

**Otley College of Agriculture and Horticulture  
Reinspection of Quality Assurance: November 1999  
Report from the Inspectorate  
The Further Education Funding Council**

## **THE FURTHER EDUCATION FUNDING COUNCIL**

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

### **REINSPECTION**

*The FEFC has agreed that colleges with provision judged by the inspectorate to be less than satisfactory or poor (grade 4 or 5) should be reinspected. In these circumstances, a college may have its funding agreement with the FEFC qualified to prevent it increasing the number of new students in an unsatisfactory curriculum area until the FEFC is satisfied that weaknesses have been addressed.*

*Satisfactory provision may also be reinspected if actions have been taken to improve quality and the college's existing inspection grade is the only factor which prevents it from meeting the criteria for FEFC accreditation.*

*Reinspections are carried out in accordance with the framework and guidelines described in Council Circulars 97/12, 97/13 and 97/22. Reinspections seek to validate the data and judgements provided by colleges in self-assessment reports and confirm that actions taken as a result of previous inspection have improved the quality of provision. They involve full-time inspectors and registered part-time inspectors who have knowledge of, and experience in, the work they inspect. The opinion of the FEFC's audit service contributes to inspectorate judgements about governance and management.*

### **GRADE DESCRIPTORS**

*Assessments use grades on 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 weaknesses clearly outweigh the strengths*
- *grade 5 - poor provision which has few strengths and many weaknesses.*

*Audit conclusions are expressed as good, adequate or weak.*

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## **Otley College of Agriculture and Horticulture Eastern Region**

### **Reinspection of quality assurance: November 1999**

#### **Background**

Otley College of Agriculture and Horticulture in Suffolk was inspected in January 1998 and the findings were published in inspection report 40/98. Quality assurance was awarded a grade 4.

The key strengths of quality assurance were: the achievement of awards that recognise quality for some areas of work; staff development linked to appraisal and strategic objectives; and the manual for quality assurance procedures. The major weaknesses identified at inspection were: the lack of rigour in application of procedures for quality assurance; some staff unclear on procedures; incomplete records for course reviews; inadequate action plans; lack of rigorous analysis of data on students' achievements; inadequate arrangements for gathering the views of students and employers; and an inadequate self-assessment report.

The reinspection took place in November 1999. Inspectors held meetings with the chair of the governors' quality committee, college management, staff and students. They reviewed a wide range of documentation, including course reviews and self-assessment reports, minutes of meetings held by course teams and managers, the academic board and the corporation.

#### **Assessment**

The college has made some progress in addressing the weaknesses that were identified in the previous inspection. The quality assurance arrangements have been strengthened. The quality policy has been revised and there are clear guidelines for its implementation. A significant development has been the establishment of a quality committee of the corporation. A quality team which includes senior managers has been established. The revised procedures for quality assurance show clearly where responsibility lies for each aspect of quality assurance. A key development is the calendar of activities that contribute to course reviews and self-assessment. The quality assurance manual identified as a strength at the inspection has been improved substantially. Improvements were made to the course review documentation for 1998-99 and these have subsequently undergone major revisions for implementation in the current academic year. However, most course reviews are superficial and staff are still unclear about what is required. The lack of rigorous analysis of data on students' achievements remains a weakness. The college has not developed adequate procedures to produce timely and accurate reports on students' achievements. Courses which have low levels of performance are not always clearly identified. Action plans to address weaknesses in provision are still inadequate. They seldom state concrete actions with measurable outcomes and action plans are not monitored sufficiently. The corporation quality committee has recognised that insufficient progress has been made in effectively implementing quality assurance procedures. The arrangements to systematically gather the views of students and employers are still a weakness. Insufficient analysis and assessment is made of the views of employers in course reviews and scant attention is given to the views of students. No progress has been made in analysing student questionnaires to give a college-wide perspective. The college's quality statements and performance indicators provide a sound base for carrying out audits of the quality system. The quality team carried out a thorough and effective audit of course reviews and self-assessments to check for compliance with the quality procedures. This review accurately identified a lack of rigour in the

application of procedures for quality assurance and this weakness was identified at the original inspection. A comprehensive action plan has been compiled to address the identified weaknesses but it is too early to assess the impact of these planned changes in bringing about improvements.

The self-assessment report is written under the standard headings of Council Circular 97/12, *Validating Self-assessment*. Evidence to substantiate the judgements is not always explicitly stated. The self-assessment process has been improved but it is still insufficiently self-critical. Strengths and weaknesses are lacking in evaluation. Insufficient use has been made of national averages and benchmarking data when making judgements on students' achievements. Insufficient attention has been given to assessing the quality of teaching and learning in the self-assessment report. The outcomes from lesson observations are used to inform staff appraisal and staff development. However, they are not routinely used when assessing the quality of teaching and learning. There is no clear link between course team meetings, course reviews and curriculum self-assessments. Self-assessment is underdeveloped in non-teaching areas. The recently revised college charter has few measurable targets. Procedures to monitor all charter commitments are not yet in place.

Inspectors concluded that the college has made progress on the arrangements for quality assurance but considered that quality assurance procedures are not yet implemented effectively.

**Revised grade:** quality assurance 4.