

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

Kirkley Hall College

October 1995

**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.

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.*

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FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 110/95

KIRKLEY HALL COLLEGE

NORTHERN REGION

Inspected September 1994 - May 1995

Summary

Kirkley Hall College is the only provider of further education for agriculture and other land-based industries in Northumberland. Enrolment and admission procedures are well organised. The quality of teaching is high and students are well supported by experienced and qualified staff. The college has successfully introduced NVQs. Its farms and estates offer wide-ranging opportunities for students to develop their knowledge and understanding and the college's commercial operations provide examples of good practice to support learning. Students' levels of achievement are high and many progress to employment or higher education. The college has been slow to diversify provision to meet changing markets. Planning and the implementation of policy are not as effective as they should be. Internal communications should be improved. Practices across the college vary in detail and effectiveness and there are few structures to ensure consistent delivery and review of performance. More systematic quality assurance procedures are required for all areas of the college's operation. Some classrooms are of poor quality. Library facilities are inadequate. Veterinary animal nursing and animal care courses are poorly resourced. The laboratories require upgrading.

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	4
Students' recruitment, guidance and support	2
Quality assurance	3
Resources: staffing	2
equipment/learning resources	2
accommodation	3

Curriculum area	Grade
Agriculture	2
Horticulture	2
Environment	2

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INTRODUCTION

1 Kirkley Hall College was inspected between September 1994 and May 1995. A total of 39 working days was used in assessing enrolment and induction, specialist programme areas and aspects of cross-college provision. Inspectors visited 46 teaching sessions, examined students' work and talked with students undertaking work experience. Discussions were held with governors, managers, college staff, parents, local employers and community representatives. Views were also sought from representatives of Northumberland Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), Northumberland Local Education Authority (LEA) and the careers service.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 Kirkley Hall College was opened in 1950 to provide a centre for agricultural education in Northumberland. The original hall, dating from 1764 and rebuilt in 1930 after an extensive fire, provides the main administrative offices for the college. The campus occupies an attractive rural setting close to Newcastle-upon-Tyne and the Tyne-Wear conurbation. Transport links to surrounding and upland areas of the county are generally poor.

3 Northumberland is the most northerly and sparsely populated county in England. Agriculture is a major economic activity accounting for up to 21 per cent of the workforce in some neighbourhoods. In 1991, the proportion of residents involved in agriculture (3.8 per cent) was nearly three times the national average. Nationally and locally there has been a move away from agriculture into horticulture and environmental developments. Unemployment in the county increased from 8.4 per cent in 1990 to 11.2 per cent in 1993 but there are pockets of more severe unemployment. It is estimated that the county's population will grow by only 1 per cent from 1991 to 1996.

4 The Kirkley Hall estate extends to 228 hectares incorporating two lowland farms and 24 hectares of woodland and ornamental grounds. One of the farms is on the main campus; the other is situated three miles away. A remote hill farm, leased from the Ministry of Defence, provides an additional resource used by the college. It extends to 530 hectares and is within the Northumberland National Park close to the Scottish border. College farms reflect typical commercial activities within the county. Kirkley Hall College has an international reputation for sheep farming and is currently seeking accreditation as a national training centre for sheep husbandry.

5 The curriculum is delivered through four sections: agricultural and environmental subjects, machinery and estate, horticulture, and creative studies. These sections offer a range of educational qualifications including those of the Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC), the National Examinations Board for Agriculture, Horticulture and Allied Industries, the City and Guilds of London Institute and the Royal Horticulture Society.

6 The college has 349 full-time equivalent students of whom 228 are funded by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). All enrolments by age and level of study are shown in figures 1 and 2. Full-time equivalent students by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figure 3. The proportion of full-time women students attending the college is under 30 per cent. The college employs 36 full-time equivalent teaching staff, 53 full-time equivalent technicians and other support staff, and 7 farm staff. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents is shown in figure 4.

7 The college supports the land-based industries by providing premises for the Northumberland Young Farmers' Club, the Northumberland Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group and North Country Primestock, a successful livestock marketing organisation.

8 Specialist colleges supporting land-based industries are 30 miles away close to Durham City and 80 miles away near Penrith. The college is affiliated to the University of Teesside and offers a higher national diploma in environmental science and technology. The national diploma in land use and recreation is offered in partnership with Durham College of Agriculture and Horticulture. In broadening its provision the college must compete with other general further education colleges; Northumberland College is 10 miles away at Ashington and there are four colleges on Tyneside. All of these colleges enjoy more direct transport links with outlying areas of the county than does Kirkley Hall College.

9 The college's stated mission is to provide high-quality education and training to meet the needs of individuals and of the land-based and allied industries. This is to be achieved in partnership with public and commercial organisations both national and international.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

10 The college strategic plan reflects the national policies and targets for further education. Teachers are aware of the need to increase students' participation and broaden provision and plans are in place to extend the course portfolio over the next three years. An increase in the pace of development will be required if the college is to achieve its intended growth and diversification.

11 Courses in agriculture studies are becoming increasingly vulnerable as the numbers employed in the industry decline. The national certificate in agriculture failed to run this year because there were so few applicants and this left an important gap in full-time provision. Although it recruits nationally, the advanced national certificate in sheep management enrolled only six students. Opportunities for students in employment to study specialist aspects of agriculture after gaining their main qualification are also limited. Animal care courses are only available through part-time study.

12 The introduction of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) as an additional qualification has enabled students to gain credit for practical achievements during their course attendance. NVQ assessment is available in most full-time courses and many students achieve an NVQ in horticulture where assessment is fully integrated with normal course work. An equestrian department and related courses are to be introduced in September 1995. Horticulture and environmental studies, however, require further development. The college should continue to explore more flexible ways of delivering the curriculum to improve opportunities for employed students and for those living in remote areas who cannot attend regularly.

13 Some short courses are provided to meet the needs of industry. Most relate to new legislative requirements in the industry. Many students have obtained certificates in the safe use of organo-phosphates for dipping sheep, and have attended courses on the Food and Environmental Protection Act and for chainsaw operatives. The college recognises that there is scope for further development of short course provision and for generating income.

14 Employers provide valuable work experience and specialist facilities for full-time students. Local farms are used extensively for practical livestock activities and arable work and students carry out tasks such as lambing, sheep shearing, calf castration and land cultivation. Environmental students make good use of public and privately owned grounds to gain experience in different habitats, as for example the Druridge Bay coastal restoration and wildlife protection initiative. Employers and land owners providing such experience welcome the support received from the college.

15 A wide range of non-schedule 2 recreation and leisure courses have been offered by the college for many years and more than 1,500 people have so far enrolled on part-time courses during 1994-95. However, the LEA's reduced financial support for this provision and the consequent increase in course fees have led to a drop in enrolments and the cancellation of some courses. The college is currently reviewing the situation.

16 Collaboration with external organisations is used to enhance the curriculum. The college has developed joint funding bids with Northumberland TEC, including a current project to develop information technology and communication systems which will support outreach training in rural business and environmental skills. International links developed with many colleges in Europe and further afield have been supported by funds from the European Union. Long-standing links with France include student exchanges and work placements for students in each others' country. French language teaching is available to students on an optional basis. Students also gain practical experience in other regions of the United Kingdom including visits to selected colleges of agriculture and horticulture.

17 Support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is at an early stage of development. It is poorly co-ordinated and left too much to the initiative of individual members of staff. A working party is developing a college policy. The horticulture section has offered separate specialist provision for some years and students have progressed to higher level courses, including NVQ level 2. Students in other sections are absorbed within general courses. More specific objectives and targets should be set to ensure speedier development of the provision.

18 A school liaison officer co-ordinates the college's activities for schools. Over 2,000 school pupils visited the college last year to enrich their studies. The college has developed an informative teachers' handbook and course leaflets to support the visits. Taster courses are offered to 15 and 16 year old students. Last year more than 250 pupils were able to study subjects linked to the national curriculum and some worked on college farms. There is the potential to extend activities aimed at recruiting school leavers. The college should evaluate such activities.

19 The college claims that students' difficulty in obtaining discretionary awards from local education authorities has significantly hindered recruitment. Parents supporting the college's concerns gave specific details of students unable to attend because of financial hardship. Sixty-eight potential students were identified as unable to enrol in 1994 for financial reasons. The college can accommodate over 150 students in residential accommodation on campus but demand for this has reduced because students are increasingly unable to meet the costs involved. The number of non-residential students travelling from urban areas has been increased by negotiating special transport arrangements.

20 The college promotes itself widely to the broad community. A mobile exhibition trailer is used extensively at trade and public shows and more than 6,000 people pay to visit the college gardens each year. The public are also invited to an annual country festival, to lambing weekends and to sheep shearing competitions. The 'Friends of Kirkley Hall' group, established by the college in the late 1980s, is now run by members of the local community who organise events, including lectures in the college, for people interested in horticulture. There is a college representative on the committee.

21 The college prospectus and course leaflets are generally well presented and informative. A manager was recently appointed to improve the college's marketing activities but, as yet, there is no strategy to guide market research. New arrangements were being introduced at the time of the inspection. Though the college has a good image with local employers, their awareness of its provision is often poor. Many employers feel the college should be more active in heightening their understanding of its work and facilities. A recent survey of employers' views carried out by the college provided valuable information which the college should use to improve its strategic planning.

22 Elected representatives from staff, students and the governing body serve on an active equal opportunities subcommittee of the academic board. Codes of practice were issued early in 1994. Targets for implementation of the policy have been established and the subcommittee monitors developments closely. There has been a strengthening of college procedures for tackling harassment.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

23 Members of the corporation take an active interest in the college. They recognise the need to broaden their representation to match the wider curriculum now offered. There are 15 members, 10 of whom are independent members with backgrounds mainly in agriculture. Board members' collective experience of horticulture is limited. There is a member nominated by the Northumberland TEC, a community representative and a co-opted member. Two members are women. The principal and one of the teaching staff are also board members and the student body has elected an observer. A member with financial expertise was recently appointed. The college's director of administration acts as clerk to the board and the director of finance attends meetings as an observer, both contributing information as requested.

24 The governors and senior staff are well aware of the need to secure the college's financial viability and to improve physical resources. Not all members share the same view of how the college should develop and these differences are also apparent across the college. The board supports the principal and his team but does not routinely accept all recommendations. The governors and college staff would welcome closer mutual involvement but time and business constraints prevent governors visiting the college frequently. The chairman maintains regular contact with the principal. External consultants have been used to develop the strategic plan and guide members on other important issues. The board has not yet considered its own training needs or developed measures to evaluate its own and the college's performance.

25 There are seven committees of the board: finance and property, employment policy, audit, farms and estate, remuneration, academic board and a consultative committee which is intended to act as a forum for staff and governor consultations. Most of the board's business is considered initially by one of these committees and all members serve on at least one. Discussions are sometimes repeated when committee minutes are presented at board meetings. A committee of the board chaired by a governor has also been established to assess the future of the creative studies section.

26 The board received an executive summary of the college's first strategic plan and has considered subsequent revisions. The plan contains few operational objectives and there is limited information on the allocation

of resources or the identification of individual responsibilities for moving issues forward. The implications of proposed developments are not fully considered and timescales are not always realistic. There are no contingency plans. For example, the much needed development of library facilities intended for September 1995 depends entirely on the sale of college buildings. Governors do not monitor routinely progress of the strategic plan and some teaching staff at section level do not see the plan's relevance to their work. Overall, college planning is unco-ordinated and there is a lack of measurable targets and performance indicators.

27 The management structure within sections is generally clear. Heads of section tend to operate independently of each other and this has led to a lack of standardisation. Some sections have regular, minuted meetings and others do not. To help the college make progress, heads of section have been given additional cross-college responsibilities. These roles are not yet fully operational and heads continue to act primarily within their own areas. Initiatives tend to develop because of individual and group enthusiasm but the authority to take them forward is often not provided. When senior staff delegate work to individuals they rarely provide sufficient direction or lay down timescales for action.

28 Procedures for developing college policies lack detail and are inconsistent. The recently-produced staff handbook collates the available policies in an accessible form but there is no framework for monitoring and evaluating the implementation and effectiveness of policies.

29 The college has taken steps to improve its performance. Finance and administration are now managed more energetically and effectively. The recently-formed strategic management group comprising the principal, vice-principal and the directors of finance and administration was created to take strategic decisions. It meets frequently although it has no written terms of reference and does not produce minutes. A college management committee comprises the members of the strategic management group, the four curriculum section heads and the staff governor. This committee has met less frequently since the creation of the strategic management group and many staff perceive that the two-way communication between college management and the sections has become less open.

30 Most staff are aware of what needs to be done to secure the future of the college. Important issues have been identified but progress on them is slow. The lack of internal consultation does not encourage a collective commitment to priorities. The principal addresses all academic staff at least once a term and the director of administration has introduced similar meetings with support staff. The staff governor has taken responsibility for informing colleagues of governing body decisions and convenes meetings of all the staff for this purpose. Minutes of governors meetings are made available in the staff room.

31 The academic board meets twice a term. It has a responsibility for the development of curriculum and plays a substantial role in reviewing courses. All its major recommendations are referred to the corporation board. The board has established several productive working groups which have clear terms of reference. The academic board has sometimes considered items at several successive meetings before decisions were taken, and this has slowed progress on important initiatives.

32 Since incorporation the college has had to address serious financial difficulties. Prior to incorporation, the college's unit of funding was the highest in the further education sector. The average level of funding in 1993-94 was £39.62 per unit and the median for similar colleges in 1993-94 was £31.44. The college's income and expenditure for the 16 months to July 1994 are shown in figures 5 and 6.

33 Financial controls operate differently across the college. Budgets for the teaching sections are allocated on a historical basis. Not all sections know their budgets or receive regular expenditure statements and there is insufficient attention to efficiency in the management of resources. The staff to student ratio is low at 1:7.6. Taught hours are high, the average for full-time courses being 25.7 hours per week. An approach to costing individual courses was piloted in the creative studies section. This has resulted in difficult decisions involving the closure of some courses. Work on the costing of courses in other sections is continuing.

34 The manager of information services has developed computerised college information systems. The FEFC individual student record project is being piloted and a staff record has also been developed. Teaching staff find that the data they now receive are increasingly useful. Lists of students and other student-related information is provided before courses start. Few reports are routinely generated by the information system and the data held do not always match those used by course teams. A computer network, installed in January 1995, is only operational in administration areas. More terminals are needed before curriculum managers can access management information routinely.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

35 The organisation of pre-enrolment and enrolment events is effective. Open days are widely publicised and well attended. Teaching staff give careful attention to each applicant's long-term goals, providing impartial advice and suggesting alternative institutions if appropriate. Records of enquiries and interviews are kept for analysis. Procedures on enrolment days are thorough and efficient. All students have a personal interview with their prospective course tutor. The choice of course is discussed, accommodation arrangements confirmed, travel problems noted and the student contract is explained and completed. Tutors work to a checklist to ensure that all entrants are treated similarly. Useful information booklets are provided for both students and parents.

36 Most students find their induction to courses helpful, although there is no central policy to ensure that the content of course programmes is consistent. Course handbooks are of varying quality. Early in their course, all full-time students and trainees complete an individual learner-agreement document which specifies the learning goals, the learning programme and the support and review arrangements which are available. The document is not always updated as it should be nor discussed at tutorial interviews. Nevertheless, it is a potentially powerful tool for providing continuous guidance to students.

37 All full-time students are tested to find out whether they have specific learning needs. The tests sometimes take the form of assignments related to the course and are designed to measure abilities in numeracy, comprehension and report writing. Where the results indicate a need for additional support, there are discussions with each of the identified students within a few weeks of the test. A specialist learning support tutor is employed two half days per week to provide specific support for development of basic skills. Students and teachers speak highly of the help provided but the level of take-up is poor. The learning support tutor also contributes to some class sessions where weaknesses in numeracy skills, in particular, are likely to be exposed. Teachers often provide considerable and much-appreciated individual support for students' learning outside timetabled hours.

38 Teaching staff in the agriculture section have developed and introduced a pilot programme to accredit the prior experience and learning of farm employees, enabling them to achieve an NVQ level 3 qualification. Approximately half the assessment and delivery costs are met by Northumberland TEC. A working group is exploring the issues to be addressed before the model is extended across the college.

39 Course tutors act both as course managers and personal tutors to their students. Each course has a timetabled tutorial period. In the best practice students have frequent meetings with the tutor, mainly to discuss their progress. Actions to improve or maintain progress are mutually agreed between tutor and student and formally noted. There is no overall college policy to guide the tutors in this work and no regular forum for developing best practice. On a minority of courses the tutorials are poor. All full-time students are issued with a file in which to keep their record of achievement but few tutors encourage its use.

40 There is no tutorial curriculum to cover general topics such as study skills and careers advice. Tutors say that they deal with these at an individual level. On courses where there is the expectation that students will progress directly to employment, tutors notify them of appropriate job vacancies. However, they are not made sufficiently aware of wider employment opportunities. National diploma students are not adequately encouraged to explore the possibilities for progress to higher education. A

professional careers officer attends the college one day each week but does not have a direct input to courses. The materials in the careers library require updating.

41 Tutors keep thorough, regularly-updated records of students' achievements and views. Reports are sent to the student each term and parent evenings are held at which progress and difficulties are discussed. Reports are sent to employers frequently and employers send reports of students' achievements on work placement to the college. Tutors visit students regularly when they are on work placements.

42 Of the 179 full-time students, 105 are resident in college accommodation. Up to 55 funded trainees also live at the college for one or two-week periods. The majority of residential students go home at weekends. Most students view the accommodation as adequate and well managed. A warden is on-site each day from 17.00 to 07.00 hours. If they are ill, students report to the warden or tutors who ensure that appropriate help is obtained.

43 Neither students nor staff have access to an independent counselling or advice service. Students' concerns are dealt with by their course tutor. The senior warden, who is a residential member of the teaching staff, has counselling training but also carries a disciplinary responsibility for students living on campus. A local clergyman acts as chaplain to the college and is available to support the students. All new full-time students complete a health questionnaire and those in residence are asked to register with a local general practice and to have a basic medical examination. One of the doctors from the practice holds a surgery at the college each week.

44 All students are members of the student association which is active in organising social and sporting activities. Its committee meets weekly. Recreational and sporting events are arranged between students and between staff and students. Representatives of the association sit as observers on the board of governors, the academic board and the equal opportunities subcommittee.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

45 The average level of attendance in the 46 teaching sessions inspected was over 90 per cent, a figure which accords with the college's own 1993-94 annual review. Most students benefit from teaching which is of good quality. The strengths clearly outweighed the weaknesses in 61 per cent of the classes inspected. Weaknesses outweighed strengths in less than 7 per cent of sessions. The following table summarises the grades given to the teaching sessions inspected.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
NVQ		1	4	2	0	0	7
Other vocational		6	17	13	3	0	39
Total		7	21	15	3	0	46

46 Students experience a variety of activities including a balance of practical and classroom work. The high level of class contact hours does not allow sufficient opportunities for some students to develop responsibility for their own learning.

47 Most programmes were well planned. A few aspects of the curriculum were sometimes dealt with in too much detail or at an inappropriately high level; and their content and balance should be reviewed. Clear links were made between theory and related practical work. Lessons were well organised. There were clear aims and objectives that were made known to the students. In most classes, students were introduced to lesson topics and then given opportunities to develop their skills. Practical sessions were well prepared. Equipment and materials were available for immediate use. Most students started working with a minimum of delay. In a significant minority of classes teachers did not allow sufficient time to summarise what had been learned at the end of the session.

48 The college estate was well used and provided a realistic setting in which students could apply their knowledge to solve problems. For example, students on a national certificate in countryside skills class were studying footpath maintenance and rights of way. They were given a clear brief about re-routing a footpath and then visited the site in small groups to evaluate alternative solutions. Farm staff supported learning by demonstrating commercial enterprise in operation and sometimes by assessing students' practical work. The farm office publishes weekly information on performance and the reasons for operational decisions and this is placed on college notice boards.

49 Teachers displayed a sound understanding of their subjects and maintained good professional standards. Some had in-depth knowledge of the various enterprises carried out on the estate and this was used to good effect in their teaching. In a first-year national diploma group, students tested soils collected from different fields on the college farm. The teacher introduced the session with a challenging set of questions which clearly highlighted the relevance of soil science to crop husbandry. In summarising, the teacher discussed fertiliser requirements for the fields with individual students to help them link theory and practice.

50 In most practical classes, students worked on their own or in small groups. This enabled teachers to devote more time to those who required assistance. In the better sessions, students were encouraged to appraise their own performance. In many of the theory classes, students' interest

was maintained by the varied activities and opportunities for discussion which teachers provided. Skilful questioning ensured that students were involved in their work and that they related what they were learning to their own vocational experience. Misunderstandings were effectively identified and cleared up. One NVQ level 2 session started with a clear and interesting introduction from the teacher in which the main principles of taking hardwood cuttings were explained. The teacher used well-chosen overhead transparencies to illustrate the topic, together with a demonstration of various techniques. Students were given a part-completed worksheet to guide their learning and reduce the burden of note-taking.

51 Although the strengths outweighed the weaknesses in each of the three curriculum areas which were inspected, there were some clear weaknesses. In a number of practical sessions, some students had to wait for long periods while the teacher dealt with others. On occasions, the wide range of experience and abilities within a group meant that little account was taken of individual learning needs. In too many theory sessions, students' activities were restricted mainly to copying notes. Teachers' questions to students were not always well directed and the more knowledgeable students were allowed to dominate the responses. In some national diploma classes, more time should have been spent developing understanding and applying knowledge and less on acquiring facts. Generally, insufficient use was made of worksheets and other learning materials which would have enabled the students to work at a pace which suited them.

52 Assessments were closely related to the aims of the syllabuses. Students were informed of the schedule for course assessments and most of them considered it appropriately balanced. Work was usually well marked. Assignments were returned promptly together with helpful written comments on performance and technical content. The assignments were designed to encourage students to develop their knowledge and understanding. Most had clear written briefs specifying the tasks and the expected outcomes. In some practical groups, students were unsure if their work was to be assessed or what level of competence was required to achieve success. A number of students received assessment criteria which failed to reveal how marks would be allocated. Class notes were orderly and were filed systematically although students in lessons did not always appear sure whether they should be taking notes. Some national diploma students had not developed sufficiently effective note-taking skills.

53 BTEC course documentation explicitly requires the development of core skills such as communication and numeracy. Such skills were clearly identified in assignments and helpful guidance notes were issued to students. Students' progress in developing core skills was recorded effectively on most courses. The college should encourage students to use more information technology, including software packages related to their work.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

54 The majority of students were enthusiastic about their learning experiences. They showed a high level of vocational commitment and often displayed good technical understanding. Many agriculture students had considerable knowledge of the physical and financial performance of farming enterprises. Environmental students applied their knowledge to solving practical problems and related information gathered to the management of an enterprise. These students expressed concern about the value of some aspects of the environmental curriculum.

55 Students were generally confident and capable in their practical work and often respected the high level of expertise shown by teachers. The diverse levels of students' practical ability, observed on many courses, reflected their widely-differing industrial experiences. Students often worked effectively in teams to carry out practical tasks and many had a good understanding of the theory underpinning such work. National diploma students engaged in a tree planting exercise, were able to explain clearly the principles of planting and aftercare and its relevance to hedge management. Agricultural students were careful in handling stock. For example, national diploma students were aware of the care required in moving ewes which were close to lambing.

56 Most written assignments were of an appropriate standard and some of these were of a high standard. A few final year students had difficulty in formulating meaningful conclusions. Students' assignments for the first diploma in land-based skills were of variable quality, although the majority were acceptable. Some assignments were wordprocessed but students' wider information technology skills were poorly developed and students themselves were critical of this. At all levels a minority of students had weak numeracy skills which restricted their progress in technical work. In a first-year class working on application rates for fertilisers some students had considerable difficulty relating area and speed to coverage. Some diploma students undertaking a costing exercise had problems calculating percentages.

57 Less than 9 per cent of students fail to complete their studies. More than 90 per cent of students on environmental courses complete their studies; the figure for students studying the national certificate in countryside skills is 81 per cent. In agriculture the overall completion rate is 80 per cent although for the national diploma course it falls to 67 per cent. The national certificate in horticulture has a 97 per cent completion rate. On part-time vocational courses the completion rate is 98 per cent. College records show that a high proportion of full-time students who leave early do so for reasons not directly related to their course. Financial hardship is the most common reason given for students withdrawing.

58 Last year, 89 per cent of students who completed their studies gained the intended award. However, there is a significant variation between courses and programme areas. Ninety-two per cent of last years students

who completed the national certificate in horticulture course gained an award, four at distinction level. Students on the advanced certificate in woodland management had a 91 per cent pass rate, whereas those on the national certificate in agriculture had a 62 per cent pass rate. Most vocational part-time students achieved their intended qualification. Last year over 70 per cent successfully completed their studies. The pass rate for veterinary nurses was below the national average.

59 The college maintains good records of students' destinations. These show that 60 per cent of last years students entered employment and 33 per cent moved on to further studies. Seventy per cent of first diploma students progressed to other further education courses at the college while 80 per cent of students on the national certificate in agriculture gained employment. Seventy per cent of students on the national certificate in horticulture courses entered full-time work and the others went on to further study. There are very few students who remain unemployed or whose destinations are not known.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

60 The college's strategic plan and charter commit the institution to provide high-quality education and training services for all its customers. There is no implementation strategy or operational statement to suggest how this will be achieved. The college quality assurance policy does not establish a clear framework to ensure continuous improvement in all areas of the college's operation. Most quality improvements result from informal procedures or external monitoring by other agencies. This leads to a lack of standardisation across the college.

61 The most effective procedure operating in the college deals with the training programmes funded by Northumberland TEC and complies with the TEC's 'quality standards for training programmes'. External auditing is comprehensive, rigorous and systematic. Six programme areas were audited in April this year and courses were found to be well run with no underlying problems. Subsequently, the college received the TEC's quality training award and was praised for the high level of satisfaction expressed by trainees.

62 Neither curriculum managers, nor senior managers have clear performance targets for improving the quality of provision. Responsibility for co-ordinating quality issues within the sections is unclear and job descriptions do not emphasise post holders' personal responsibility for maintaining quality.

63 The course evaluation and review procedure introduced in December 1993 is intended to ensure improvement at course level. It sets the framework for regular course reviews and satisfies the requirements of external validating bodies. Course teams are kept well informed of students' progress, achievements and destinations. Students evaluate teaching, learning, assessment and other aspects of college provision.

Their perceptions of courses and college services have been analysed. Results of these analyses are well presented graphically but they are not widely distributed across the college.

64 The college sees accreditation as an Investor in People as the main vehicle for ensuring college-wide quality improvement. The process involves identification of college and personal development needs. A public commitment to the initiative was made in September 1994, though the audit of staff views was undertaken by an external consultant in autumn 1993. Of the 130 questionnaires issued at the time, 106 were returned complete. The audit found several issues which needed to be addressed. At the time of inspection, progress had not been made on some of these.

65 The vice-principal has overall responsibility for teachers' staff development. The needs of support staff are dealt with by the director of administration. There are two college policy documents on staff development and it is unclear how these documents relate one to the other. The college should establish a uniform policy which establishes common procedures for all staff. The staff-development budget is 1.2 per cent of the staffing budget. The college intends to increase this to meet the training needs identified by the Investor in People audit. Course reviews are expected to identify curriculum-related training needs but this does not always happen. Records of staff-development activities are comprehensive and up to date but procedures for disseminating the knowledge from staff-development activities gained are at best informal. Induction for all new staff requires better-structured procedures if it is to be fully effective.

66 The college operates a system of staff development, review and appraisal for teaching staff. It rests on a collaborative review procedure aimed at identifying staff-development needs. There is no measurement of individual performance and line managers are not necessarily the reviewers. Each teacher can choose from one of seven reviewers, some of whom are members of the staff development, review, monitoring and evaluation committee. The college intends that up to 50 per cent of teachers will be reviewed by the end of the year. To date the principal, vice-principal, most teachers and all support staff have yet to be appraised. Training for reviewers and reviewees is inadequate.

67 The college's self-assessment report was produced before the main inspection in May 1995. It follows the framework outlined in the Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*, but omits consideration of staffing, equipment/learning resources and accommodation. The document helped inspectors by setting a context for the inspection but it was not comprehensive and lacked analysis. Its conclusions did not fully accord with the findings of the inspection.

68 The college charter is a well-presented document. A college working group developed initial drafts of the document and all staff were requested to suggest improvements. The charter commits the college to a limited

number of service standards for students, employers and the community. These need developing to make them more explicit, demanding and measurable. The college's performance in relation to these standards has not yet been measured. A review is intended in July this year.

RESOURCES

Staffing

69 Teachers are well qualified and experienced for the work they undertake. More than 90 per cent of staff have a teaching qualification and all, including senior managers, undertaking teaching. More than 76 per cent of teachers, including the vice-principal, are accredited to assess the competence of NVQ candidates and some are qualified to verify the standards achieved. A few staff lack recent industrial experience but good personal contact with industry, including membership of industry-led groups, keeps them up to date. Teachers benefit from their involvement with enterprises on the college estate and more should be offered the opportunity. In one subject area, too much reliance is placed on part-time specialist staff. Few academic staff are women. One member of the senior management team is a woman.

70 Technical support staff are suitably qualified and sufficient in number. Some are currently working towards accreditation as NVQ assessors. Administrative support staff work flexibly as a team and respond favourably to requests for changes in role when this is required. The library does not have a qualified librarian and it is not permanently staffed. There is no technician support for information technology.

Equipment/learning resources

71 All classrooms have a range of teaching aids, including overhead projectors and screens. Audio-visual equipment is easily obtainable. Most specialist equipment is up to date, and of reasonable quality. Horticulture has excellent amenity gardens which are abundantly stocked with a wide range of established shrubs and herbaceous perennials. There is a good quantity of small tools and equipment to support all programme areas except animal care. The range of small animals on veterinary nursing courses is limited. The machinery department has an ageing range of equipment but the college farm equipment is used effectively to support teaching. Additional specialist items are borrowed from local companies as required. Other areas could benefit from improved access to the up-to-date scientific equipment purchased for use on the higher national diploma course.

72 Many books and periodicals are available to support learning but much of the stock is old. Students make good use of the library, even though it is small and cramped and supervised opening hours are limited. Security is poor and there is a high book loss. The college needs improved

procedures for replacing and upgrading the bookstock to meet changing needs.

73 The college is well equipped for information technology. A specialist teacher co-ordinates the development of information technology for teaching across the college. Some computers are becoming outdated but they are serviceable and meet current curriculum needs. The college has recently introduced 12 new workstations through links with Teesside University and this has increased the ratio of workstations to students to 1:2.4. Full-time students have open access to facilities during the day and by use of a security code in the evening. Teaching accommodation for horticultural studies is detached from the main college buildings which restricts students' access to information technology. There is a lack of specialist software to support environmental management and conservation courses. Non-resident students have difficulty in gaining enough access to information technology equipment.

Accommodation

74 College property is generally well managed. The main campus is visually attractive and has extensive landscaping which is well maintained by the horticultural department as part of curriculum activities. The hall courtyard surrounds a large and ancient cedar of Lebanon and this scene features in the college's corporate publicity. The adjoining residential and teaching accommodation has less appeal, consisting of flat-roofed blocks and temporary buildings. The main campus has a grassland farm with dairy and sheep enterprises. Broadlaw is a beef, sheep and arable farm and Carlcroft is an upland sheep farm. The college's lowland farms are used extensively by agriculture students. Residential accommodation is of variable quality. A residential hostel in nearby Ponteland is surplus to requirements and is currently for sale. Students benefit from a large, well-equipped recreational centre. Access to college buildings for students with restricted mobility is difficult.

75 The accommodation strategy, prepared by outside consultants, addresses college needs over a 10-year period. The building maintenance programme is not yet fully implemented. Internal decoration is sometimes poor and much interior space is under used. Some teaching areas are in temporary units which are not suitable for the full range of learning activities. The size of classrooms occasionally restricts opportunities to organise teaching and learning in the most effective way. Staff and students have designed and built a terraced effluent-control scheme for farm waste disposal which performs better than legislation demands. There are car parking facilities for all staff and students.

76 Conservation and land use courses have a wide range of environmental habitats. The woodland provides a variety of land management opportunities and for horticulture the extensive grounds

offer many landscape features. A walled garden is well used, together with excellent glasshouse facilities which include controlled heating, capillary watering and root zone heating systems. Animal care and veterinary facilities are inadequate but the college has plans to improve them.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

77 The college is making progress in achieving its mission, but much remains to be done if it is to build on its achievements. Its strengths are:

- recognition of the need to develop provision and of the action required to address financial and structural issues
- well-organised enrolment and admissions procedures
- well-structured tutorials
- the high standards reached in Northumberland TEC-funded programmes and achievement of the TEC quality training award
- the generally high quality of the students' learning experience
- a wide range of realistic learning opportunities and environments
- students' high levels of achievement and good records of progression to employment and further or higher education
- teachers who are well qualified professionally and academically
- the good models of practice provided by the estate and the farms.

78 The college should:

- speed the diversification of course provision
- improve its planning, particularly at operational level
- improve internal communication particularly the sharing of priorities for development
- ensure more consistent practice in aspects of the college's operations
- introduce systematic quality assurance procedures for all areas of college activity
- improve the quality of accommodation in respect of temporary classrooms
- improve library accommodation and library provision
- upgrade the laboratories and improve the resources for veterinary animal nursing and animal care.

FIGURES

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- 1 Percentage enrolments by age (as at May 1995)

 - 2 Percentage enrolments by level of study (as at May 1995)

 - 3 Full-time equivalent enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at May 1995)

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

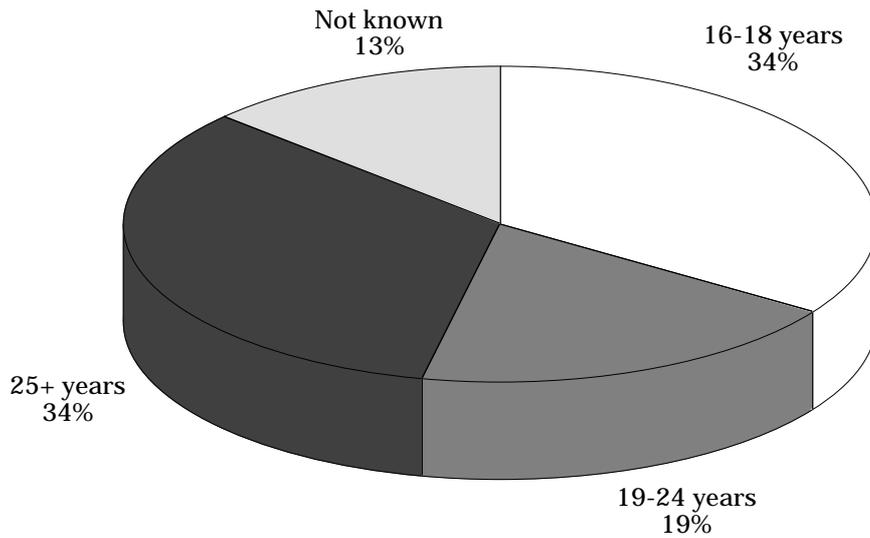
 - 5 Income (for 16 months to July 1994)

 - 6 Expenditure (for 16 months to July 1994)

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

Figure 1

Kirkley Hall College: percentage enrolments by age (as at May 1995)

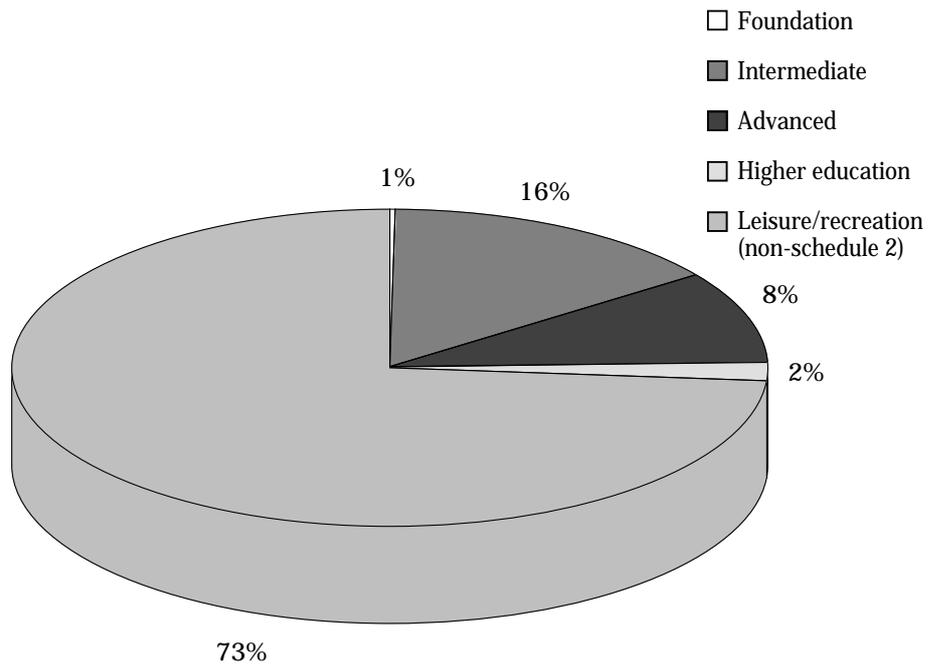


Enrolments: 545

Note: this excludes 1,505 adult education enrolments.

Figure 2

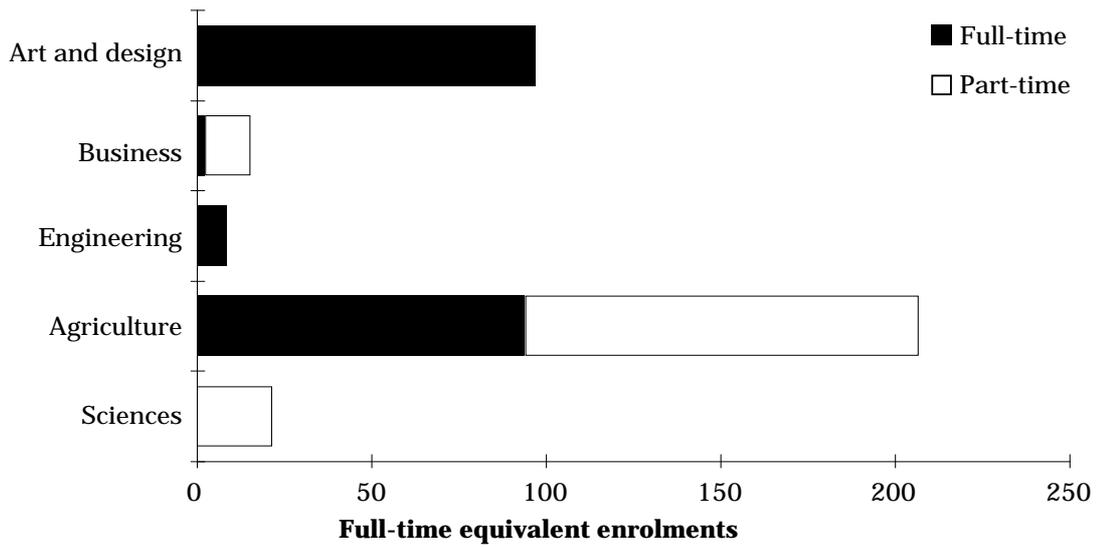
Kirkley Hall College: percentage enrolments by level of study (as at May 1995)



Enrolments: 2,050

Figure 3

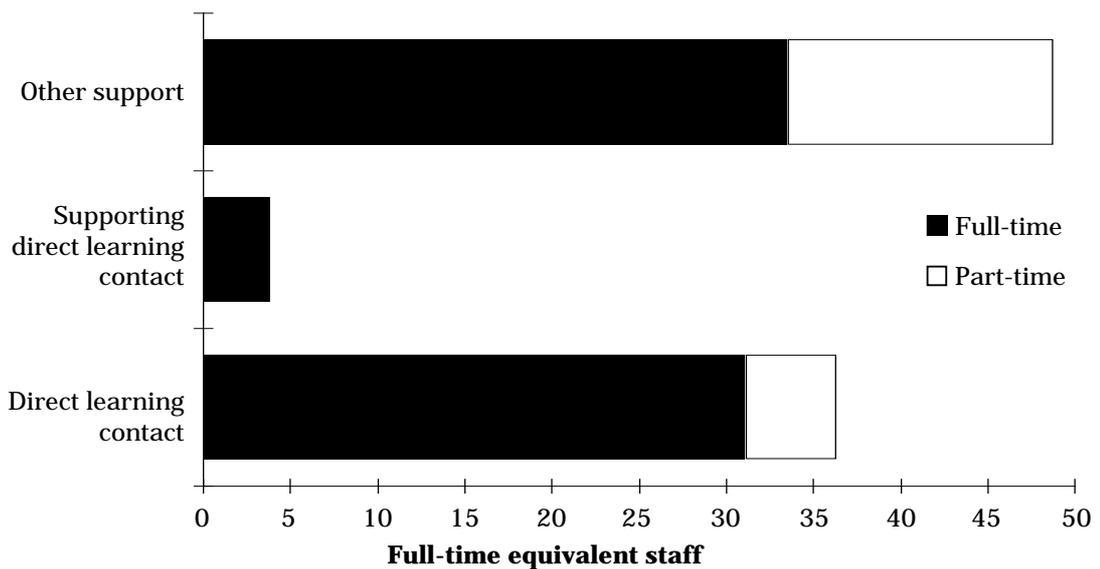
Kirkley Hall College: full-time equivalent enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at May 1995)



Full-time equivalent enrolments: 349

Figure 4

Kirkley Hall College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1994-95)

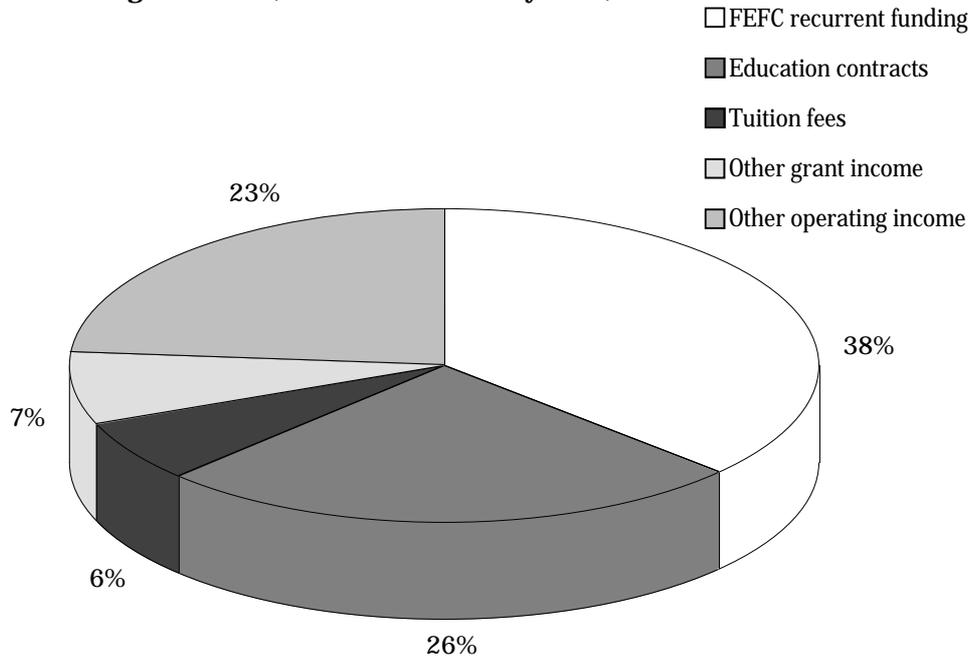


Full-time equivalent staff: 96

Note: this chart excludes seven farm staff.

Figure 5

Kirkley Hall College: income (for 16 months to July 1994)

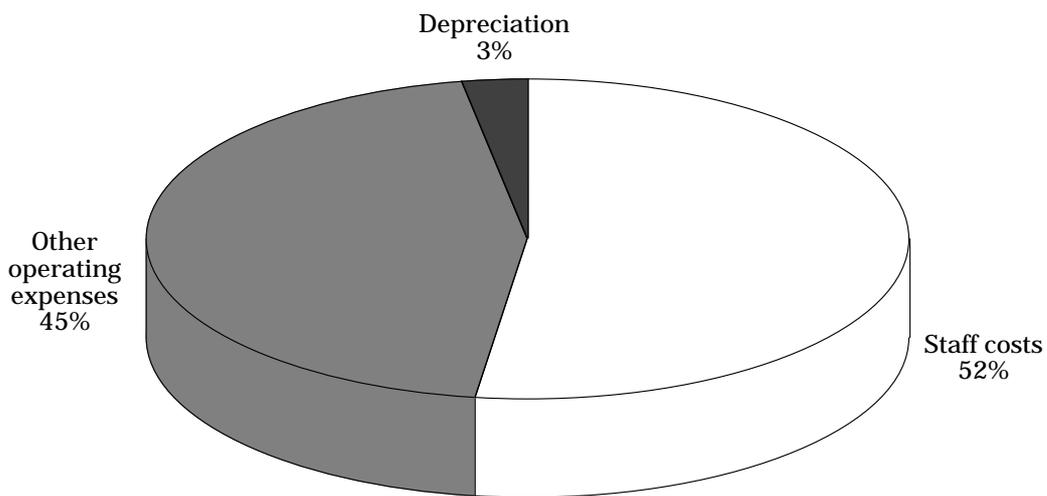


Income: £4,054,000

Note: this chart excludes £3,000 capital grants.

Figure 6

Kirkley Hall College: expenditure (for 16 months to July 1994)



Expenditure: £4,172,000

Note: this chart excludes £17,000 interest payable.

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