

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

**The Berkshire
College of
Agriculture**

July 1997

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
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 every four years. The inspectorate also assesses and reports nationally on the curriculum and gives advice to the 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.

*Cheylesmore House
Quinton Road
Coventry CV1 2WT
Telephone 01203 863000
Fax 01203 863100*

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GRADE DESCRIPTORS

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

By June 1996, some 329 college inspections had been completed. The grade profiles for aspects of cross-college provision and programme areas for the 329 colleges are shown in the following table.

College grade profiles 1993-96

Activity	Inspection grades				
	1	2	3	4	5
Programme area	9%	59%	29%	3%	<1%
Cross-college provision	14%	50%	31%	5%	<1%
Overall	12%	54%	30%	4%	<1%

FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 108/97

THE BERKSHIRE COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE

SOUTH EAST REGION

Inspected September 1996-May 1997

Summary

The Berkshire College of Agriculture, near Maidenhead, is a specialist college providing courses primarily for the land-based industries. It has been successful in diversifying its curriculum and achieving substantial growth in student numbers. It has good relationships with the local community and with industry. There is an open and consultative management style. Staff have good working relationships with students. Students have access to an appropriate range of equipment and the college estate offers excellent opportunities for work experience and practical learning. The college should: involve governors more in strategic planning and curriculum matters; address the inconsistencies in management responsibilities and lines of accountability; improve the quality of teaching and learning, tutorial practice and learning support for students; review the deployment of teachers; improve the punctuality of staff and students; and develop procedures for quality assurance, including the use of performance indicators.

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

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Agriculture	3	Engineering	3
Animal care and veterinary nursing	3		
Horticulture	2		
Equine studies	3		

INTRODUCTION

1 The Berkshire College of Agriculture was inspected between September 1996 and May 1997. The college's arrangements for enrolment and induction were inspected in September 1996. During March 1997, six inspectors spent 18 days assessing specialist subject areas. They observed 89 classes and examined students' written and practical work. In May 1997, five inspectors spent 20 days assessing aspects of cross-college provision. They held meetings with governors, college staff, students, employers, parents, a head teacher of a local secondary school and representatives of the local community, the local education authority (LEA) and Thames Valley Training and Enterprise Council (TEC).

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 The Berkshire College of Agriculture was opened in 1949. It provided courses for local farmers. The college continues to offer courses in agriculture but, over the past 10 years, it has diversified considerably and now offers programmes across the spectrum of land-based industries. The college is situated on a single site in the parish of Hurley, one mile from the River Thames and in the middle of a triangle formed by the riverside towns of Henley, Marlow and Maidenhead. Within a 12-mile radius there are several major centres of population and the college is only 28 miles from the centre of London. The college serves the needs of Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire; it also attracts students from west London. The area in which the college is located has a reputation for high technology industries. The unemployment rate for the Thames Valley is under 7 per cent. The proportion of young people over 16 in the area who continue in full-time education is 76 per cent.

3 There are three general further education colleges within a 12-mile radius of the college but the nearest agricultural college is over 30 miles away in Surrey. At the time of the inspection there were 1,740 enrolments, of whom 478 were full-time students and 1,262 part-time students. Student numbers by age, by level of study and by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figures 1, 2 and 3. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4.

4 The curriculum is organised in six programme areas: agriculture and countryside; horticulture; equestrian; business and retail studies, including food and creative studies; engineering; and animal care and veterinary studies. The college, in its mission statement, sets out 'to be the centre of excellence for education and training for the land-based industries and associated professions for the Thames Valley region and west London'.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

5 The college has been active in diversifying its curriculum and it offers a wide range of courses to meet the needs of the land-based industries. It has also developed courses in marine engineering which recruit nationally. Courses are available in agriculture, animal care, business

studies, engineering, equine studies, horticulture, leisure and tourism and veterinary nursing. Part-time courses are offered in most areas at intermediate and advanced level. Progression from foundation to advanced level is possible in most curriculum areas. The college has identified core subjects which are common to a variety of courses. These core disciplines are taught to large groups of students, enabling the college to offer a wide range of specialisms. There are no access to higher education courses or higher education courses and the college has no formal links with higher education institutions. Full-time students have little opportunity for additional accreditation through taking national vocational qualifications (NVQs) alongside their main awards. The college has a contract with Berkshire County Council to provide adult education courses, which are mostly in creative studies. Market research has identified some other smaller specialist markets and courses in childcare are planned to start in September 1997.

6 The college has a strong commitment to providing educational opportunities for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. There is a range of programmes at foundation level and a day-release course. Students have raised money to fund facilities for the Riding for the Disabled Association at the college. Students have also leased an all-terrain wheelchair to improve access to the college grounds. The college works closely with the Windsor and Maidenhead Users Network to promote access to public rights of way for people with physical disabilities.

7 The college is developing a flexible approach to course provision. All courses are modular so that students can mix units from different courses to build an individual programme. However, it is not possible to enrol on single modules to update knowledge and qualifications and there is no provision for distance learning. In some areas, training is provided for companies on their own premises. In collaboration with Reading Borough Council, the college runs training courses in horticulture at Caversham Court in the centre of Reading.

8 A marketing group is responsible for the promotion and publicity programme. Programme area managers advise on the suitability of agricultural shows and exhibitions to promote their courses. The effectiveness of promotional activities is monitored. Publicity material is attractive and appropriate. There are a number of promotional and recruiting events throughout the year. The college is active in the Maidenhead consortium of colleges, schools and businesses. Half the students recruited to college courses are from local schools. During 1995-96, the college hosted visits and provided activities based on the national curriculum for about 2,500 school pupils. Careers advice on land-based industries is provided at 21 publicity events for schools in the region and six careers and information evenings held at the college. The open day and lambing weekend together attract some 19,000 people. The college hosts craft shows, conferences and exhibitions. The college has some European links. For example, in 1996-97, veterinary students from Holland undertook a six-week placement at the college as part of a

European module on their course. Many college students visit European countries on study tours.

9 The industrial relevance of the courses offered is strengthened by the college's involvement with industry lead bodies. It is helping to develop NVQs in marine engineering. A commercial veterinary practice on the campus provides good work experience for students. Every course has an industrial liaison panel but, with the exception of the greenkeeping committee, they have little involvement in the design of the curriculum. The greenkeepers' liaison committee is assisting in raising funds for a golf greenkeeping academy at the college. Many employers support courses by offering to have visits from students. A significant amount of equipment has been sponsored by employers. The co-ordination of full-cost courses for employers is not well developed and opportunities to generate income are not exploited fully.

10 The college works closely with the local TEC. The college won a Competitiveness Fund bid to develop resources for marine engineering, and funding has been contributed by major manufacturers of marine equipment. The 'Routes to Achievement in Management' project identified the need for more management courses and, as a result, weekend courses in veterinary practice management have been run. The 'Back to the Land' project provided training opportunities for ex-offenders, but recruitment was small. A successful Discretionary Fund bid will provide information technology and audio-visual aids for a management training centre. The college has its own managing agency for TEC-funded training.

11 The college is responsive to the needs of the local community. Students have worked with local parish councils on conservation and landscape projects. The college has supported a number of Berkshire County Council's initiatives, including the 'grow a plant' competition for primary school children. It provided judges for this competition and for others, including the Royal Windsor Rose Show. The college has won awards from Berkshire County Council and a major international confectionary company for good environmental practice.

12 Membership of the equal opportunities group is drawn from the teaching and support areas of the college. There are no student members. The group wrote the disability statement for the college and drafted the charter. It has not monitored the implementation of the charter. The new children's nursery is open to the public. Staff are offered a discount on fees but students are not. There have been two projects funded by the European Social Fund to encourage wider participation from specific groups: one promoted courses to help women to enter engineering and the other training for ex-offenders.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

13 There are 15 members of the corporation board, including the principal. Eleven are independent members, one is from the TEC, there is a staff member and a student member. Members have a relevant range of

experience. Legal experience is provided by the clerk, who is a solicitor. There are two women members. Governors take a keen interest in the college and are well known to staff. The chairman was the first president of the college's student association.

14 The corporation board has an appropriate committee structure. There are four main committees: audit; finance and general purposes; remuneration; and a committee for recruiting new members. A number of other subcommittees report to the board through the finance and general purposes committee which draws together all issues which place demands on college resources. This arrangement works well. All committees have appropriate terms of reference and the minutes of their meetings distinguish clearly between matters for information and action. Papers for the board and its committees are comprehensive. In some cases, clearer identification of the key issues would help to focus discussion more quickly. Not all papers are sent out in time for members to consider them fully. The corporation meets four times each year. The finance and general purposes committee meets more frequently and other committees meet when necessary. Attendance at board meetings has been 77 per cent on average; attendance at committees is higher.

15 Corporation board members have a clear view of their roles and responsibilities and they observe the distinction between governance and management. They take a special interest in the college's financial affairs, particularly its use of public funds and its commercial activities. Members are aware that they have spent a disproportionate amount of time upon these matters and have left issues such as strategic planning relatively neglected. Governors are kept informed about enrolments, retention rates and students' achievements in comparison with regional and agricultural sector averages. Governors support the college strongly. They keep a close eye on many college activities. The principal is not formally appraised by the corporation but his performance is discussed with him informally by the chairman and the vice-chairman. There is an induction programme for governors and many of them also attend training events.

16 The strategic plan was produced by the college's senior managers. There was little opportunity for staff or governors to be involved. The process for developing the new plan has been changed to give more scope for involvement by board members and staff. The board held a special meeting to consider the new strategic plan and a series of meetings has been held for staff to contribute. There is evidence that the plan is being used to guide the actions of programme area managers.

17 A new structure for managing the curriculum was introduced in September 1996. It was designed to provide clearer and wider responsibilities for middle managers so that senior managers would have more time to focus on strategic responsibilities. Restructuring has been only partially successful in achieving this goal. Programme area managers have taken on additional budgetary and personnel responsibilities and they are clearly accountable to a senior manager. There is some lack of

clarity about reporting relationships and curriculum responsibilities at senior management level. The respective duties of programme area managers, programme tutors and curriculum team leaders overlap.

18 The college has a broad range of committees which meet regularly. The senior management team comprises the principal, vice-principal and two assistant principals. It meets weekly and the personnel manager acts as secretary. There are at least 16 other groups or committees and most meet termly. While these meetings play an important part in creating a flow of information, they make considerable demands upon the time of staff. The focus and reporting responsibilities of these committees are not always clear.

19 The impact of the imperfections in the committee and management structures is reduced because the college is small, it occupies a single site, and staff have many opportunities to meet informally. The principal and other senior managers are readily accessible and have developed an open and consultative management style. A weekly news bulletin for staff also makes an important contribution to good communications.

20 The college has achieved substantial growth. Between 1993 and 1997, the number of full-time students has doubled. The college has consistently exceeded the growth targets agreed with the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). Budgets for materials and small items of equipment are delegated to 30 budget holders. All have received adequate training, and they understand the basis for the distribution of funds. Budget holders receive sufficient information to enable them to monitor their expenditure. Computer systems are used for financial reporting and for recording student data. Confidence among staff in the student data is growing. The college's income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1996 are shown in figures 5 and 6. The college has considerably reduced its average level of funding from £23.06 per unit in 1994-95 to £19.91 per unit in 1996-97. The median for all agricultural colleges in 1996-97 is £22.86 per unit.

21 The college has a range of policies, including those for health and safety and equal opportunities. A policy on the environment is being produced. Senior staff take responsibility for implementing policy.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

22 The various aspects of support for students are co-ordinated by the vice-principal. There is an expectation that the staff responsible for supporting students will do their work effectively without supervision and monitoring. Procedures for recruiting students are generally effective. Information about the college is given out by local schools, by the careers service, and by the college itself at local trade events and shows. The central admissions office responds promptly to enquiries and deals with applications efficiently. Feedback from students is used to improve the recruitment process.

23 Communication between the administrative staff responsible for admissions and teachers responsible for interviewing prospective students is good. The selection process for full-time students is well conceived and it includes an interview, a tour of the college, an explanation of course requirements and an agreement with the prospective student setting out the work which should be completed before entry. Students' particular needs are recorded in varying degrees of detail. Students who are uncertain of their choice of course are given impartial guidance by programme area managers. The level of detail provided about each individual course varies. Students and their parents do not always receive a clear explanation of course content or of its level, assessment requirements and opportunities for progression. The college has clear policy statements on the accreditation of students' prior learning and on how assessment can take account of the needs of individual students.

24 Most students find the introduction which they are given to the college and to their courses welcoming. However, students often have insufficient opportunity to participate and to get to know each other. They are largely passive recipients of information. The length of the induction period varies between one and five weeks and students may transfer between courses during induction. The students' handbook provides some basic information but it is not comprehensive and it is too big to use as a working document for daily reference. Additional information, including the college charter, is readily available to students in the college's resource centre. Students are aware of the college charter and of their rights and responsibilities.

25 The college provides learning support for full-time and part-time students. Their requirements are identified through declarations made by students on application forms, from evidence provided in school references, and by basic skills testing during induction. All students identified as requiring additional support are invited to attend the learning support centre and are offered the opportunity to enter into a learning support contract. Eight per cent of full-time students, and some part-time students, receive learning support. In some curriculum areas, including science and mathematics for engineering students, and mathematics for animal care students, additional specialist support is offered through workshop sessions. The college offers the general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) in English and mathematics.

26 Students are complimentary about teachers' willingness to respond to their requests for help. There is a clear policy statement on tutorial support and all full-time students are allocated a personal tutor. Full-time students, and some part-time students, attend both group and individual tutorials every term, but tutorial support for part-time students is inconsistent. The effectiveness of tutorial sessions varies and there is too little monitoring of tutorial practice. Tutorial time is often poorly used and the action plans which students prepare are not sufficiently detailed. Students' attendance is monitored. Reasons are sought for persistent

absence. There are close links with the Thames Valley Careers Service which provides a well-defined level of advice to students. On some courses, students are given too little help in making job applications.

27 Parents who contact the college by telephone or visit speak highly of its responsiveness. However, some parents do not feel they are kept sufficiently well informed about students' progress. There is inconsistent practice on reporting to parents. Some parents suggest that progress reports provide too little information and are too reassuring about students' achievements. Some parents and students say that discipline at the college is not handled consistently and that penalties are sometimes inappropriate.

28 The college provides a range of services for students. There is residential accommodation for about 140 students and additional accommodation for students who carry out farm or yard duties early in the morning. The student services manager co-ordinates an effective team of four full-time and five part-time wardens. They are viewed by students as helpful and approachable. A local doctor holds a surgery at the college once a week. There is a part-time counsellor, and students are able to make confidential appointments. The college provides transport for students, but it does not always arrive at the college in time for the start of lessons.

29 There is an active students' association. However, students on the executive committee do not have a clear understanding of their role because they are not given explicit guidance. The college has teams in rugby, football, hockey and netball. It hosts the Berkshire Rugby Sevens, in which 22 agricultural colleges compete. Students take part in fund-raising activities, for example, the lambing weekend, and they raise money for charity and for additional resources for the student body. They hold a range of discos and dances.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

30 Forty-six per cent of the lessons observed had strengths which clearly outweighed weaknesses. This figure is 17 per cent below the average for the sector for all lessons observed during the 1995-96 programme of inspections according to the *Chief Inspector's Annual Report 1995-96*. In 13 per cent of lessons, weaknesses clearly outweighed the strengths; this figure is well above the average of 8 per cent recorded in the same report. The average level of attendance in the lessons inspected was 78 per cent. The lowest attendance was in engineering at 65 per cent, and the highest in agriculture at 90 per cent. The average number of students in each session was 10. Both staff and students sometimes arrived very late for lessons. 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
GNVQ	2	5	9	2	0	18
NVQ	0	7	4	2	0	13
Other, including vocational	8	19	23	8	0	58
Total	10	31	36	12	0	89

31 The quality of course and lesson planning varies. In many cases, schemes of work are no more than lists of topics. Schemes of work and lesson plans in equine studies do not show clearly the links between theory and practice. Lesson plans are generally available but their usefulness varies widely. Some are thorough but most do not pay sufficient attention to teaching methods. Some lesson plans in engineering are well presented and carefully designed, but in agriculture they do not lay down what students are expected to achieve. Schemes of work are not generally shared with students. In a few lessons, the planning and preparation was inadequate. For example, in one practical lesson students wasted one-third of the time available moving other equipment to reach the machinery they needed for the task.

32 In the better lessons, aims and objectives were stated clearly at the start and students were aware that the lesson was part of a planned programme of study. Teachers use a variety of methods to maintain students' interest and regularly question students to check their understanding. In a lesson on mechanisation in agriculture, the students were divided into groups which competed against each other to complete the tasks set by the teacher. The lesson was lively, it covered the topic effectively, it involved all students and it provided the teacher with information on whether or not the students had understood the topic. Some teachers use group work skilfully. For example, students in a business studies class were divided into three groups and asked to produce a list of accounting terms. The task was explained clearly. Each group of students reviewed the work produced by the others and the teacher summarised their findings well. In equine studies, teachers conclude their lessons by indicating how the objectives have been achieved and by introducing the topic for the next session.

33 In the weaker lessons, teachers fail to use appropriate visual aids and do not introduce a sufficient variety of activities. In some lessons students spent too much time copying notes. For example, in a lesson on veterinary nursing, students were too busy taking notes to listen to the teacher's explanations. Though the teacher had provided a handout, no attempt was made to use a model or skeleton which would have helped students to understand the topic more easily. In many lessons in equine studies and business studies teachers gave students little opportunity to contribute to the work. Often teachers saw themselves as the only source

of knowledge and did not set students tasks which would have involved them in using a wider range of resources for their learning.

34 Most teachers make good use of their own industrial experience, and in some cases, that of their students as well. Many students in engineering are adults and teachers adopt a suitable approach to teaching them. In a lesson on carburettors, good use was made of teaching aids and equipment was passed around the class. The teacher noted the key points on a whiteboard and provided extra detail in a handout. The most effective lessons made good use of students' experience on the college estate.

35 In some curriculum areas, assignments are set regularly and marked promptly. Assessment criteria are made clear to students and teachers give detailed comments on how students might improve their work. Equine studies students receive comprehensive handbooks which contain schedules for practical assessment. Teachers keep accurate records of students' progress. However, in agriculture, teachers do not keep to assessment schedules and students sometimes have to try to complete too many assignments at the same time. Assignment briefs in animal care and veterinary nursing are detailed but the work set is often not sufficiently challenging. They do not encourage students to be analytical or to apply their knowledge. In business studies and equine studies, teachers' comments on students' work are sometimes unhelpful and in horticulture, teachers' remarks are too brief to be useful in helping students to improve their work. In some cases, grammatical and other errors are not corrected and it is not always clear to students why particular grades are awarded. On NVQ courses, teachers do not always make enough use of evidence of students' achievements from work placements.

36 In most cases, practical work is well organised and proper attention is paid to health and safety. Teachers generally use an appropriate range of teaching methods and students' work is properly assessed. In a successful lesson on the first diploma course in countryside studies, students were engaged in a practical lesson in bricklaying. Towards the end of the lesson, the students were given a well-designed self-assessment sheet and asked to appraise their own skills. They discussed this assessment with the teacher. Other students offered constructive comments and made comparisons with their own work. In another practical session, students worked in small groups to prepare horses for events. They helped each other and worked competently around the horses. However, equine studies students do not always have enough time to develop the practical skills that are needed to meet the criteria of the British Horse Society's higher level qualifications. In agriculture, teachers fail to make clear to students the relationship between work in the classroom and practical work on the farm. In a few practical lessons, poor planning by the teacher and a lack of resources hindered students' learning. For example, in one lesson, there were not enough fish tanks for a group of students who were learning how to set up an aquarium; there were nine students and only two tanks.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

37 Students are generally well motivated. They work well together and they enjoy their studies. Their practical work shows a high degree of effort and care, and most students develop appropriate levels of skill. One part-time student was awarded a contract for a floral display at the Horse of the Year Show and other students on her course worked together to install it. In some areas, students' work is of a particularly high standard. For example, a part-time business studies student researched the effectiveness of communications at a veterinary centre and the conclusions from the report were put into practice.

38 Seventy per cent of the 27 students aged 16 to 18 on the advanced vocational courses which were included in the performance tables published by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) were successful. This performance measure places the college in the middle third of colleges in the further education sector. On the same performance measure for intermediate vocational courses, 81 per cent of the 54 students in their final year of study were successful in 1996, placing the college in the top third of colleges in the further education sector.

39 Results on advanced vocational courses are variable. In agriculture, equine studies and horticulture the results are good. Pass rates in veterinary nursing have improved and are above the national average. One student achieved the highest marks in the United Kingdom in her final veterinary nursing examinations. There were poor results on the national diploma courses in animal care and marine engineering and on the full-time advanced general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) in business studies. The following table shows success rates on full-time advanced level vocational courses for students completing their studies in 1994, 1995 and 1996.

Success rates* on advanced vocational courses (including national diplomas and advanced GNVQs)

	1994 (%)	1995 (%)	1996 (%)
Agriculture	71	85	80
Animal care	-	-	46
Veterinary nursing	45	50	61
Engineering	-	38	18
Equine studies	64	70	80
Business	-	-	38
Horticulture	-	74	74

**success rate=percentage of those enrolled on 1 November of year one of the course who achieved the qualification.*

40 Students on the advanced GNVQ in business studies, and the intermediate GNVQs in business studies and leisure and tourism also take British Horse Society qualifications in riding and stabling. They are generally more highly motivated, enthusiastic and more successful in their equine studies than on their GNVQ courses. From September 1997, the college intends to offer a first diploma in horse studies, a national diploma in horse studies, and a national certificate in the management of horses.

41 There are some good results at intermediate level on vocational courses. Small numbers of students are enrolled on the first diploma courses in agriculture and countryside skills and most are successful. However, only 50 per cent of those enrolled on the certificate course in agriculture achieved a qualification in 1996. Results from animal care courses are good and those from veterinary nursing courses have improved. In engineering, pass rates have been consistently good on the marine craft fitters course and on the part-time courses for agricultural and horticultural mechanics. In 1994-95 and 1995-96, a student in marine craft fitting achieved the City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) bronze medal of excellence. In each of the past three years, students on the agricultural mechanics course and the horticultural mechanics course also achieved the C&G bronze medal of excellence. However, although numbers are small, results from the full-time course for agricultural mechanics have been poor for the last three years. Pass rates in garden design have been consistently good over the last two years. Results on other horticultural courses vary widely. The following table shows success rates on full-time intermediate level vocational courses for students completing their studies in 1994, 1995 and 1996.

Success rates* on intermediate vocational courses (including first diplomas, intermediate GNVQs and NVQ level 2)

	1994 (%)	1995 (%)	1996 (%)
Agriculture	61	80	63
Animal care	88	97	90
Veterinary nursing	40	69	67
Engineering	38	70	76
Equine studies	96	80	92
Business	-	60	50
Leisure and tourism	-	-	67
Horticulture	90	72	76

**success rate=percentage of those enrolled on 1 November of year one of the course who achieved the qualification.*

42 Equine studies students on full-time and part-time courses are generally successful. Pass rates on the NVQ level 1 in amenity horticulture have varied over the last three years. All the students who completed the rural industries course were successful. The following table shows success rates on full-time foundation level vocational courses for students completing their studies in 1994, 1995 and 1996.

Success rates* on full-time foundation vocational courses (including NVQ level 1)

	1994 (%)	1995 (%)	1996 (%)
Equine studies	-	84	84
Business	-	60	38
Horticulture	70	53	66
Rural industries	-	-	85

**success rate=percentage of those enrolled on 1 November of year one of the course who achieved the qualification.*

43 Retention rates are good on many courses. In 1996, there was a 100 per cent retention rate on all full-time veterinary nursing courses, on the national diploma in horticulture, and the first diploma in agriculture. Retention rates were low on some courses in 1996, including the national diploma in animal care at 62 per cent, the NVQ level 2 in animal care at 54 per cent, the GNVQ advanced in business studies at 52 per cent, and the national diploma in marine engineering at 66 per cent. Retention and pass rates were particularly low on courses leading to Royal Horticultural Society qualifications. In 1996, only eight of the 21 students who originally enrolled completed the Royal Horticultural Society general evening course and only three of these achieved a qualification. In the same year, only one student out of the eight who enrolled on the Royal Horticultural Society advanced evening course achieved an award. There were similar results in 1994 and 1995. Pass rates on the part-time courses which are offered during the day are better, but they are still poor. Many students who enrol on the Royal Horticultural Society courses do not enter for assessment. The college intends to charge for these courses at full cost in future and to pay a rebate to those who are examined for the award.

44 Students' destinations are monitored but a high proportion of destinations are unknown. The college contacted all the students whose destinations were unknown for 1994-95 and 1995-96, but the response was poor. The college needs to improve this aspect of its data. A small number of students progress to higher education. The destinations of students in 1996 are shown in the following table.

Destination of students, 1996

Destination	Number	Percentage
Further education	489	31%
Higher education	42	3%
Entering new employment	164	10%
Continuing current employment	353	23%
Other	91	6%
Not known	427	27%
Total	1,566	100%

QUALITY ASSURANCE

45 The college does not have a quality assurance policy. A series of briefing papers for staff outlines aspects of quality assurance. There are guidelines for students which describe their entitlements. There are some elements of good practice, but they have not been brought together in a coherent approach to the management of quality assurance. Seventeen committees and groups report to the academic board but much of their work is insufficiently focused on quality assurance matters and it lacks adequate analysis. The academic board reports on quality assurance issues to the principal and to the corporation, but its role consists primarily of receiving information. It is insufficiently critical and it fails to give strategic direction.

46 The college has few indicators to help it monitor its performance and it does not define standards in many important areas. Responsibility for monitoring performance across the college is unclear. Programme area managers identify targets for enrolment but there are no targets for retention rates or for students' achievements. The college charter sets out students' entitlements. Standards for tutorials, punctuality and deadlines for handing in work are listed in the student handbook. However, compliance with these standards is not monitored and practice varies from course to course. Formal complaints are dealt with by the principal or the vice-principal and the nature of complaints which have been received and the action that has been taken are reported to the governors.

47 Course teams undertake annual reviews which form the basis of a self-assessment report. However, these reports are not based on sufficient evidence to make their judgements reliable. They do not evaluate enrolment trends, retention rates or students' achievements and progression, nor do they consider the quality of teaching and the effectiveness of support for students. Course team meetings are held regularly and there is a specified agenda of cross-college issues at the start of each meeting. The discussion that flows from this agenda has largely superseded curriculum issues. Reports from external verifiers are received

by the vice-principal in his role as quality assurance manager. Course teams are required to produce an action plan in response to issues raised by external verifiers and these are systematically monitored. Internal verification has been supported by staff development and the introduction of standardised procedures but the college would benefit from ensuring that teams learn from each other's experience.

48 Questionnaires seeking students' perceptions about their courses are issued after the initial induction period and prior to students leaving the college. The questions are not always well designed and students' responses do not generally provide enough information to help improve the quality of teaching and learning. Students' open comments on questionnaires often relate to teaching and learning, but course teams do not analyse them thoroughly or implement the actions which are required. On some courses, students are invited to attend course reviews and to discuss the outcomes of surveys of students' views. The results of questionnaires completed by employers highlight factors affecting schemes of work and, in some areas, these have been taken into account and action implemented to secure improvements.

49 The college uses staff team meetings to identify issues of concern. Senior managers, programme area managers and support area managers meet regularly. They work together to formulate policy and to respond to college issues. They feel that they are well informed, that they can readily voice concerns, and that they are part of the college's procedures for planning. Suggestion boxes have been sited around the college and senior managers are quick to respond to any suggestions made. However, neither staff meetings nor the suggestion box scheme make a measured contribution to improving the quality of the students' learning experience.

50 There is a clear staff-development policy and a planned programme of relevant training events. Part-time staff are encouraged to undertake training. The effectiveness of staff-development activities is reviewed and some staff teams share what has been learned. Managers are trained to be aware of the college's aims and objectives and of the environment in which it operates. All new staff participate in an induction programme which is seen as welcoming and informative. The responsibility for this induction rests with managers and it is monitored centrally.

51 The college is working towards the Investor in People standard. There was a low response to the initial questionnaire designed to identify staff perceptions of the college. As a result, the staff-development programme has been used to improve communication and to introduce staff to personal development reviews. These are used by the college instead of appraisal and all teachers and a significant number of support staff have undertaken personal development reviews. Task observation is not part of this process but most full-time teachers have been observed in lessons recently. Staff acknowledge that observation of their work has been informative and helpful, but most of the common issues that emerged have yet to be pursued in order to bring about improvement.

52 The college's self-assessment report gave little evidence against which the validity of strengths and weaknesses could be judged. It was imprecise and overgenerous in its judgements. The standards and performance indicators identified in the report are not analysed systematically. Targets for improvement are imprecise and there is insufficient information about how their achievement will be monitored.

RESOURCES

Staffing

53 There are 34 full-time and fractional permanent teachers. Just under half of them are women. There are 22 part-time teachers. There are 23 full-time equivalent learning support staff, including 14 instructors, and 41 full-time equivalent staff responsible for administration, the farm, college premises and the estate. The college employs 24 staff to provide its own catering, housekeeping and cleaning services. The children's nursery employs six staff. Payroll costs are about half the college's expenditure. Staff are appropriately qualified. Forty-seven per cent of teachers are qualified to higher national diploma or degree level. Most teachers are qualified to at least one level above that at which they teach. Forty-seven per cent of full-time staff have recent industrial experience. Fifty-nine per cent of the full-time and permanent teachers have a teaching qualification, three are currently working towards one and five newly-appointed full-time teachers are scheduled to start teacher training in September 1997. Forty per cent of instructors have a teaching qualification. Sufficient staff have achieved assessor and verifier awards to run the GNVQ and NVQ courses.

54 A qualified personnel manager and her assistant are responsible for staffing matters. All staff have access to a comprehensive handbook which is updated regularly. Staff have up-to-date job descriptions, but the personnel management records are not complete and the data are underused. Staff deployment is monitored every week and reviewed each term, but it is not evaluated against targets. Some staff workloads are unequal. Allowances, in the form of remission from teaching duties for staff holding other responsibilities, are generous. However, many staff also work during weekends supporting open days and other events.

Equipment/learning resources

55 Equipment levels are generally adequate to support the curriculum. A combination of hiring, leasing and purchasing has meant that much of the large plant used is sufficiently up to date to provide students with relevant industrial practice. The animal care unit has a wide range of animals in appropriate numbers for course needs. The equestrian centre has about 45 horses available for students' use. Efficient use is made of equipment by sharing it between courses. For example, horticultural students use the mowing machines and engineering students service them. The college is generally well equipped in marine and agricultural

engineering. The newly-opened marine engineering centre has many modern engines and co-operative arrangements with suppliers have been used to further extend the range of machinery available to students. The college farm and estate provides a good learning resource for agriculture, horticulture and countryside studies. Many students develop their practical skills by working on the farm and they learn to take responsibility for animal welfare. The glasshouses are computer controlled and they provide a range of plant habitats. An open-ground nursery is available for amenity horticulture and conservation students. Laboratory facilities are adequate for current needs.

56 All teaching rooms have overhead projectors and screens and either whiteboards or chalk boards. There is an adequate range of audio-visual aids. Efficient reprographic facilities are available to students and staff. There is an assets register and inventories are updated regularly and audited annually. There is no formal equipment replacement policy.

57 The college has a network of 33 modern computers and four older machines which are available for students' use. Most of the machines are situated in the information technology room and students may use these machines freely when the room is not timetabled for classes. Students also have access to seven machines in the learning resource centre. Although the ratio of full-time equivalent students to computers is only 13:1, there is no evidence that demand to use them outstrips their availability. All staff have access to computers, most of which are linked to the college network. There are no computer-aided design facilities for landscape design and engineering students.

58 The resource centre provides a good service for students. It is open until 19.00 hours on four evenings each week in term time. It is well managed by a full-time qualified librarian. Formal links between resource centre staff and teachers in the curriculum areas are uneven, although many informal discussions take place. The resource centre is small for the number of students using it but it is generally bright and conducive to study. There are 77 study places which provide separate areas for quiet or silent study. The annual budget of £15,000 was increased this year by a further £8,000. A substantial donation from the local Grassland Society has enabled the purchase of a considerable number of additional books on agriculture. There are about 6,500 books on the catalogue, nearly half of which have been published since 1990. Over 160 journals are taken regularly and the collection of 360 videos and 50 slide sets is well used. The 36 compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) databases and Internet link are increasingly used by students. There is also a well-stocked careers education section.

Accommodation

59 The college farm and estate covers about 272 hectares. The farm is two-thirds grassland, the remainder being devoted to crops and pig paddocks. There is a herd of 140 Holstein Friesians and a new

computerised milking parlour. The sheep flock comprises 240 breeding ewes. The pig herd has been expanded to 240 sows, and piglets are raised indoors and outdoors. The college manages the Woolley Firs environmental education centre which provides a wide range of environmental activities for pupils from local schools.

60 The main teaching and administrative buildings are at the centre of the estate and they consist of permanent and temporary accommodation of varied quality and age. An eighteenth-century grade I listed mansion, Hall Place, houses the college administration and the learning resource centre. The drawing room is used as the staff common room and is also used regularly for receptions, meetings and other functions. Facilities for marine engineering have been formed from converted farm buildings, and the horticulture and floristry centres have been developed from a barn. Some of the small animal and veterinary nursing areas are in converted poultry sheds and one of these lacks adequate ventilation. A new dog grooming room was almost complete at the time of the inspection. A working veterinary practice is located on the estate. The indoor and outdoor arenas for equine studies are suitable for teaching and for competitions but there is no covered storage area for hay and straw.

61 The college monitors its use of accommodation. Room utilization is below the college target, although it is better than last year. Classrooms and workshops are generally clean. The maintenance schedule is reviewed regularly and the maintenance department repairs faults promptly. About half the estate is accessible to people with restricted mobility. The college is currently updating its accommodation strategy.

62 Seven hostels provide adequate residential accommodation for students. Some have secure entry and most external areas are covered by security cameras. There is a central laundry room for students' use. The hostels are used by language students and young people on activity holidays during college vacations. The college's Vaughan-Morgan centre has an indoor sports hall and fitness centre, a common room and a bar with television. The college has pitches for rugby, football, hockey and cricket, tennis courts and an outdoor swimming pool. The students' dining room has seating for 120 and there are vending machines around the campus.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

63 The particular strengths of the college are:

- the diversification of provision and wide range of courses
- good relationships with the local community and with industry
- the substantial growth in student numbers
- the open and consultative management style
- good working relationships between staff and students

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- the wide range of equipment
 - excellent opportunities for work experience provided by the college estate.
- 64 If it is to improve the quality of its provision the college should address:
- the need to involve governors more closely in strategic planning and curriculum matters
 - inconsistencies in management responsibilities and lines of accountability
 - the below average standard of teaching
 - the deployment of teachers
 - the need for better tutorial practice and support for students
 - the poor punctuality of staff and students
 - the underdeveloped arrangements for quality assurance, including performance indicators.

FIGURES

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- 1 Percentage student numbers by age (as at November 1996)

 - 2 Percentage student numbers by level of study (as at November 1996)

 - 3 Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at November 1996)

 - 4 Staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (as at July 1996)

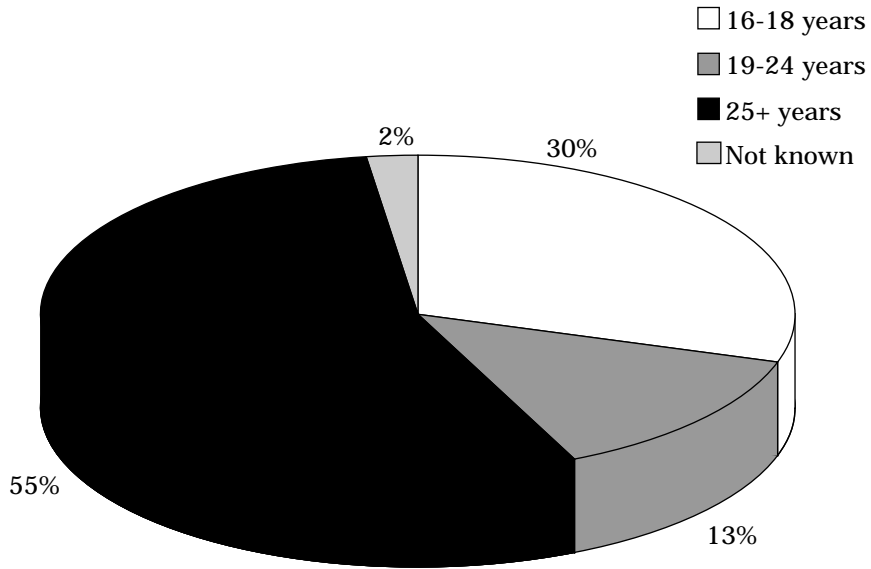
 - 5 Income (for 12 months to July 1996)

 - 6 Expenditure (for 12 months to July 1996)

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

Figure 1

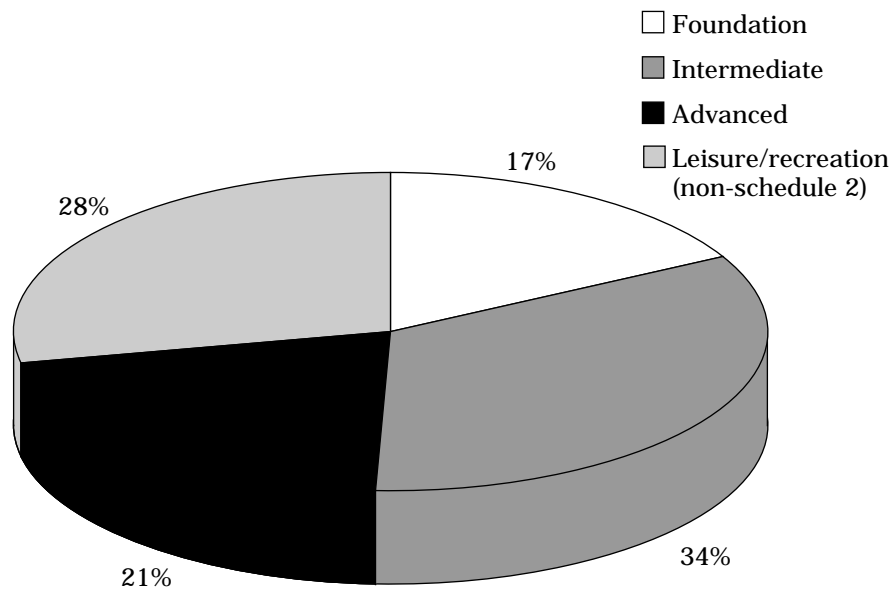
The Berkshire College of Agriculture: percentage student numbers by age (as at November 1996)



Student numbers: 1,740

Figure 2

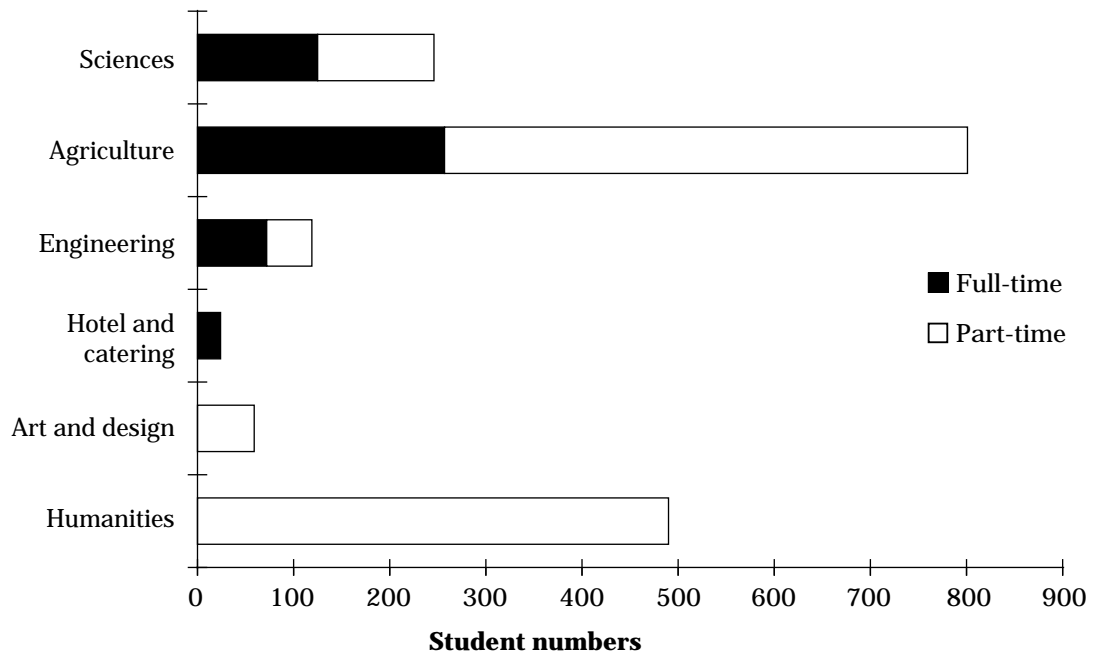
The Berkshire College of Agriculture: percentage student numbers by level of study (as at November 1996)



Student numbers: 1,740

Figure 3

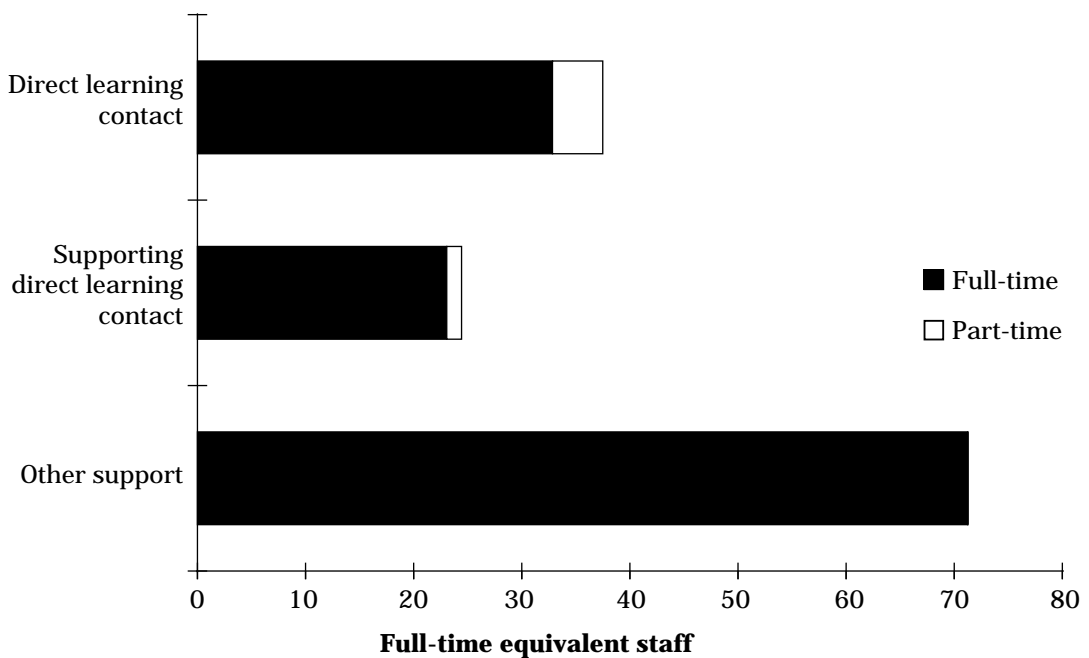
The Berkshire College of Agriculture: student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at November 1996)



Student numbers: 1,740

Figure 4

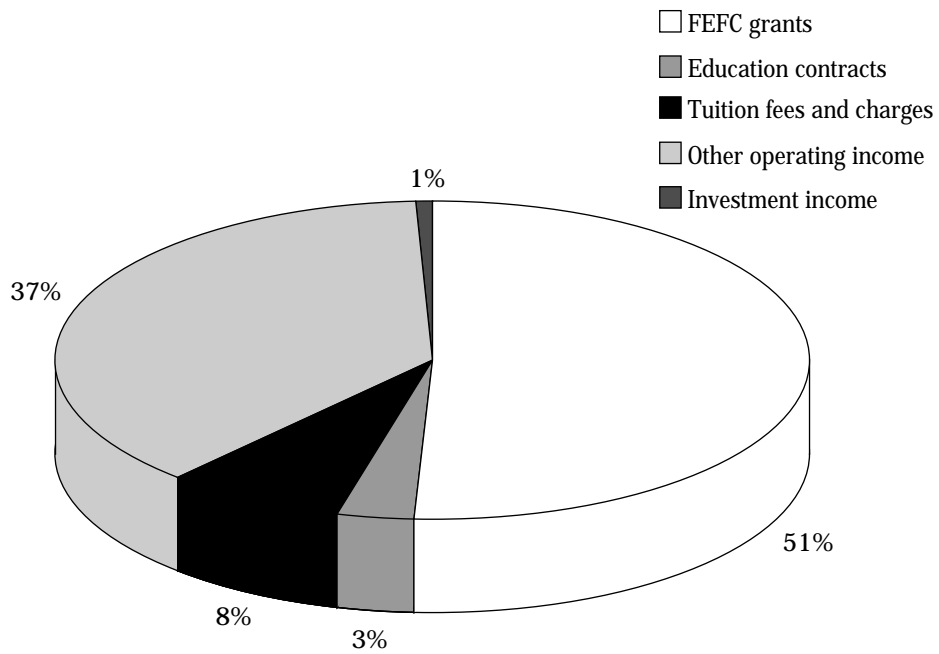
The Berkshire College of Agriculture: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (as at July 1996)



Full-time equivalent staff: 133

Figure 5

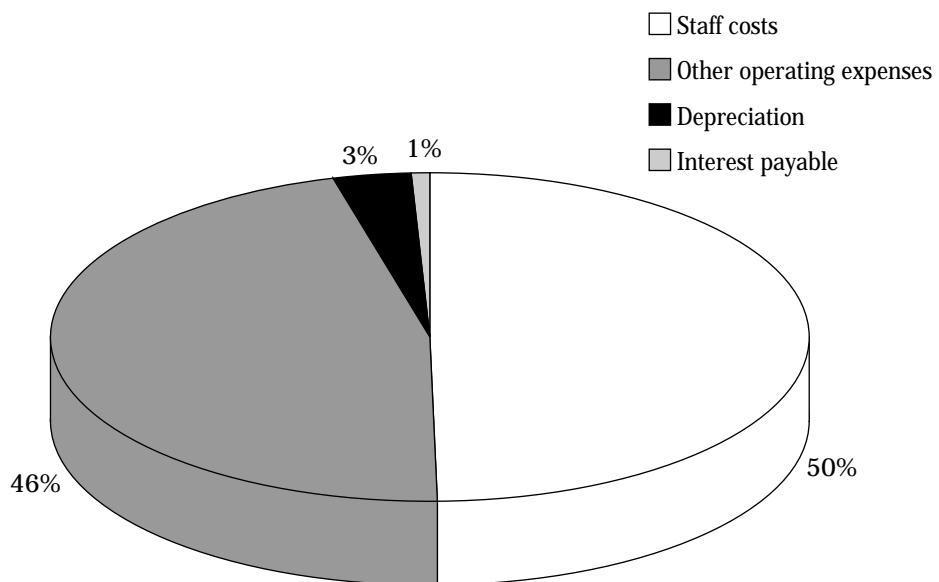
The Berkshire College of Agriculture: income (for 12 months to July 1996)



Income: £4,673,000

Figure 6

The Berkshire College of Agriculture: expenditure (for 12 months to July 1996)



Expenditure: £4,575,000

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