staff for basic skills support in numeracy and literacy for three hours per week at Milton. Insufficient attention is given to co-ordinating the support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Not all tutors are made aware when students have a learning disability such as dyslexia.

30 Students are appreciative of the personal support and guidance given by staff. All full-time students receive an individual tutorial at least once every four weeks; some receive them weekly. There is no formal tutorial curriculum and tutors use their discretion in how the time is used. The arrangements are effective in providing a balanced mix of group and individual tutorial support. Additional personal tutorials are provided on request. Tutors maintain comprehensive records of student performance. Not all part-time students have timetabled tutorial support. There is no college counsellor, but information on external agencies which provide counselling is available to students.

31 Students receive good verbal feedback on their performance from subject tutors. Progress is discussed at tutorials and detailed plans of remedial action are agreed. However, progress and attendance reports are not sent out routinely to students, parents or employers. This does not comply with the commitments stated in the learning agreement and the charter. Non-attendance is followed up rigorously but there is no formal reporting of the actions taken or written record of follow-up. There are clear procedures to enable students to transfer courses. Interviews are

held with students who withdraw from programmes and reasons sought for their leaving.

32 There is a strong commitment to national records of achievement. Although it is not compulsory for students to have or update a record of achievement they are encouraged to complete one by tutors. Most students recognise the value of keeping a record of their achievements. The college has gained validation from the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate that the procedures and documentation associated with records of achievement are of a nationally-approved standard. A college co-ordinator has been appointed and has conducted a number of sessions to introduce national records of achievement to staff and students. Good support is given to students to update records of achievement during information technology workshops using computer software. In a few courses, little use is made of records of achievement.

33 There is a positive working relationship with the Cambridge and Wisbech careers services. Students are aware of the service, but most prefer to use college staff who provide effective vocational guidance on careers. The library provides a wide range of information on higher education. Advice is given on how to complete Universities and Colleges Admissions Service applications and these are typed by the college. There are no formal links with higher education institutions. Some tutors arrange a series of careers talks with speakers from the industry. Students are encouraged to plan progression suited to their intended career.

34 Students are well represented on college committees. In addition to the two student places on the corporation there are student members of the academic board and the charter review and monitoring group. Each full-time course group has a student representative who is invited to attend team meetings. Students feel their opinions are valued and their suggestions heard. There is an active student association which is supported financially by the college. It has a well-documented constitution and a member of staff acts as adviser. It organises the election of student representatives for the governing body and course committees. There is a high level of student participation in the organisation of social activities. A diverse range of events includes discos, badger watching, clay pigeon shooting, college fun days and an annual summer ball.

TEACHING AND PROMOTION OF LEARNING

35 Sixty per cent of observed teaching sessions had strengths which outweighed the weaknesses. Twelve per cent had weaknesses which outweighed the strengths. The average attendance in the classes observed was 86 per cent. A summary of the grades awarded to teaching sessions inspected is given in the following table.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
NVQ		2	3	3	0	0	8
Other vocational		11	29	18	9	0	67
Total		13	32	21	9	0	75

36 Learning activities are matched to the aims of students' courses and include theory classes, tutorials, practicals, off-site visits, and assignments. Most lessons are organised appropriately. In the best examples the objectives for the lesson were clearly understood by the students and practical tasks were related to theory. In most classes teachers made use of questions to develop students' understanding of the work. In the less effective classes the questions were often too general or inappropriate for the level of course. As a result the more able and experienced students dominated the responses. Insufficient attention was given to developing oral and numerical skills in some of the classes observed. In the less effective lessons teachers did not check students' progress nor provide appropriate concluding summaries of what should have been learned.

37 Information given to students about the organisation of their course is generally good. Detailed and informative course handbooks provide students with a useful guide to their programmes of study. The quality of documentation to help teachers manage courses varies. Schemes of work are prepared to a standard format but are insufficiently detailed to fully support teachers in planning and managing their lessons. Links between individual elements of courses are not identified to help co-ordination and avoid duplication. For some sessions in agriculture which covered half a day or more lesson plans were insufficiently detailed to enable effective management of students' activities.

38 Planning of courses does not always ensure that students follow a balanced and coherent programme of study. For example, the introduction of directed private study days has not always been supported by sufficient guidance to ensure that students make effective use of this time. Some agriculture students are timetabled for two days each week on a local farm, 12 miles away from the main site of the college. The range of activities and the programme of study covered during these days are sometimes inappropriate. These students also have less opportunity to use the learning support facilities at the main site.

39 In most theory classes the work was illustrated effectively by reference to current commercial practice. Teachers showed enthusiasm for their subjects and, in most classes, demonstrated a thorough knowledge of current commercial practice. In the best examples the students were given the opportunity to make contributions from their own experiences of work. In agriculture, the structure and balance of the work in some theory sessions did not ensure that the individual needs of students were met. The pace and content of lessons was often too demanding and did not take

sufficient account of the experience and ability of all students. A significant minority of students took little active part in some classes and towards the end of the session paid little attention to their work. In some cases their behaviour was distracting for other students. In both agriculture and horticulture there was little variety in the range of teaching techniques and learning materials used to support theory sessions.

40 Good use was made of visual aids in some classes. For example, in a lecture on equitation, visual materials were used to explain how artificial aids are used in riding. This was followed by a demonstration of the aids using a horse in the outdoor school. There was then a video presentation to reinforce the topic. In some classes there was insufficient use of handouts to reduce the amount of note copying. The overhead projector was not always used effectively to support presentation of theory or to direct students' note taking. In these classes slower writers were not able to pay full attention to what was being said by the teacher.

41 The teaching in practical classes was generally good. Practical classes were organised effectively to take account of the range of students' abilities. In the best examples worksheets provided clear guidance of what was required and most students were actively engaged in the work. Teachers closely supervised the work and provided advice and support where it was most needed. For example, an agriculture machinery project for first diploma students had been carefully planned with clear objectives covering both practical and personal skills. The production of plans to convert a trailer for use by the college's equine unit provided good opportunities for problem solving and teamwork. Students were clear as to what was expected of them and were all working productively on fabricating the components of the trailer. The teacher provided well-directed support aimed at developing their practical skills. Students were given clear direction on how to improve their performance and were encouraged to critically appraise their own work. They appreciated the realistic nature of the exercise and worked enthusiastically at their tasks.

42 There were weaknesses in the management and organisation of a few practical classes. In these classes lack of clarity of requirements meant that students had to continually refer to the teacher for help, students spent too much time waiting for help and the teacher was not able to provide the level of supervision required. Practical sessions in horticulture and countryside management did not explicitly refer to the theory covered in other classes. In animal care, students do not have sufficient opportunity to develop practical skills in the care and management of dogs and cats.

43 Students are required to take part in a rota of routine duties on the college farm or in the animal units. These duties are well organised and teachers demand professional standards of working. There are clear schedules of work and students work well, receiving appropriate guidance where necessary. Farm duties enable students to gain direct weekly experience of farm working practices and the more advanced students to

experience supervisory work. Students take pride in this work often devoting their own time to additional duties. There are effective arrangements to assess and use these experiences in their courses. All students complete a programme of work experience in local industry. This is highly valued by students. There are effective arrangements to prepare and support employers and students during work experience.

44 Students' assessed work is based on realistic exercises and often uses information from the college's commercial and practical units. Students are provided with detailed assessment schedules and consider the work load balanced and fair. Assignment specifications provide a clear statement of the tasks and the expected outcomes. Review of assignments by course teams is improving the consistency of assessment and the standard of assignment specifications. A good range of assessment activities is completed which are well matched to the aims of the courses. In agriculture some assignments do not provide sufficient opportunity for more able students to apply or extend their knowledge. Written feedback given to students on assessed work varies. Most teachers provide appropriate comment on the technical content of the work. In the best examples this is clearly cross-referenced to the objectives of the assignment. Insufficient comment is made on the application of core skills in assignment work.

45 There are effective arrangements for monitoring the development of core skills in BTEC courses and good opportunities for the development of personal skills in practical activities. The assessment of core skills is carefully integrated with students' assignment work. A well-planned programme to support the development of information technology skills is organised in workshops which students can attend during private study time. The programme covers basic skills in using business software, including wordprocessing. However, the sessions have been attended by only small numbers of students. There is effective use of information technology by students following animal care and horse studies courses and, in these areas, appropriate emphasis is given to integrating its use with other course material.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

46 Students enjoy their studies and work well individually and in groups. Students' enthusiasm for their studies was particularly evident in animal care and equine studies. In agriculture many displayed a good knowledge of farm enterprises. For a minority of students weaknesses in literacy and numeracy inhibit their progress in the technical subjects. Although more experienced students are encouraged to provide support to other members of their groups, some of the group work in practical sessions was dominated by the more able.

47 Students develop appropriate levels of knowledge and understanding. Students' assignment and course work is clearly presented; in most cases

it is wordprocessed with effective use of diagrams. The work is comprehensive and detailed and makes good reference to factual material. A few relied heavily on photocopies of published material and contained little analysis. High standards are achieved in some areas. For example students on the national certificate for the management of horses completed a project to design a poster to teach the colours and markings of horses to children. The students' work was of a high standard and included watercolour paintings, the use of flip charts and other methods of presentation. One student had produced instruction cards for a game which involved matching felt cut-out shapes of horses of different colours and markings. The product was of marketable quality.

48 Students' practical work is carried out carefully with due regard to health and safety. In agriculture competence varies widely and students' understanding of the theoretical basis for working practices on the farm is sometimes lacking. In equine studies unit duties are performed with enthusiasm and practical work is carried out in a careful and systematic way. There is some excellent practical work leading to the achievement of high standards in NVQ floristry courses. Students on animal care courses demonstrate a good level of communications skills.

49 Completion rates vary but for most courses are above the average of about 90 per cent for colleges of agriculture. In the 1993-94 academic year 87 per cent of those enrolled completed their courses and took the final examination or assessment. This figure improved last year to 94 per cent of enrolling students. This year 93 per cent of students completed one-year courses and 74 per cent of students who enrolled on a two-year course in 1993 completed their courses in 1995. Completion rates are below 70 per cent for part-time courses in agriculture and animal care. Insufficient analysis is carried out of courses where completion rates are low.

50 Pass rates for students who finish courses vary. Pass rates have improved in the last year. Eighty-eight per cent of students who entered examinations in 1995 were successful. Ninety-three per cent of students completing national diploma courses and 91 per cent of students completing first diploma and national certificate courses gained the award. In equine studies and animal care pass rates are good. All students who took the examinations for the first diploma in animal care and the national diploma in horse studies were successful. The level of success in veterinary nursing examinations is consistently above the national average level of passes. Equine courses enable students to achieve a high level of success in gaining qualifications additional to their main award. Students on the first diploma and national certificate courses in horse management achieve up to seven additional qualifications. These include British Horse Society qualifications, RSA Examinations Board computer literacy and information technology and wordprocessing awards and passes in first-aid and Pony Club tests. There is a lower level of passes in the first diploma in agriculture

and horticultural machinery (83 per cent in 1994-95) and in the national certificate in horticulture (80 per cent). However, a high proportion of first diploma agriculture students achieved at least one additional award in practical work.

51 Pass rates for NVQ awards varied from 100 per cent passes in floristry and level 2 NVQ in horticulture to low levels of success in NVQ awards in agriculture mechanics (50 per cent). In 1993-94, 70 per cent of students enrolled on full-time courses who entered examinations leading to NVQs were successful. However, only 57 per cent of part-time students achieved the award in the target time. Pass rates for part-time courses in agriculture and animal care are low. In 1995, the overall pass rates for part-time students was 84 per cent.

52 Intended destinations of students are collated by course tutors who also monitor students' actual destinations. Following the summer of 1994 college data show that destinations are known for just under half of the full-time students who completed their courses. Of these, about 45 per cent went on to further or higher education courses and just over half entered employment. Knowledge of destinations has improved and in September 1995 course tutors report that 34 per cent of students went on to further or higher education courses and 35 per cent entered employment. The destinations of the remaining students were unknown. In agriculture, records of students' intended destinations suggest that a high proportion progress to employment or to further education. A high proportion of students taking the national certificate in horse management are successful in gaining relevant employment. There is no formal recording or analysis of students' actual destinations across the whole college.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

53 The college is committed to the achievement of high quality and has recently developed a quality assurance framework that will embrace all aspects of the college's work. An element of this is a quality network comprising working groups that are each responsible for ensuring quality for an area of the college's work. It is planned that these groups will report to the academic board each term on issues of quality. The curriculum support officer is responsible for co-ordinating the development of the quality framework. Much work is still to be done to realise the practice outlined in the college policy documents and quality assurance framework. Standards of performance have not been identified and arrangements to monitor college achievements have not been satisfactorily implemented.

54 Course evaluation relies on the use of questionnaires to gather students' perceptions at induction, during the course and as they leave. Some of the questions do not enable course managers to identify clearly students' views about their course. For example, in the mid-course questionnaire there is only one question that is concerned with teaching.

In the last academic year, apart from the equine section which used all three, only the induction and mid-course questionnaires were used. Both of these were completed by students in the summer term. Whilst some course managers analysed returns, the collation and analysis of the 1994-95 student surveys were not produced early enough to enable remedial actions to be taken in time for the current academic year. Only about one-third of students completed both questionnaires. There have been some improvements in the current year. New students received and completed the induction questionnaire and the results have already been collated.

55 Course teams discuss the management and development of their courses in regular team meetings. Student representatives are invited to attend these meetings which are held at least once a term. Apart from administrative issues, the agenda items include moderators' reports, resource issues, and course modifications. Practice varies in identifying responsibility for the taking of remedial actions, reporting and follow-up. Where action is required, the minute usually identifies the lecturers responsible, although a timescale is often not included. The minutes of team meetings indicate superficial regard for quality issues. Programme managers are given enrolment targets but performance standards for attendance, retention, progression and success have not been identified.

56 The quality framework specifies that the academic board, as part of its responsibility for the review of courses, should receive course reports annually. Course teams have not been required to produce these reports. No reports have been considered by the board. Consequently, review of course quality by the college is ineffective. Procedures for course monitoring and review, based on clear reporting, need to be put in place. Course reports have been produced for some courses. Equine studies have consistently produced annual reports for consideration within the section. New courses require the approval of the academic board. However, these procedures do not specifically cover assessment of the quality or academic content of new course proposals.

57 The college charter is a well written and presented document that attracted one of five Department of Education (now the Department for Education and Employment) awards when it was issued in 1994. The charter commits the college to a number of service standards for students, employers and the community and it has made an impact on the college's procedures. For example, as a result of the charter, each student now signs a learning agreement with the college. When first issued in 1994, its distribution to some students was not accompanied by any explanation. Consequently, not all students are aware of the college's commitment to them. For the current academic year, time has been set aside for the introduction of the charter during the induction period. A charter monitoring review group has met regularly but has not yet established procedures to monitor the fulfilment of the commitments made in the

charter. For example, the student survey questionnaires are not used to monitor the colleges' compliance with the charter commitments.

58 The college is proposing to introduce an appraisal scheme that will be linked to the college's staff-development programme. The implementation of the appraisal scheme has been agreed for full-time and, wherever possible, part-time teaching staff. The appraisal policy and detailed implementation plans were agreed over a year ago but the scheme is not yet operating. An appraisal system has not been developed for support staff. The college has recognised the need to be more systematic in planning staff development. The appraisal scheme will enable action plans for staff development to be related more closely to the needs of individuals, sections and the college.

59 There is a satisfactory level of staff training. One per cent of the college's budget is dedicated to staff development. Professional training is available to all teaching and teaching support staff. Last year more than two-thirds of the teaching staff engaged in one or more forms of training. In-house staff-development weeks have been run and are also planned for later this year. Most full-time teaching and technical support staff have achieved Training and Development Lead Body awards or are working towards them. In some areas insufficient professional support has been given to teaching staff following changes of role. Staff complete an evaluation report of the training event but the production of annual staff-development reports and plans by section heads has not taken place.

60 In preparation for the inspection the college has produced an assessment of its own quality using five of the areas identified in Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. Assessment of teaching and the promotion of learning and students' achievements was included in a self-assessment report for each curriculum area. The assessment provides background information, a brief analysis and a summary giving the college's judgement using the grade descriptors. The report is mainly descriptive and does not take sufficient account of college weaknesses. It does not provide a suitable basis for the judgement of quality. In general, the judgements were less critical than those made by inspectors.

RESOURCES

Staffing

61 Teaching staff have a good knowledge of their subject, possess relevant qualifications and most bring current awareness of industrial practice to their teaching. Some part-time teachers have an acknowledged industrial reputation for their specialism. Teachers are enthusiastic about their subjects and are committed to supporting the students. Many give considerable informal assistance outside timetabled classes. There is a good level of activity associated with land-based professional organisations. Staff in the equine section have a wide range of involvement

in equine organisations both in and out of the college. They compete in equine events such as dressage and showjumping and have a significant involvement with the Riding for the Disabled charity and the British Horse Society, both of which use the college facilities on a regular basis.

62 Technical staff are dedicated and enthusiastic in the performance of their duties. Equine and animal care technicians liaise closely with teaching staff and are effectively deployed in the management and assessment of unit duties. The level of technical and support staffing is mostly appropriate. There is limited support for the use of information technology equipment. A tutor librarian manages the learning resource centres on both sites and, although other support is provided, there are times when the centres are not staffed.

63 Staff responsibilities have broadened considerably in the last few years. Most teachers have programme management and tutorial responsibilities in addition to their teaching duties. Reduction in teaching hours for these responsibilities is inconsistent and often generous. For example, there is significant variation in the time allocated for tutorials. The workloads on staff varies significantly between curriculum areas. All new teaching staff are appointed on revised contracts. Existing staff have not been asked to transfer to more flexible contracts. Written job descriptions are not provided for all staff. One-third of teaching staff who have job descriptions have not had them revised within the last four years. There is no procedure for the evaluation or revision of job descriptions. A review of the workloads of teaching staff is not planned although a review of support staff roles and responsibilities is in progress. Technical staff have a diverse range of duties and are not always deployed effectively.

Equipment/learning resources

64 Specialist equipment is of a good standard and well maintained. The college has over 35 vehicles of which most are agricultural machines. There is an appropriate range of road vehicles, including a 7.5 tonne horsebox and four cars for use by staff travelling between sites. All the road vehicles are well maintained to a clear schedule. The equine unit is well equipped. There is a complete range of tack and equipment, sufficient horses of appropriate type and ability, and a good range of teaching aids. The life-sized plastic horse and skeleton are used effectively. The stable yard is well managed and a rigorous system for controlling the workload of horses is used. Students at both sites have access to a modern well-equipped animal care unit which has an appropriate range of small animals and equipment. However, the kennel units are not effectively used and there is insufficient access to dogs and cats for students to practice routine care. There is an adequate range and quality of equipment and tools in agriculture and horticulture.

65 Learning resource centres at both sites provide easy access for students and staff to library facilities and learning materials, including a wide range of videos and computers. Both centres have an adequate range

of texts in most subject areas, although some texts are out of date. There is an appropriate range of periodicals. Good links between the library and teaching staff ensure that additional texts and other resources are provided to meet course requirements. There is currently no automated issuing or purchasing system. A computerised catalogue system is available but it is not used by students. There is a significant level of book loss, often of the most heavily-used books. There is no system to monitor the use of the library. There are no arrangements to enable students in college on unit duties at weekends to use the learning resource centres.

66 Students and staff have access to a good number of up-to-date computers on both sites. Computers in both learning resource centres are organised to provide for a suitable level of open access use. Compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) databases are provided at both sites. There is an appropriate range of business packages but there is a limited range of agriculture and horticulture applications software. There is no computerised recording of management information from the stable and farm units to enable it to be used by staff and students in teaching and assignment work. The college does not have a development plan for information technology resources.

67 An appropriate range of teaching aids, overhead projectors, video and slide projectors is available for use in classes. Some overhead transparencies were of poor quality. In many of the temporary classrooms there are no blinds and the screens in several rooms are poor. Handouts and study packs are of variable quality and there are insufficient learning materials to support students' directed private study.

Accommodation

68 The college accommodation strategy which states its intention to relocate on one site has not yet been agreed with the FEFC. The college faces the considerable obstacle of funding the purchase of a new site whilst continuing to use the current site to maintain its provision. Although the college recognises this difficulty, limited consideration has been given to alternative proposals for the development of the college accommodation.

69 College sites are clean, tidy and well maintained. General teaching accommodation at Milton is mostly in temporary buildings. Some of these are untidy and in need of repair. The temporary classroom at the nearby farm is too small and inadequately equipped. In some of the rooms on both sites displays of posters and students' work provide a stimulating environment. Classrooms at the Wisbech site are generally of a higher standard than those at Milton. Laboratory facilities are clean and have appropriate work space for the small groups using them. There is adequate workshop accommodation at both sites although there is little storage space for machines and equipment. The learning resource centres on both sites are small but well furnished and provide some private study facilities.

70 About 45 full-time students are in college residences or local private accommodation. Self-catering accommodation is provided in two houses for about 20 students. These places are allocated only to students over 18 years of age as there is no warden. Students are concerned about the level of security at both residences and there is no telephone at Wisbech. A comprehensive list of accommodation in the Milton and Wisbech areas is distributed to students. There is no formal check by the college of the standard of this accommodation.

71 Recreational facilities on both sites are unsatisfactory. A student common room is provided in temporary buildings at each site. They are not well used by students as they are poorly furnished and provide few facilities. At Milton a limited selection of snacks is available but opening hours are restricted. There is no catering facility at Wisbech. Students have access to a drinks machine at both sites.

72 There are good practical equine facilities with stabling for up to 35 horses. The equine yard is approved for NVQ assessment purposes and by the British Horse Society as an examination centre. Full use is made of the very good indoor riding school. Viewing facilities for the indoor school are limited. The outdoor school is appropriate for the size of the unit. The storage facilities on the equine yard for feed and straw is inadequate.

73 The animal units at both sites are well maintained, clean and appropriate for the courses. However, the grooming parlour at Milton is too small for some groups and has inadequate ventilation. The grooming area at Wisbech is inappropriately located as part of the unit for small animals.

74 The range of farm enterprises at the college is limited and none are of a commercially realistic size. The livestock demonstration units on the Milton site provide opportunities for students to carry out a small range of routine duties associated with livestock management and care. Two adjacent fields are used effectively for machinery practical work and also enable students to gain some arable crop experience. To overcome the lack of a full-scale commercial farm the college has a contract with a 280 hectare mixed farm near Cambridge. This provides access for agriculture students to modern equipment and a wider range of farm enterprises than is available in the college demonstration units. This goes some way to make up for the deficiencies in the college's own provision. However, students' learning experiences are hampered by the lack of ready access to some practical facilities.

75 There are appropriate practical facilities and large well-equipped practical teaching areas for the horticulture, countryside and floristry courses at Wisbech. The countryside areas at Wisbech have a range of habitats which provide the basis for a good variety of practical work. There is a lack of modern nursery facilities on both sites. Most of the glasshouses at Wisbech are underused and in need of updating. At Milton,

facilities for horticulture and floristry are generally adequate for the limited course provision but there is a lack of practical teaching areas that can be used in poor weather.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

76 The major strengths of the college are:

- the range of full-time courses in animal care and equine studies
- communications between staff and senior management
- the admissions procedures and the guidance given to students
- effective arrangements for tutorial support
- the standard of practical teaching
- the levels of students' achievement in equine studies
- well-qualified and enthusiastic staff
- some high-quality practical facilities.

77 If it is to succeed in achieving its aims, the college should:

- address low levels of recruitment in some areas and the limited range of opportunities for students taking first-level programmes
- improve planning and arrangements to implement policies
- identify criteria that will enable the corporation to monitor the effectiveness of management
- review the roles and workloads of all staff
- establish systems to support students requiring additional learning support
- provide more guidance to enable students to make more effective use of their directed study time
- take more account of the needs of the individual student when teaching groups of wide experience and ability
- address variable completion and pass rates, and monitor the destinations of students more closely
- implement procedures for quality assurance including a more rigorous and consistent review and evaluation of courses
- improve the range of learning materials and the control of the library stock
- improve the quality of teaching accommodation and student facilities.

FIGURES

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- 1 Percentage enrolments by age (1994-95)

 - 2 Percentage enrolments by level of study (1994-95)

 - 3 Enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1994-95)

 - 4 Staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1994-95)

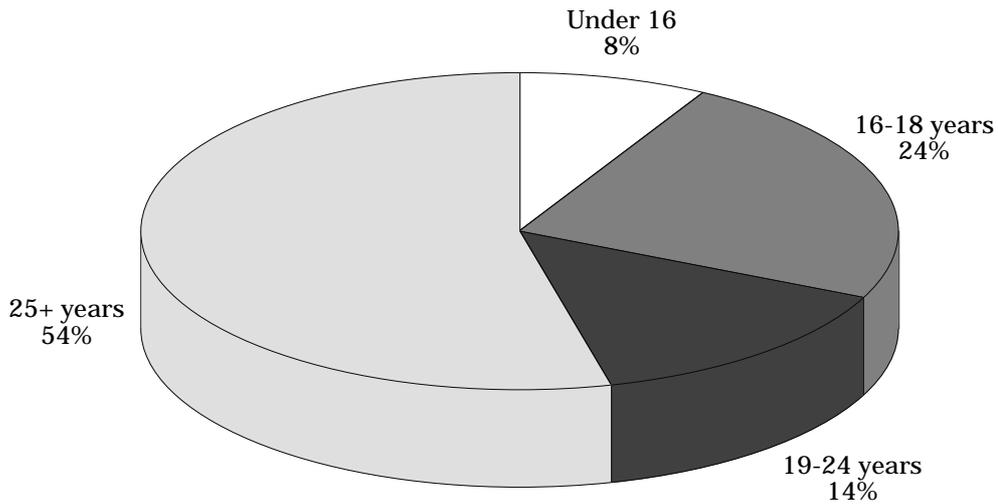
 - 5 Income (for 12 months to July 1995)

 - 6 Expenditure (for 12 months to July 1995)

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

Figure 1

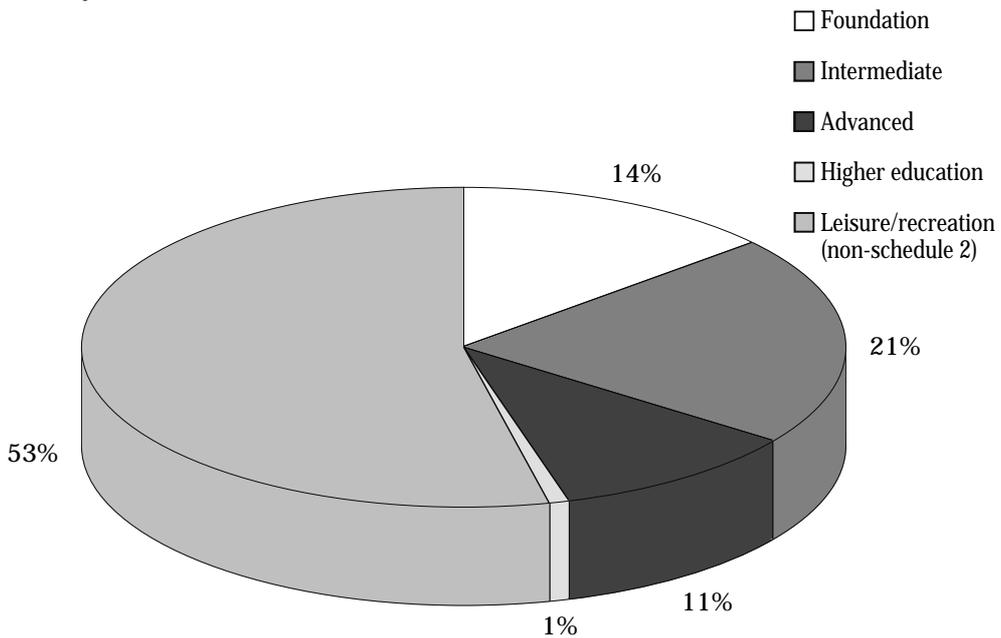
Cambridgeshire College of Agriculture and Horticulture: percentage enrolments by age (1994-95)



Enrolments: 1,520

Figure 2

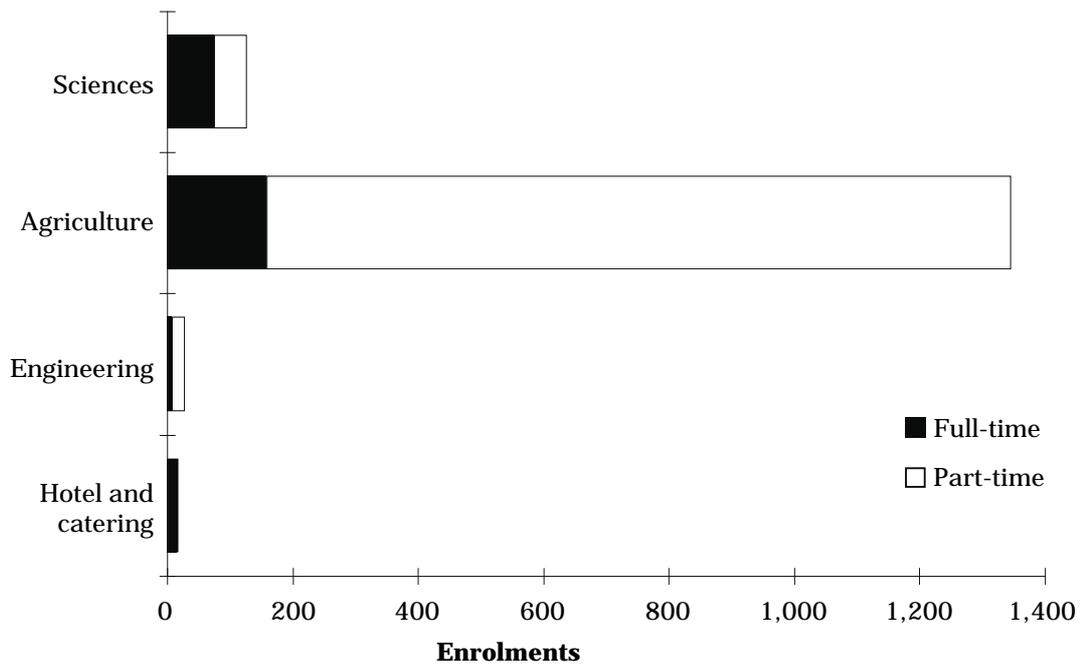
Cambridgeshire College of Agriculture and Horticulture: percentage enrolments by level of study (1994-95)



Enrolments: 1,520

Figure 3

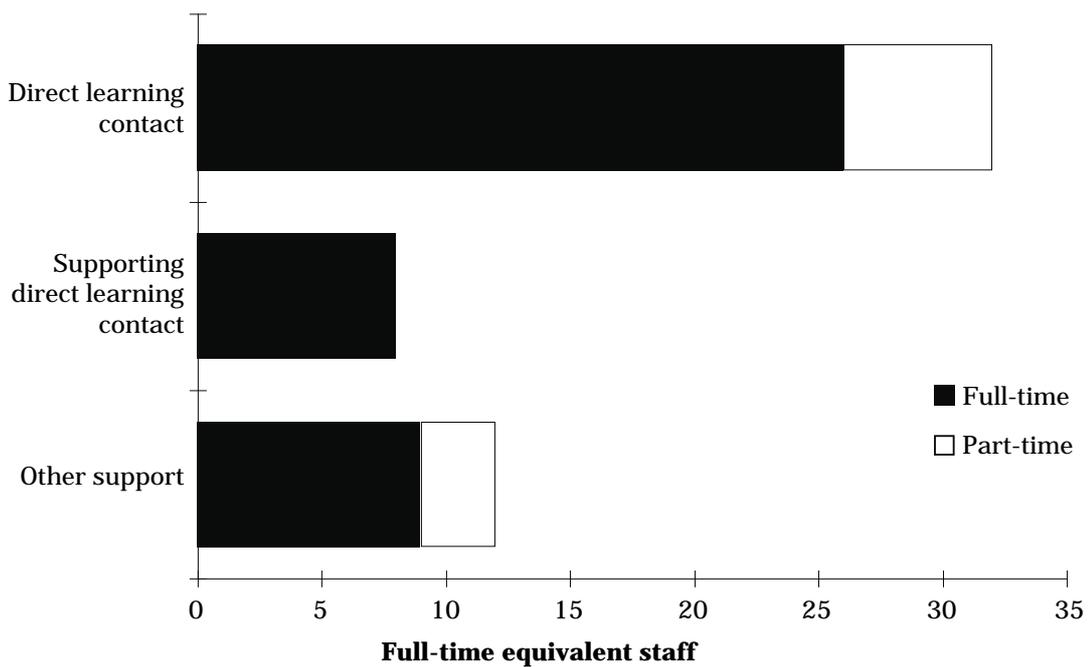
Cambridgeshire College of Agriculture and Horticulture: enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1994-95)



Enrolments: 1,520

Figure 4

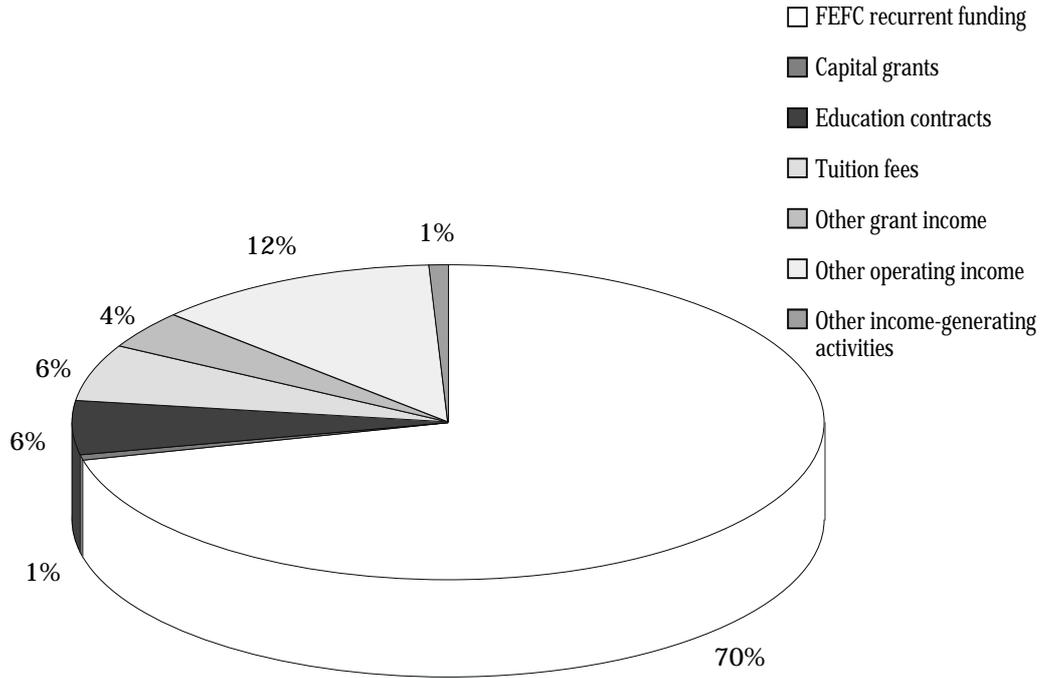
Cambridgeshire College of Agriculture and Horticulture: staff profile - staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1994-95)



Full-time equivalent staff: 52

Figure 5

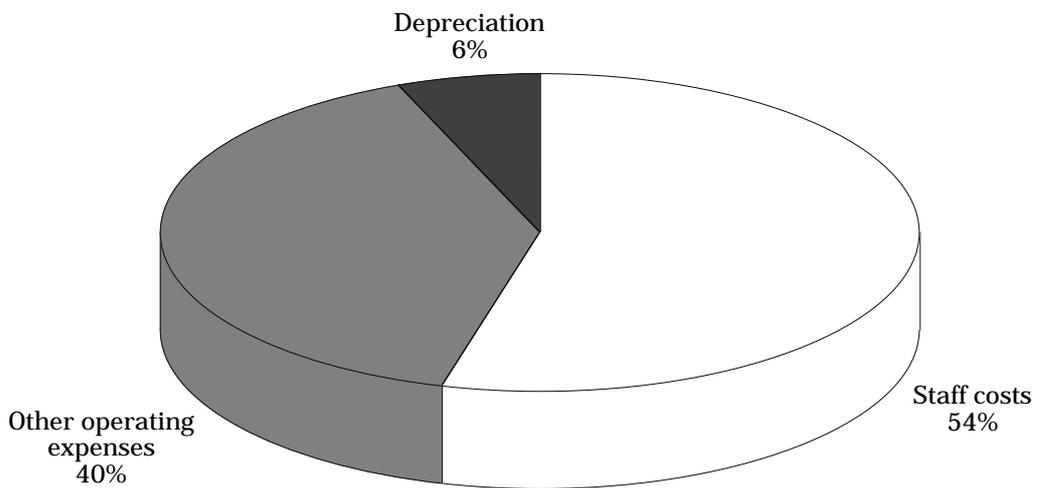
Cambridgeshire College of Agriculture and Horticulture: income (for 12 months to July 1995)



Income: £1,853,151

Figure 6

Cambridgeshire College of Agriculture and Horticulture: expenditure (for 12 months to July 1995)



Expenditure: £1,992,152

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