

Hadlow College

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1997-98**

**THE
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FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL***

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 according to a four-year cycle. It also 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.

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

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

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

Retention and Pass Rates

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

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

Summary

Hadlow College

South East Region

Inspected March 1998

Hadlow College is an agricultural and horticultural college in Kent. The college produced its first self-assessment report in preparation for the inspection. The report is detailed and covers most of the college's activities. The judgements in some areas are sound. However, the report understates some weaknesses and does not recognise others. Most of the judgements made by the college about the quality of curriculum areas were confirmed by inspectors. The inspection team's findings about the quality of two of the cross-college areas do not confirm those made by the college.

The college offers courses in five out of the 10 programme areas funded by the FEFC. Most of the provision offered by the college is in the agriculture programme area; this area was inspected. Provision in the other four programme areas is very small. The inspection also covered aspects of cross-college provision. The quality of teaching and students' achievements is mostly good, but achievements on the first diploma course in agriculture are

unsatisfactory. Links with industry are productive. There is a wide range of good-quality specialist facilities. There are effective procedures for recruitment, guidance and enrolment, and for support for students on welfare matters. There are well-established systems for quality assurance and appraisal. Students' opinions are taken seriously and acted upon. Governors contribute to the development of the curriculum. Middle management is effective. The college must address the following key issues: inadequate strategic planning; weak financial management and the failure to fulfil its responsibilities under the FEFC's financial memorandum; poor clerking of the corporation; inadequate involvement of the corporation in monitoring the quality of the curriculum and overseeing the activities of the college. The college should also improve: the systems for monitoring, recording and reviewing students' progress; the usage of tutorial time; learning support; the usage and maintenance of accommodation; the analysis of data on students' achievements in the review of courses; and the procedures for reporting on students' performance.

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

| Curriculum area | Grade | Cross-college provision | Grade |
|------------------------|--------------|--------------------------------|--------------|
| Agriculture | 2 | Support for students | 3 |
| Horticulture | 2 | General resources | 4 |
| | | Quality assurance | 3 |
| | | Governance | 5 |
| | | Management | 4 |

The College and its Mission

1 In 1966, Hadlow College was formed from the amalgamation of the Kent Farm Institute and the Kent Horticultural Institute and moved to its current site, close to the village of Hadlow in Kent. The college's buildings are located in 15 hectares of landscaped parkland, gardens and sports fields. There are 255 hectares of farm and nursery. The farm has cattle, sheep, pigs and a range of arable crops. Horticultural provision includes a large nursery stock and glasshouse production units. There are three satellite horticultural units in Maidstone, Canterbury, and Mottingham in South East London where there is also a retail training centre. The college has residential accommodation for 158 students.

2 Kent has a large and diverse agricultural and horticultural industry. The county is renowned for its fruit, hops, vegetables and livestock. Unemployment in Kent is over 7 per cent. Employment in the land-based sector accounts for only 1.5 per cent of employment in the county. In 1996-97, 61 per cent of students who completed their courses went into employment and 29 per cent continued in education.

3 In November 1997, 2,060 students were enrolled at the college of whom 572 were full time. Sixty-two per cent of all students are studying at intermediate level. Over 50 per cent of students are over 25 years of age and most are enrolled on agricultural or horticultural courses. Hadlow College is an associate college of the University of Greenwich and 10 per cent of the college's students are enrolled on higher education courses. Most of the students on further education courses are recruited from Kent or South East London.

4 The college employs 42 lecturers, 22 technical instructors and learning support staff; and 86 other support staff, including farm, horticultural and grounds staff. There is a senior management team of four. The

curriculum is managed through seven teaching sections, each headed by a lecturer-in-charge.

5 The mission statement has recently been revised. The college's mission is 'to widen participation and increase access to high-quality education and training in the land-based and related sectors and to raise student achievement levels in responsive partnerships with regional, national and international communities and with increasingly efficient use of resources'.

Context

The Inspection

6 The college was inspected in March 1998. Inspectors had previously examined the college's self-assessment report. The college submitted data on students' achievements for the three years 1995 to 1997. These data were checked by inspectors against primary sources such as class registers and awarding body pass lists and found to be reliable. The inspection was carried out by five inspectors and an auditor working for a total of 25 days. They observed 25 lessons, and examined samples of students' work and a variety of college documents. Meetings were held with students, governors, managers and staff.

7 Sixty-four per cent of the lessons inspected were rated good or outstanding and 8 per cent were less than satisfactory. According to *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1996-97: Chief Inspector's annual report*, 61 per cent of all lessons inspected for the year 1996-97 had strengths which outweighed weaknesses, and 8 per cent of lessons inspected had weaknesses which outweighed strengths. The average level of attendance in the lessons observed was 84 per cent. This level compares with a figure for all colleges in 1996-97 of 77 per cent reported in the chief inspector's annual report. The following table shows the grades awarded to the lessons inspected.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

| Programme | Grade | | | | | Totals |
|------------------|-------|----|---|---|---|--------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| NVQ | 0 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 7 |
| Other vocational | 2 | 11 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 18 |
| Total | 2 | 14 | 7 | 2 | 0 | 25 |

Curriculum Areas

Agriculture

Grade 2

8 Eleven lessons were observed covering courses from foundation to advanced level. Inspectors' findings supported many of the strengths in the self-assessment report. The college had not identified some of the weaknesses identified during the inspection.

Key strengths

- teaching closely related to practical applications
- effective teaching in most lessons
- the achievement of additional qualifications
- attendance, retention and pass rates on most courses
- the effective use of assignments to assess students' learning
- good use of specialist resources

Weaknesses

- insufficient attention to meeting the needs of all students
- underdeveloped schemes of work
- the pass rate on the first diploma course

9 The college provides a range of courses up to advanced level. Inspectors agreed with the findings of the self-assessment report that students have many opportunities to take additional vocational qualifications. Teaching is generally good. A suitable range of teaching and learning approaches are used which are well matched to the objectives of courses. Most teachers successfully introduce students to the lesson topic but some do not check on previous learning or relate the lesson to other elements of the course. Lessons are well structured. They are taught at a pace which suits the students. A strength in most lessons is the frequent reference to the practical and commercial

applications of the subject. Practical teaching is of a high standard. Inspectors confirmed the judgement, recorded in the self-assessment report, that attention to the application of health and safety legislation is given a high priority, particularly in practical lessons. Teaching of numeracy is not always effective. In the weaker lessons, students often fail to concentrate on the work, their interest is not always maintained and they are not encouraged to participate through questioning and discussion. Some teachers took too little account of the wide range of students' experience and ability.

10 The content of most courses is appropriate and relevant to students. Schemes of work are often merely a list of topics and there is no information about how the subject will be taught. Course handbooks are comprehensive and informative.

11 A wide range of assessment is used, which is well matched to the objectives of courses. Details of assessment are available for students at the start of a course. Assignments are set regularly and returned promptly. They provide good opportunities for students to gain and apply knowledge. The work of most students is carefully researched and well presented. Assignment briefs and assessment criteria are comprehensive and space is provided for students and teachers to record their assessment of common skills. Work is marked and verified accurately, and in the majority of cases detailed written feedback helps students to make improvements in their work. There are good attendance, retention and pass rates on most courses, and for most students. The pass rate on the first diploma course is poor. Achievement of additional vocational qualifications and progression to other further or higher education courses or to employment is good. Inspectors' findings support the college's assessment that there is inadequate analysis of data on students' achievements. High targets for pass and retention rates on courses have been set, and inspectors considered some of

Curriculum Areas

these unrealistic in the light of past performance.

12 Staff are appropriately qualified and experienced. There is a good working relationship between staff and students. Students are highly appreciative of the support they receive from staff. Good use is made of the well-managed estate. Students undertake many of the planning and practical activities on the farm. There is a range of machinery and estate workshops which are adequately resourced to meet the requirements of the courses that are offered. For most students, teaching and learning in college is supplemented by work experience and outside visits.

Examples of students' achievements in agriculture, 1995 to 1997

| Course grouping | | 1995 | 1996 | 1997 |
|-------------------------|---------------|------|------|------|
| National diploma | Retention (%) | 83 | 64 | 100 |
| | Pass rate (%) | 100 | 100 | 83 |
| National certificates | Retention (%) | 100 | 100 | 91 |
| | Pass rate (%) | 92 | 64 | 76 |
| First diploma | Retention (%) | 70 | 91 | 87 |
| | Pass rate (%) | 57 | 60 | 38 |
| NVQ level 2 agriculture | Retention (%) | 96 | 86 | 88 |
| | Pass rate (%) | 96 | 67 | 74 |

Source: college data

Curriculum Areas

Horticulture

Grade 2

13 Fourteen lessons were observed covering full-time and part-time courses in horticulture from foundation to advanced level. Inspectors found a number of weaknesses which were not included in the self-assessment report. The most significant related to students' achievements and to academic support for students. The college, in addition, did not identify a few strengths.

Key strengths

- a clear link between teaching of theory and its practical applications
- effective use of assignments
- well-structured opportunities for students to gain additional qualifications
- high pass and retention rates on the national diploma course
- a broad range of provision
- productive links with industry
- good specialist facilities

Weaknesses

- the organisation and management of some teaching
- inadequate reviews of students' progress
- some low retention and pass rates over the last three years

14 Courses in horticulture provide appropriately for school-leavers, adult students and those employed in the industry. There are progression routes to: advanced level; a foundation level course for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities; and a wide range of specialist courses in amenity and commercial horticulture. Demand for some specialist options is low; the college has maintained the viability of small teaching groups

by combining classes with common areas of study. There is further scope to combine classes. There are too few opportunities for students to have their previous experience accredited before entering courses. Students have the opportunity to gain additional units in national vocational qualifications (NVQs) on many courses. Arrangements for students to develop key skills on national certificate and part-time courses are not adequate. Students' understanding of the horticultural industry is extended through opportunities to take additional activities that include study tours and outside visits. Work experience on the diploma courses is well managed and valued highly by students. Inspectors agreed with the findings of the self-assessment report that there are effective arrangements for obtaining advice from industry on courses and resources.

15 In most lessons, topics are developed logically and new terms and ideas are explained carefully. Teachers use their wide knowledge of the industry to demonstrate the relevance of the subject. In many lessons, students' interest is maintained by an appropriate variety of activities, including exercises that enable them to apply the theory that they have recently learnt. In most cases, when students carry out practical work they are given clear guidance on how to improve their performance. Much of the practical work which is carried out under realistic working conditions makes use of the extensive range of college facilities that includes: a national plant collection; landscaped areas; water features; and a large commercial horticulture glass house area. Inspectors confirmed the college's assessment that in some theory and practical lessons the objectives are not always made sufficiently clear. Teachers are not always aware of the extent to which students understand the work; sometimes discussions do not involve all members of the class. The length of time taken to read handouts and record notes by students who work more slowly prevents them from concentrating fully on the lesson.

Curriculum Areas

16 The assessment programme is spread evenly throughout courses and communicated effectively to students. Most assignments are based on realistic work problems; the tasks are specified clearly and students often receive detailed written comments on their work. Although teachers are responsive to requests for help, regular reviews of progress are not undertaken and students' learning needs are not clearly identified.

17 Inspectors support the college's assessment that students produce work of a high standard. A notable feature of their assignment work is the impressive quality of their presentations and the effective use of illustration. Most work is researched comprehensively. Much of the third-year national diploma work is of a high standard. Students demonstrate effective skills in problem-solving and present conclusions that are well argued. These qualities are lacking in students' work on one-year courses. Students on national diploma courses achieve consistently high pass rates and most complete their studies. In 1996-97, the retention rate for the national diploma course in amenity horticulture was low; over one-third of the students left before the end of the course. Students had left the course to take up employment or for disciplinary reasons. Retention and pass rates for the national certificate course are high. Pass and retention

rates have been high on the first diploma course but, in 1996-97, enrolments almost doubled and both rates declined. Over half of last year's national diploma students have achieved or expect to gain an NVQ at level 3. Some NVQ students do not achieve a full qualification. Eighty-five per cent of students completing their national diploma and certificate courses in 1997 gained employment. Over half of the students on the first diploma course in 1997 progressed on to the national diploma or certificate courses.

Examples of students' achievements in horticulture, 1995 to 1997

| Course grouping | | 1995 | 1996 | 1997 |
|--|---------------|------|------|------|
| National diploma | Retention (%) | * | 94 | 71 |
| | Pass rate (%) | * | 97 | 94 |
| National certificate and first diploma | Retention (%) | 82 | 81 | 80 |
| | Pass rate (%) | 74 | 76 | 83 |
| NVQ level 1 and NVQ level 2 (one year) | Retention (%) | 100 | 95 | 92 |
| | Pass rate (%) | 74 | 47 | 66 |

Source: college data

*course not running

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 3

18 Inspectors' findings confirmed the college's overall assessment of support for students, although they identified one significant weakness which is not included in the college's report.

Key strengths

- the high levels of support provided by some tutors
- effective procedures for recruitment, guidance and enrolment
- helpful 'taster' and induction programmes
- effective help with welfare matters

Weaknesses

- the lack of a strategy for the provision of support for students
- use of tutorial time
- insufficient learning support
- inadequate systems for recording and reviewing students' progress

19 The college justifiably identifies as a strength its publicity, recruitment, enrolment and induction procedures for full-time students. There are links with over 200 schools. The range of marketing activities undertaken includes: visits to schools; attendance at their open evenings; and attendance at local, county and national agricultural and horticultural events. The college organises 'taster' days at Easter for year-10 pupils and runs public events, for example lambing days, which are popular and generate interest in the college. There is a range of publicity material; the prospectus for 1998 is attractive. Enquiries from prospective students are dealt with through a central unit. Arrangements for enrolment are clear and fair. There is no system for recording the guidance that is provided.

20 Induction activities on both full-time and part-time courses help students to settle in quickly and ensure that they are placed on the most appropriate course. Health and safety issues are given a high priority during the induction programme. The college has recognised in its self-assessment report that students who are late starting courses do not always have an appropriate induction. The majority of students have received the college charter. Students vary in their awareness of the equal opportunities policy and associated procedures.

21 Arrangements for learning support are not yet fully developed. Students on full-time and day-release courses are tested to assess the level of their skills for literacy and numeracy; 62 students have received help during 1997-98. Inspectors agreed with the college in its assessment that learning support should be strengthened for students on part-time courses and for those studying on courses at the college's satellite centres. Students with disabilities receive appropriate support.

22 There is no strategy which would help to co-ordinate all aspects of support for students and there is insufficient monitoring of the support provided. The self-assessment report recognises the lack of monitoring of tutorial support for students as a weakness but fails to acknowledge that the college lacks an adequate strategy. Tutors do not have a common understanding of the tutorial support that students should receive. Tutors of full-time students are allowed time for their tutorial work. However, the allowance varies as does the frequency and content of the tutorials. Students spent their time in some tutorials completing class work. Some tutors monitor students' progress and set them targets but the records they have vary in quality. Nevertheless full-time students are appreciative of the high levels of commitment from individual tutors. Little use is made of records of achievement.

Cross-college Provision

23 Six residential wardens, and a housekeeper and cleaning staff whose duties include the daily monitoring of the general welfare of residential students, help to provide effective support for students on welfare matters. The counselling service responds to students' needs and the professional counsellor sees students as required. Arrangements for providing guidance on financial matters are effective. There are useful links with local banks and charities which assist with grant aid.

24 The college has a service level agreement with Kent Careers Services. All students on first diploma courses have an interview with a careers officer. Other students who need careers guidance only benefit from the service if they, or tutors on their behalf, request interviews. The careers section of the library has good resources. The college has an active students' association which arranges social activities.

General Resources

Grade 4

25 The college's self-assessment report did not adequately cover general resources. Inspectors identified weaknesses which were not included in the report. Some strengths recorded by the college were overstated.

Key strengths

- well-maintained grounds
- the high quality of facilities for information technology (IT) on the Hadlow site
- a good refectory

Weaknesses

- the lack of an accommodation strategy
- the under-use of accommodation
- poorly-maintained accommodation
- inadequate learning resources at the satellite centres

- poor access to some areas for students with restricted mobility

26 The college's grounds are well maintained and provide an attractive setting for its buildings. The majority of the communal and recreational rooms for students are in Garrad House. This property, built in 1840, is located in the centre of the campus. There is a comfortable bar area but some of the other communal accommodation is sparsely furnished and poorly decorated. The refectory is well run. The staff are helpful and the food is of good quality. Students' residential accommodation is adequate and well cleaned but there are insufficient places to meet demand. The college has undertaken surveys to assess the suitability of its accommodation for students with restricted mobility; some improvements have yet to be made. The library and some of the communal rooms can only be reached by stairs.

27 Several reviews of accommodation have been carried out since the self-assessment report was produced. These have identified significant weaknesses. However, the shortcomings of the review of accommodation and the consequent lack of appropriate information prevent the college producing an accommodation strategy. The college has, in addition, recognised that it has to make significant financial savings; it has already made some changes to its accommodation. Although not identified in the self-assessment report, the college acknowledges that the absence of a comprehensive accommodation strategy to guide any changes is a significant weakness; action is now being taken to produce a strategy.

28 The planning of a maintenance programme and the actual maintenance of the accommodation are both poor. The maintenance costs of many of the buildings are high; there is a severe backlog in the achievement of improvements. An initial review of the use of accommodation has shown that there is under-use. The self-assessment report

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does not recognise that the current arrangements for monitoring and controlling the use of accommodation are ineffective. Rooms are used for activities for which they are not wholly suited. Most teaching accommodation on the main campus is adequate. Some classroom accommodation at the satellite centres is inadequate.

29 Some of the weaknesses in library provision are recorded in the self-assessment report. The college is an associate college of the University of Greenwich. To improve resources for students, the college has developed an agreement which will enable college students to make use of the resources of the university. There are insufficient books to meet fully the needs of all curriculum areas. In some areas, specialist books are not available and some books are out of date. Library catalogues are not computer based. Expenditure on bookstock is poorly planned. Despite a recent expansion, there are still insufficient study spaces at times of peak demand. The accommodation and materials to support students who wish to study on their own is inadequate.

30 The four computer rooms are spacious and comfortably furnished. They are open seven days a week. The rooms are frequently occupied for teaching during the day but students can use the machines whenever they are available. The number of computers in these rooms is adequate to meet current demand. The computers are modern and there is a range of suitable software. Networking of the computers is being carried out. However, the college recognises that the use of IT for teaching purposes in vocational areas is poor. It is taking action to improve the relatively low ratio of computers to students. Most staff have access to computers but not all of these are linked to the network. The standard of resources in the specialist laboratories is good. The college is well provided with machinery workshops. The provision of learning resources at the satellite centres is inadequate.

Quality Assurance

Grade 3

31 The self-assessment report claims as strengths features which inspectors did not regard as particularly significant, and underestimates the impact of the college's failure to review quantitative data on academic performance.

Key strengths

- a clear and well-established framework for quality assurance
- responsiveness to student opinions
- the impact of course reviews
- internal verification policy and practice
- a well-established appraisal system
- the clear arrangements for staff development

Weaknesses

- insufficient analysis of students' achievements in reviews and reports
- no reviews of some aspects of the college's work
- some non-compliance with format for course reports
- omission of action points from some course reports
- inadequate data on students' performance given to the corporation and academic board
- low expenditure on staff development

32 A strategic objective of the college is to deliver high-quality programmes. The policy statement on quality assurance has recently been updated. The framework for quality assurance is well established and focuses on course reviews. The formal process of course review, which supplements team meetings and student questionnaires, results in an annual course report. The reports for all courses within

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a teaching section are summarised in a section report. Both course and section reports are submitted to the college's scrutiny group for course reviews, which presents a summary report to the academic board.

33 The policy on quality assurance includes guidance on the composition of the groups that carry out course reviews. Employer representatives, present and past students, and key staff are included in the groups. Course reports follow standard headings, and contain details of students' achievements and progression. The best reports, primarily those for full-time courses, contain action plans and identify the staff responsible for seeing that the plans are carried out. Not all reports include action plans, as the self-assessment report acknowledges, nor do they contain clear data on student retention, particularly where the course has continued over more than one academic year.

34 Until 1996, the format of course reports did not identify action points that were to be followed up. For 1997, a front sheet has been added which lists actions resulting from the 1996 course review. The format of the summary for 1996-97 from the scrutiny group is a marked improvement on previous years; actions, responsibilities, and deadlines are identified. The latest draws attention to a general shortage of quantitative evidence, and the failure to use external evidence, for example verifier reports. There are examples in these reports of weaknesses which recur over several years, for example, students' comments on the poor timing of assignment demands. Inspectors agreed with the college's conclusion that course reports would be improved by the inclusion of comparisons of college results with national averages, and with best practice elsewhere. Although there are many effective features of the college's quality assurance process, it is essentially inward looking. Not all reports are sufficiently evaluative. The academic board has not received full details of students'

achievements or other performance data, and the corporation has received insufficient information on academic performance. These weaknesses are not identified in the self-assessment report. The policy for internal verification is in its second year of operation, and is working well.

35 Evidence from students' questionnaires is taken seriously. Questionnaires are issued three times a year, and summary data are included in course reports. Analysis of returns is used to identify strengths and weaknesses in college facilities, and in course organisation. In its self-assessment report, the college identified a need to produce whole-college analyses of the survey data. Students are complimentary about the responsiveness of staff to their suggestions for improvements. Inspectors found links between students' comments on questionnaires and subsequent actions that were planned to achieve improvements in the college. Some sensible suggestions from students, for instance that a syllabus should be provided for a major course element, had not, however, been recorded as having been implemented. Student representatives on course review groups felt that they would have benefited from some training for their role. There are procedures for dealing with complaints and assessment appeals, which are handled promptly.

36 The staff appraisal system is well established and includes classroom observation of teaching staff. Very recently, further observations were carried out, and graded. They are intended to inform future self-assessment of the quality of teaching; they were too late to contribute to the self-assessment report prepared for the inspection. These observations, if the teaching staff who are involved agree, may be used as additional evidence during subsequent appraisals. The college has recognised that the grades awarded to lessons observed by college staff were more generous than those awarded by inspectors.

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37 Staff development needs emerge from the appraisal process. Personal action plans for staff are negotiated with line managers. These plans for training identify activities which align with the college's strategic objectives. Specific requests by staff are summarised in an annual report, with target dates for completion. Many staff development activities are provided in-house. In 1997-98, the budget for course and conference attendance is £22,000, which is less than 0.7 per cent of staff costs. The need to increase this budget is recognised in the self-assessment report. Wardens have been systematically trained for their duties; training provided for tutors has been less systematic. Despite the existence of training plans, college records show that some staff have taken part in no development activities, while other staff have received a great deal of support for their development. Opportunities do not seem to have been evenly distributed.

38 The college produced its first self-assessment report for this inspection. It drew on evidence from course reviews, as well as from support sections of the college. Each teaching section produced its own self-assessment report to a standard format, and the summary report was presented to governors. A small group of governors gave advice on the report. Action plans to address weaknesses have been compiled and these specify who has responsibilities for action and the dates by which action must be completed.

Governance

Grade 5

39 Inspectors concluded that many of the strengths recorded in the self-assessment report are overstated. Inspectors' findings confirm the weaknesses recognised by the college but other serious weaknesses were also identified.

Key strengths

- the contribution of governors to the development of the curriculum

Weaknesses

- the failure to fulfil responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC
- the inadequate oversight of the activities of the college
- poor compliance with the instrument and articles of government
- inadequate clerking
- insufficient awareness and implementation of best practice in governance
- a reactive approach towards strategic planning
- inadequate involvement in monitoring the quality of the curriculum and in self-assessment activities

40 Governors have not effectively adjusted the focus of their work to meet the needs of an incorporated college. The Further Education Funding Council's (FEFC's) audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is weak. The corporation does not substantially conduct its business in accordance with the instrument and articles of government. It also does not substantially fulfil its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC. The corporation has a membership of 12

Cross-college Provision

independent governors, one governor nominated by the local training and enterprise council (TEC), three co-opted governors, one staff governor, one community governor and the principal. There are two long-term vacancies which could be used to augment existing skills. The corporation has not been validly constituted since September 1995 when governors' terms of office expired. Neither governors nor the clerk took action to reappoint. The process for recruiting the principal followed good practice, however, the formal decision to appoint was not made by the full corporation. The appointments of other governors have also not complied with the instrument of government.

41 Governors have failed to ensure that proceeds from the sale of college properties have been used in accordance with the financial memorandum. Governors also acknowledge that they have been slow to recognise that, under the memorandum, the college is not permitted to run an annual deficit year-on-year.

42 Governors' involvement in strategic planning has been inadequate. This judgement does not support the college's own assessment. The college has produced a plan, *New Directions*, which seeks to set out the means by which financial viability will be restored. This plan was reviewed and approved at a single meeting of the corporation, even though it does not show adequately how the college will achieve financial recovery or the link between strategic objectives and financial forecasting. A revised draft is being prepared for submission to the FEFC to support the college's application for a waiver to the financial memorandum.

43 The self-assessment report justifiably recognises the invaluable work of governors in supporting the curriculum, including their activities on advisory groups. They have directed much of their effort towards this work. However, they have not given sufficient attention to monitoring and reviewing the quality of the curriculum. Very little time in corporation meetings is given to academic matters. Minutes

show that the academic board reports regularly to the corporation, but there is little indication that governors are informed about examination results or retention rates in sufficient detail to enable them to form an accurate view of students' achievements. Inspectors did not support the college's view that the involvement of governors in the self-assessment process was a strength. Governors did not make a major contribution to either the governance section or any other section of the self-assessment report.

44 Inspectors agreed with the college's evaluation that governors bring to the corporation a range of skills and expertise in land-based industries and that attendance by the majority of governors at both corporation and committee meetings is good. The corporation is assessing its work for the first time. This self-assessment will include a review of the skills possessed by current governors and skills required for the future. Previous appointments of new governors were undertaken by an ad-hoc search committee, which relied on nominations from existing governors. The corporation has only recently appreciated the need for a governor with financial expertise and made a suitable appointment. The value of such an appointment is reflected in the increasing effectiveness of the college's audit committee. The chairman and the principal meet regularly and have established an effective working relationship.

45 The clerk to the corporation is also the college's finance and resources director. There is no job description for the role of clerk to the corporation. The clerking of the corporation and its committees is inadequate. There is a lack of awareness of good practice on governance and clerking matters. The code of conduct for governors is out of date. There are no standing orders for the conduct of meetings. Minutes of corporation meetings are produced within appropriate timescales, but do not always reflect the full extent of business discussed. The corporation has decided that the minutes should be available to staff and students, but copies are

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unavailable in the library and not displayed on noticeboards. The register of interests does not comply with best practice in terms of the nature of interests to be disclosed and has not been extended to cover staff with significant financial responsibility.

Management

Grade 4

46 Inspectors generally agreed with the college's assessment of the quality of management. They identified, however, a number of additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- the recent introduction of an open and consultative approach to management
- recent initiatives in business planning
- effective middle managers

Weaknesses

- the failure to address key issues
- breaches of the financial memorandum with the FEFC
- inadequate strategic planning
- poor management reporting
- the late submission of returns to the FEFC
- insufficiently adequate and accessible non-financial management information
- no implementation strategy for equal opportunities
- the management of some cross-college initiatives

47 A new principal was appointed in September 1997. Since then, the college has started to address some of the many issues that need to be resolved. There is much work to be done to ensure that such activity results in necessary improvements. On incorporation, the college had an average level of funding of

£44.11 per unit. It has achieved efficiency gains and reduced the level to £26.51 per unit.

Further savings will have to be made over the next few years as the college's average level of funding per unit is further reduced and converges to the sector average. There has been little growth in student numbers. The college has not made financial and student returns on time to the FEFC. The 1995-96 accounts are the most recent to be signed and, as a result of concerns over the college's continuing viability, contain a qualified opinion.

48 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is weak. The college requires a waiver to the FEFC's financial memorandum. Managers identify their lack of understanding of the memorandum as a reason for the failure to seek a waiver. The college has also failed to comply with the requirements of the memorandum in relation to the acquisition and disposal of land and buildings. The college's internal auditors have commented adversely on the number of recommendations that relate to routine financial controls which are still necessary after four years.

49 Although the college has responded well to the needs of industry, it has lacked strategic direction and firm leadership; the self-assessment report does not note these weaknesses. A clearer sense of direction and an open and consultative style of management are now enabling progress to be made in tackling the college's financial difficulties. The new principal embarked upon an extensive programme of consultation, including meetings with staff and the establishment of new committees. Staff comment favourably on the opportunities that they now have to understand the college's problems and to be involved in their solution. Development activities have introduced staff to the characteristics of the FEFC's funding mechanism, and thus enabled them to understand its financial impact on their work.

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50 Inspectors' findings supported the college's assessment that strategic planning has been poor. The outcomes of an incomplete planning process had resulted in unclear targets and strategies. Staff have not previously been involved in planning. In contrast, the production of the new plan, *New Directions*, has involved all staff. All teaching and support sections produced business plans to support the new plan. The college intends to produce a new strategic plan later this year. The college is making good use of published local and national market research information to inform planning.

51 The senior management team comprises the principal, three directors, and the head of personnel. It meets regularly. The lecturers-in-charge of the teaching sections also meet regularly. The minutes of these meetings, which now contain detailed action points, have improved since September 1997. The lecturers-in-charge manage the curriculum effectively and work well together. They now also manage a number of cross-college projects. Management of cross-college initiatives has not always been effective. The principal has proposed a three-phase restructuring of the management of the college, starting with the senior management team after Easter 1998. At the time of the inspection, the staff were aware of the principal's intentions but not the details of any plans.

52 The college has striven to develop effective management information systems. The 27 budget holders receive reliable monthly accounts; a strength recognised in the self-assessment report. These accounts will soon be available on the computer network. A budget holders' committee, chaired by the principal, has been introduced. It is helping budget holders to improve their understanding and monitoring of accounts. Several attempts to devolve budgets to managers have proved unsuccessful. Budget allocations are based mainly on the allocations made in previous years. Currently, the finance manager and lecturers-in-charge are developing a method of

allocating budgets based on units of activity. The quality of management information that relates to students is improving. Weaknesses in the management information system have contributed to the college's failure to gain the maximum value from its funding.

53 Management accounts are prepared monthly and distributed to budget holders and to governors on the employment, policy and finance committee and the audit committee. They do not include a written commentary detailing reasons for significant variations against budget. Neither do they include detailed cashflow information, which is essential given the college's tight financial position.

54 Policies for equal opportunities and health and safety are in place. There are clear management arrangements which support the health and safety committee in its work. The brief policy statement for equal opportunities has no strategy to support its implementation. The self-assessment report recognises this shortcoming which the college plans to address.

Conclusions

55 Inspectors found that the self-assessment report provided a useful basis for the inspection. Many of the findings of the inspection team were in line with those of the college. However, in some cases, inspectors found that weaknesses acknowledged by the college were understated and that other weaknesses identified by the inspectors had not been recognised by the college. The inspection team considered the college's self-assessment for governance and general resources were overgenerous. Inspectors were in agreement with the grade awarded for the two curriculum areas inspected. Action has already been taken by the college to address some of the weaknesses that were identified by inspectors.

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

College Statistics

Student numbers by age (November 1997)

| Age | % |
|-------------|-----|
| Under 16 | 0 |
| 16-18 years | 17 |
| 19-24 years | 25 |
| 25+ years | 50 |
| Not known | 8 |
| Total | 100 |

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (November 1997)

| Level of study | % |
|-------------------------------------|-----|
| Foundation | 2 |
| Intermediate | 62 |
| Advanced | 19 |
| Higher education | 10 |
| Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2) | 7 |
| Total | 100 |

Source: college data

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

| Programme area | Full time | Part time | Total provision % |
|--------------------|-----------|-----------|-------------------|
| Science | 132 | 0 | 6 |
| Agriculture | 393 | 1,315 | 83 |
| Engineering | 13 | 45 | 3 |
| Business | 30 | 128 | 8 |
| Hotel and catering | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 572 | 1,488 | 100 |

Source: college data

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (September 1997)

| | Perman-ent | Fixed term | Casual | Total |
|------------------------------------|------------|------------|--------|-------|
| Direct learning contact | 29 | 9 | 4 | 42 |
| Supporting direct learning contact | 17 | 5 | 0 | 22 |
| Other support | 70 | 16 | 0 | 86 |
| Total | 116 | 30 | 4 | 150 |

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

| | 1994-95 | 1995-96 | 1996-97 |
|-------------------------------------|------------|------------|---------|
| Income | £5,640,000 | £5,948,000 | * |
| Average level of funding (ALF) | | | |
| Out-turn to 1995-96; funded 1996-97 | £38.07 | £33.12 | £33.09 |
| Payroll as a proportion of income | 59% | 62% | * |
| Achievement of funding target | 109% | 110% | * |
| Diversity of income | 59% | 57% | * |
| Operating surplus | -£380,000 | -£255,000 | * |

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

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

Payroll – Council Circular 96/29 (1994-95), college (1995-96)

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

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

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

*data not available

Performance data for students aged 16 to 18

| Qualifications | | 1994-95 | 1995-96 | 1996-97 |
|-------------------------|------------------------------------|---------|--------------|-----------|
| Advanced vocational | Number in final year | 4 | 10 | 1 |
| | Percentage achieving qualification | 100% | 100% | 100% |
| | Position in tables | top 10% | top 10% | top 10% |
| Intermediate vocational | Number in final year | * | 124 | 116 |
| | Percentage achieving qualification | * | 65% | 75% |
| | Position in tables | * | middle third | top third |

Source: DfEE

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

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

*1994-95 intermediate vocational results not available

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