

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

Brooksby College

March 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.

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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 32/97

BROOKSBY COLLEGE

EAST MIDLANDS REGION

Inspected February-December 1996

Summary

Brooksby College in Leicestershire offers a range of courses that reflects the changing nature of land-based enterprise. It works closely with other local colleges and centres to provide some of its programmes. The college has a committed and supportive board of governors. Senior managers plan well. An energetic and enthusiastic group of support staff is responsible for publicising the college's courses. There is a well-established system for pre-entry information, advice and admissions. Students' learning support needs are identified and support is offered by trained staff. The library offers good services to students. Staff and students make effective use of the college's estate in teaching and learning. There is a clear accommodation strategy and the provision of equipment is linked to course development. Teaching staff are aware of current developments in industry. If it is to build upon its strengths the college should: improve retention rates and achievement on some courses; clarify key responsibilities and priorities at all levels in the management structure; improve the quality and monitoring of on-course tutorials; review the role of the counselling service provided by the team of wardens; address inconsistencies in the quality of teaching; improve implementation of quality assurance procedures and develop stronger links between the various aspects of quality assurance; utilise teachers and technicians more effectively; remedy inadequacies in equipment and accommodation in areas where student numbers have significantly exceeded targets; improve the availability of computers for students to work on their own; and improve the management, control and quality of the equine franchised provision.

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

Aspects of cross-college provision		Grade
Responsiveness and range of provision		1
Governance and management		3
Students' recruitment, guidance and support		3
Quality assurance		4
Resources:	staffing	3
	equipment/learning resources	2
	accommodation	2

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Animal care	3	Horticulture	3
Countryside and fish	3	Agriculture	2
Equine	4		

INTRODUCTION

1 Brooksby College was inspected between February and December 1996. Inspectors spent a total of 51 days in the college. Enrolment and induction procedures were inspected in September. Inspection of curriculum areas took place in February, October and early December, and included franchised provision. Aspects of cross-college provision were also inspected in December. Inspectors observed 74 classes. They examined samples of students' work and studied documentation relating to the college and its courses. They held discussions with governors, college managers, teaching and support staff, and representatives from industry, schools and colleges, Leicestershire Careers and Guidance, and the Leicestershire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC).

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 Brooksby College was founded as the Leicestershire and Rutland Farm Institute in 1950. It is situated in the north east of the county of Leicestershire, some five miles from the market town of Melton Mowbray and 10 miles from the city of Leicester. The college occupies an estate of 315 hectares. The main campus has been developed around Brooksby Hall, a 200 year old Grade II listed building. Most of the classrooms are located on this campus. It also provides accommodation for 100 residential students. Elsewhere on the estate there are nurseries and glasshouses, landscaped gardens, a horticultural and floristry unit, and sports and recreational facilities. There are also engineering workshops, and animal care, equine, countryside and fish production units. The estate is run commercially and provides a realistic working environment for the college's students.

3 At the end of 1995-96, 1,979 students were enrolled at the college, of whom 433 were studying full time and 1,546 part time. Two hundred and twenty-seven students were enrolled for non-vocational adult classes. The number of full-time students has trebled in the past four years. Many of the college's full-time programmes recruit nationally. Part-time programmes and foundation level courses recruit mainly from within the county. Brooksby College is the only college offering land-based subjects in Leicestershire, but it faces competition for students from the five colleges of agriculture that lie within a 40 mile radius, and from others nationally. There are 11 general further education colleges and a network of community colleges in Leicestershire which compete for non-specialist 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, respectively. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4.

4 The college's mission is 'to offer the widest range of opportunities through viable and high-quality education, training and associated services which show due regard for its customers, employees and the environment'.

The aims of the college over the next three years include: expanding recruitment; extending the academic base to include higher education programmes; and working in close collaboration with other providers to maintain sufficiency of provision within Leicestershire.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

5 During the past four years the college has adapted and extended its provision to take account of the changing nature of land-based enterprise and of the need for employees to have recognised vocational qualifications. It has introduced courses in countryside studies, floristry, animal care, equine studies and, most recently, in fishery studies. Students have a wide choice of courses at levels from foundation to national vocational qualification (NVQ) level 3 or equivalent. In many curriculum areas, programmes are offered on both a full-time and part-time basis, and the modularisation of courses has started to provide more flexible modes of attendance for students. There are some gaps in provision. There is no NVQ provision in animal care. The current courses do not cater fully for students at intermediate level who have a general interest in land-based careers, but who have not, as yet, decided on their specialist vocational area. Whilst there are opportunities for many students to gain additional certification to enhance their employment prospects, opportunities for agriculture students to gain units towards NVQs could be further developed. A full-time warden is responsible for organising a well-supported programme of sport and recreational activities in which all students are encouraged to participate.

6 The college produced a marketing strategy in 1994. The academic board oversees its implementation. The college's marketing committee at present does not play a part in shaping strategy, but a recent change of membership is intended to address this. A responsive and efficient group of three support staff handles day-to-day publicity and marketing. Brooksby College undertakes overseas marketing in collaboration with Melton Mowbray College. This has resulted in seven Japanese students enrolling on full-time courses for 1996-97. Other foreign links include staff and student exchanges with colleges in Germany, France, Hungary and the Czech Republic.

7 There are strong links with the local authority and its schools. The college runs 'taster' days and tours of the estate for school pupils of all ages to give them an insight into the land-based industries and to help in recruitment. They attracted over 3,000 young people in 1995-96. The college also holds four open evenings a year for prospective students and their parents or guardians. Links with careers teachers and advisers have been strengthened in recent years by an information day in the summer term. Some schools use the resources of the college to teach aspects of the national curriculum. The college collaborates with Leicestershire Local Education Authority (LEA) in its work with special schools and with disaffected pupils. The college also works closely with other local colleges

and centres in the teaching of programmes. For example, an advanced general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) course in leisure and tourism is shared with Melton Mowbray College and taught on both sites. Staff from Brooksby also deliver floristry courses at Charles Keene College in the city of Leicester. Regular meetings of college principals ensure that relationships are maintained and developed.

8 The college operates two limited companies. Through these, it makes good use of its land and buildings to generate income through lettings, short courses and the commercial management of its riding school and fishing lake. It is developing fish farming and sells about 60,000 fish a year. In September 1996, it introduced collaborative provision in equine studies placing students at nine stables nationally.

9 The college has responded constructively to the needs of industry for training and updating. It has an employer database and consults local industry by questionnaires when considering new courses. The college was the first in the United Kingdom to set up a three-year engineering apprenticeship for agricultural technicians, which it runs in collaboration with a multinational manufacturer. Courses for small and medium-sized rural enterprises include computing, sports turf and greenkeeping, and agricultural engineering. Employers make a considerable input to the curriculum. They take part in course reviews and give talks to groups of students. There are strong links with fishery organisations and their staff provide specialist input into courses. A water company provides help with countryside courses. Employers also offer valuable opportunities for work experience for students in addition to those provided by the college's own estate. For example, third-year agricultural students work with a selected farm over a period of months to suggest changes in practice. The farmers involved speak appreciatively of this arrangement.

10 There is a good working relationship with the Leicestershire TEC built around youth training provision. The college is a member of its quality assurance working group. Development funding from the TEC has supported the purchase of computer and other equipment. The college actively pursues links with organisations representing the land-based industries, such as the National Farmers Union, the Rural Development Commission and the County Landowners Association, and encourages them to meet on its premises. The Young Farmers' county organiser, the county hedgerow advisory officer and the adviser for the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group are based at the college and students are invited to their meetings. It is a policy of the college to identify a member of staff to sit on bodies representing its various specialisms.

11 The college has an equal opportunities policy and code of practice. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have good opportunities for study. Through consultation with a number of special schools the college has gained open college network accreditation for a three-year programme. The college is making a vigorous effort to attract students from groups which have not usually enrolled for its courses.

To this end, it offered an NVQ level 2 in environmental conservation for the first time this year. The college has so far been unsuccessful in its attempts to attract students from minority ethnic groups, despite producing information in community languages and using staff from minority ethnic groups to teach courses. There is no equal opportunities committee, and there are few formal arrangements for monitoring the effectiveness of the equal opportunities policy.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

12 The college has a committed and supportive board of governors who have a wide and appropriate range of interests and expertise. Its members have a distinctive view of the nature of the college and the direction in which it needs to move. The size of the board was recently reduced from 20 to 15, as the governors were consistently unable to fill vacancies. There are ten business members, including a nominee of the Leicestershire TEC, two co-opted members, two staff members and the principal. Only one governor is female. The director of finance acts as the clerk to the corporation. There is a separate job description for this post. Four standing committees, with clear terms of reference, support the work of the full board: audit; finance and general purposes; personnel; and remuneration. The governors keep their membership under review and a nominations committee meets as required. The full board of corporation meets at least three times a year, and attendance is very good. Comprehensive documentation is produced for each meeting.

13 The governors work closely with the staff of the college, whilst clearly appreciating the difference between governance and management. There is a good professional relationship between the chairman and the principal. Governors are linked to different sections of the college in order to gain an understanding of how the college works. Every six months they review the usefulness of such links to themselves and to the corporation as a whole.

14 Governors are normally well briefed on the requirements of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). They are aware of the implications of circulars and take action as necessary. The exception to this is that the board was not fully alerted to the requirements of Council Circular 96/06, *Franchising*. They paid insufficient attention to the need to scrutinise new contracts and undertake risk analysis. The arrangements for the management and control of the current franchise agreement for equine provision are unsatisfactory.

15 In January 1996, the management structure of the college changed. It is recognised that the new structure will need to be adapted. There are three levels of management. The most senior level is the executive, comprising the principal, vice-principal and finance director. They work well as a team and enjoy the regard of the board of corporation. Staff comment that senior managers are approachable and supportive. At the next level, there are five college managers. One post is currently vacant.

The vice-principal is bearing the responsibilities of the post, in addition to his other duties. This is adversely affecting the running of the college. Below the college managers are six section leaders, each leading a curriculum area.

16 Job descriptions for posts in the new structure lack clarity. They fail to identify key responsibilities and priorities. The roles of the college managers and section leaders are not well defined. A minority of section leaders still does not accept the new structure. The role of course tutors in course management remains unclear and is causing confusion. The college has acknowledged some of these weaknesses and has plans to provide further support and training for staff in their managerial roles.

17 Strategic planning is conscientiously undertaken by the executive team. The involvement of staff in the strategic planning process varies. The board of corporation was not involved in the production of the 1993-97 strategic plan. However, members understand their strategic role and plans for their involvement in the production of the next strategic plan are well developed. Monitoring of the achievement of strategic objectives varies. For example, it is effective for monitoring the estate's objectives but less so for marketing.

18 Communications in the college are good. There are regular staff meetings which form part of an overall programme. These meetings are well documented and minuted at all levels of the organisation. A monthly college bulletin is produced. It is informative and staff value it. There is an active academic advisory board, which meets termly, and which includes a governor and a student amongst its members. The principal chairs it in a manner which encourages debate. The board was recently restructured and its role and membership reviewed. It is too early to judge the effectiveness of the new arrangements. The academic board has a key role in the examination of students' achievements, the approval of new courses and the provision of advice on the educational character of the college. A quality assessment and verification group, which meets twice a term, carries out much of the detailed work of the academic board.

19 The finances of the college are well managed. Managers understand the basis on which funds are allocated and feel it to be fair. An easily-understood monthly analysis of expenditure helps them to keep tight control of expenditure. The college's average level of funding for 1996-97 is £20.69 per unit, compared with a national median for agricultural colleges of £22.86. The college's income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1996 are shown in figures 5 and 6. The college has achieved its overall enrolment targets, though some individual course targets have been exceeded by large margins and some have not been met.

20 The college has a well-managed central management information system. It collects and monitors information centrally on enquiries, enrolment, attendance, retention and destinations of students. The data it provides are accurate, timely and valued by staff. Direct access to the

system is improving. However, information is not used systematically at course level as part of course review and other quality processes.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

21 The college recruits students through a wide-ranging schools liaison programme and through a number of initiatives aimed at adults. Two teams from the student services section efficiently process and manage pre-entry enquiries, guidance and applications. They have their own quality standards and work to clear guidelines. Subject tutors are responsible for interviewing prospective students. They show them round the college and give them a thorough introduction to the course in which they are interested and its financial demands. Students spoke highly of the support they received when choosing their course. There is no interview checklist and the quality of interviews is not systematically monitored. The development of the accreditation of students' prior learning is at an early stage. A policy statement has been produced but practice is inconsistent between courses and, where accreditation of prior learning is used, arrangements are informal.

22 The college is reviewing and improving the support it offers to prospective students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The student support team leader now contacts schools for information on the level of support that students need. The college's application form has been adapted to elicit more information on all levels of support needs. The student services manager attends interviews for students whose school has indicated a need for significant support in order to give them information on what the college can provide.

23 Students receive a thorough introduction to the college. All students receive a student handbook and a copy of the college's charter. There is a week of induction which combines college and subject induction. There are handbooks for every course giving details of assessment schedules and teaching methods. Residential students receive an early and separate introduction to the halls of residence.

24 On entering the college all full-time and most part-time students take tests in literacy and numeracy. In October teaching staff and tutors on most courses also complete a survey to identify any students in need of help. Trained staff hold daily learning support sessions in the library and resource centre. They plan sessions on an individual basis with students and have the resources they need to do their job properly. Overseas students are offered extra support in English at a time which fits in to their main course. Attendance at learning support sessions is monitored and tutors are informed of which students are attending. Under college policy, attendance at learning support sessions is voluntary. Only about a third of the students identified as needing support at present take up the offer. The college is considering a strategy for increasing this number by including learning support in students' learning agreements.

25 The college has extended its careers support by a new service level agreement with Leicestershire Careers and Guidance Services and by the appointment of a library assistant with responsibility for careers. This member of staff maintains the well-resourced careers library, promotes careers days, makes appointments for students and keeps a jobs board which lists local vacancies. The contracted time for the adviser from the careers service is fully utilised. However, the college has no targets for use of the provision and there is not yet a college-wide statement of the careers support received on each course. The student services manager is currently surveying careers provision with tutors with a view to devising a college standard.

26 The quality of tutorial support for individuals is not consistent, although all students have a minimum entitlement to it. There is a useful tutor reference pack which brings together all guidelines and forms connected with the tutorial role. Tutors regularly see their students on a one-to-one basis and this is recorded. However, tutors' record sheets rarely show what actions have been decided on or refer to actions agreed at a previous interview. It is not clear whether responsibility for the monitoring of the tutorial function lies with section leaders or with course tutors. Tutoring skills are not specifically identified in the staff-development review process.

27 Students are not encouraged to set and monitor their own goals, despite this being identified as a priority in the tutor reference pack. They do not complete records of achievement. Parents receive termly reports, but neither they nor the students are invited to comment on these. New systems are in place which offer tutors support in monitoring students' attendance. A member of the student information team contacts absent students on the tutor's behalf in response to a completed form.

28 The college is supportive of the needs of adult students. Timetables are adjusted where possible to fit their requirements. The student services manager ensures that the tutors of adult students receive details of such matters as changes to benefit regulations. The college has no childcare provision, although it is discussing this issue with Melton Mowbray College.

29 Five wardens are responsible for the welfare of residential students. They are also the main source of confidential personal advice for the student body as a whole. This is described in the college's literature as a counselling service, but the wardens do not all have a counselling qualification. They meet regularly as a team, refer serious problems to the senior warden who may then refer to outside agencies, and keep records of interviews and contacts with outside agencies. The role of this service, the resources it needs and the systems it follows, need clarifying. The use of the service by different courses is not monitored. It is not clear if all students, including part-time and adult students, regard the service as equally accessible, or whether a general guidance service would be more appropriate.

30 Students on franchised courses do not receive the same level of initial guidance, and learning and tutorial support as students who attend courses on the college site. There is mention of the rights of franchised students in the college charter and they receive copies of the student handbook. They are invited to use the college's facilities where possible and one group has arranged a visit. Students on franchised courses speak positively about their training. They benefit from flexible timetabling and from account being taken of personal circumstances.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

31 Forty-six per cent of the 74 sessions inspected had strengths which outweighed weaknesses. This is well below the average of 63 per cent for all colleges as identified in the *Chief Inspector's Annual Report 1995-96* and also below the average for similar specialist agricultural colleges in 1995-96. Forty-three per cent of sessions had a balance of strengths and weaknesses and 11 per cent had weaknesses which outweighed strengths. Attendance by students in the sessions inspected was 89 per cent of those registered. This compares with a figure of 73 per cent for general further education colleges in 1995-96 recorded in the *Chief Inspector's Annual Report 1995-96*. The following table summarises the grades given to the teaching sessions inspected.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programmes of study

Programmes	Grade 1	2	3	4	5	Totals
NVQ	1	2	5	1	0	9
Other vocational	4	21	22	4	0	51
Other	0	6	5	3	0	14
Total	5	29	32	8	0	74

32 Routine estate duties and work experience provided opportunities for students to develop, and receive feedback on the development of both their personal and core skills. Taught classes and practical sessions were less successful in developing such skills, and lesson plans did not make reference to them. The development of numeracy skills in classes where calculation was a major component was poorly handled. Many agriculture students, particularly those on first diploma and national certificate courses, had poor literacy and numeracy skills that adversely affected their performance on some aspects of their course. Core skills in animal care were developed through a mix of assignment work, the assessment of presentations, and practical duties. An assessment portfolio had recently been introduced on first diploma courses to assist the assessment of core skills. There were limited attempts to encourage students to take some responsibility for their own learning.

33 The development and integration of information technology skills in the curriculum varied from course to course. There were effective arrangements to develop these skills in countryside, fish studies and animal care courses. All students had information technology classes from the start of their programme with the opportunity to achieve a computer literacy and information technology award. They were required to wordprocess a number of assignments to encourage development of this skill and to enable their progress to be monitored. Floristry students would benefit from more directed study in information technology. They were expected to acquire information technology skills through self-study but a number lacked the confidence to do so. Some students in all curriculum areas had insufficient knowledge of commercial information technology applications.

34 All students undertook work experience. The student services section efficiently co-ordinated arrangements. Employers reported that most students took their work seriously. Assignments and other tasks helped students to benefit to the full from work experience. The employer's assessment of the performance of the student provided feedback on personal qualities and core skills. Students felt that they had adequate support in finding appropriate work experience placements, which many of them did for themselves.

35 There was wide variation in the quality of assignments and their assessment. The most satisfactory assignment briefs clearly stated the criteria to be met and the opportunities for the development of common skills. They were well planned and provided opportunities for students to apply their knowledge to realistic exercises. Feedback from tutors was often inadequate, providing only a general grade and lacking reference to the outcomes the assignment was designed to cover or advice as to how the work could be improved. Examinations set to test students' knowledge as part of an assessment strategy often reflected lecture notes and did not encourage independent thought or the application of learning to the solving of problems. In the franchised provision there was no assessment schedule. Assignment work, where set, was marked without any comments. Briefing and marking sheets were not used.

36 In animal care, the quality of teaching and learning and of practical sessions suffered because staff had not planned for the unexpectedly large groups that had enrolled. Students experienced a variety of learning methods throughout the programme. Practical instruction to small groups was given effectively. In the better classes, students' interest was captured and they carried out challenging tasks. In the poorer sessions, teachers gave few opportunities for students to take part in the work and there were insufficient checks on students' learning. Classroom teaching was aimed at all students, whatever their ability, with little differentiation of task. There was little use of questions, either to reinforce students' knowledge or to draw on their experiences. In one class, the aims and objectives were not clearly explained, health and safety issues were not

dealt with, and student activities were not effectively managed. The teaching programme relied heavily on technicians who had not undergone any instructor or teacher training.

37 In countryside studies, the better classes made frequent reference to practical applications of learning and well chosen examples were used as illustrations. A variety of activities catered for the wide range of experience and ability in some groups. A well-judged variety of group and individual work allowed the teacher to provide individual help and support where it was needed. Students were encouraged to appraise their own work. Some theory sessions were poorly structured. Links to other work were not made clear and summaries were often rushed or not given. In many of these sessions, there were few checks on the level of understanding of all students. Most practical classes were well structured and students were given clear instructions and helpful advice. A few classes were poorly organised and managed. As a result, students were not always productively involved.

38 In horticulture and floristry, teachers made good use of role-play and question and answer sessions. There were some lost opportunities for group learning when one-to-one guidance was being given to floristry students. All teachers dealt sensitively with students on horticulture courses who needed additional learning support. They had modified their schemes of work to help the students and were patient and supportive, yet challenging. Instruction in practical classes was of a high standard and often supported by well-prepared handouts. Attention to health and safety was a feature of all these classes. Lesson plans for classes accommodating from two to four groups of students on different courses needed to be revised and monitored to ensure that the teaching fully met the needs of all students and maintained their interest and motivation. In some sessions, both staff and students were unpunctual. Poor grammar and spelling were rarely corrected, particularly in floristry.

39 Agriculture students experienced a wide range of learning activities, but some classroom work lacked variety. In the better lessons, a variety of work was undertaken, and students were given many opportunities to apply theory to real case studies. In one class, an exercise based on the marketing of calves gave students the chance to apply the work they had done the previous week. The realism of the task clearly motivated the students and some lively discussions resulted. At the end of the session, the teacher used the group's contributions to highlight the key points. There was frequent and effective reference to commercial practice. A class on sheep breeding allowed students to apply the knowledge they had gained earlier to a commercially relevant task on breed selection. In about half the practical classes, the teaching was of a high standard and effectively structured. Supervision was helpful and supportive. In other classes, there were weaknesses in the organisation and management of work leading to students not being fully occupied. In many classes, insufficient account was taken of individual needs.

40 Students of equine subjects based on the main site had good working relationships with staff which promoted effective communication and the reinforcement of learning. Practical sessions used a range of teaching methods relevant to students' needs and sessions for mixed-ability groups were effectively managed. In these practical sessions, all students were actively employed and their work constructively evaluated. Most sessions concluded with comments on how objectives had been met, how learning could be applied to the equine industry, and what was to be covered in future sessions. There were a number of weaknesses, particularly in classroom-based sessions. Staff often lacked the confidence to adjust the pace of their teaching and to draw on the experience and knowledge of the students. In many classroom sessions teachers made little use of question and answer and other methods to check students' understanding and ensure that they were learning. The pace and level of the work in some sessions was inappropriate to the group and to the topics covered. At times students from different courses were combined into one class. This was not always appropriate since the different groups had different requirements that could not be met in such sessions.

41 Students following franchised courses at riding stables benefited from the experience of undertaking yard duties in a real working environment. Practical teaching was of a higher standard than the teaching of theory, but generally the management of teaching and learning was weak. Lessons were poorly planned and schemes of work inadequate. Links between theory and practical teaching were poorly developed. The teaching of theory lacked variety and was conducted at a slow pace. In many classes, students had a wide range of ability and experience, but this was not taken into account. The more advanced and experienced students were not set tasks that challenged them. Some had to repeat work that had already been covered.

42 A certificated country skills class for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities gave them the opportunity to work both as individuals and as a team. They completed the work to a good standard and within the timescale set. Students were challenged socially, by being encouraged to help others and to take responsibility for certain tasks, and also technically, through structured questioning on the horticultural principles involved. In classes where a visually impaired student was attending the teacher had made special arrangements to help the student.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

43 Most students worked with enthusiasm and enjoyment. Their level of competence and confidence varied from course to course, and often depended on pre-course experience. Students caring for animals and crops on the college estate were conscientious and keen, even though this work involved early morning duties and tasks at weekends. Farm and yard staff commented favourably on students' punctuality and reliability. Most students carried out practical work with due regard for health and

safety, including those on franchised courses. This was not the case in animal care sessions, where large groups and limited resources meant that students were working without supervision.

44 Most students responded well to assignments. For example, students on countryside and fishery studies courses used diagrams and photographs to present their work well. Many used a wordprocessor to produce their assignments. National diploma and certificate students in agriculture researched their work thoroughly. Their assignments were effectively structured and clearly presented, often with good use of visual aids.

45 In a number of curriculum areas students left courses early, often to take up employment. The majority did not subsequently complete their qualification. Retention rates on equine studies courses were poor, with about one-quarter of all initial enrolments not achieving the primary learning goal. In horticulture and floristry, there was poor retention on most of the full-time courses and on almost all of the part-time courses. In agriculture a high proportion of full-time students completed their studies. The college contacts students who drop out of courses and ascertains their reasons for doing so.

46 Many full-time students who completed their courses achieved good examination results. In 1996, the percentage of Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) first diploma students who passed after completing the course ranged from 78 per cent in agriculture to 100 per cent in horticulture. In the first year of the BTEC first diploma in game, wildlife and habitat management 88 per cent of students completing the course passed, but the retention rate was only 70 per cent. The five BTEC national diploma courses showed pass rates from 60 per cent on floristry to 100 per cent on agriculture, countryside management and horse studies. National diploma students in animal care who completed the course achieved a pass rate of 96 per cent, but there was only 77 per cent retention over the two years of the course. Although there were high pass rates on the national diploma in horse studies, generally achievements of primary and secondary qualifications in equine studies were poor. The City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) national certificate courses in horticulture had high rates of successful completion. The national certificate in country and environmental studies was less successful. Only 67 per cent of students who completed the course gained the certificate in the target time and the retention rate was only 48 per cent. In agriculture the proportion of students passing the national certificate has fallen from 90 per cent in 1994-95 to 77 per cent in 1995-96. For two of the full-time courses in floristry, targets for success in external examinations were unrealistic. Students completing the national diploma in floristry and the NVQ level 2 in floristry in 1995-96 achieved pass rates of 38 per cent and 50 per cent, respectively. During the last three years, in half of the full-time courses in horticulture and floristry, fewer than 80 per cent of completing students have achieved their primary learning goals.

47 NVQ results were mixed with 100 per cent successful completions in horticulture at level 2 and 40 per cent successful completions in one floristry group. In agriculture there was a good level of achievement by part-time NVQ students. Fifty-six per cent of part-time students completing the first year of the course in 1995 achieved NVQ level 2 after one year. Many of the others went on to complete the course in the second year. A high proportion of students go on to attempt NVQ level 3 in a second year of study.

48 Many national certificate and national diploma students achieved additional awards and certificates that enhance their employment prospects. In 1995-96, all national certificate in agriculture students achieved the primary chemical application certificate, three-quarters gained the secondary, and all, except one, gained the rough terrain operators competence certificate. During the first 11 weeks of courses at franchised riding centres, 35 students had gained British Horse Society examinations.

49 Destinations of students are monitored. The destinations of students completing courses in 1996 are shown in the following table. Data show a high proportion of destinations as unknown. There is scope to improve this aspect of data.

Destination of students, 1996

Destination	Number	Percentage
Further education	198	22
Higher education	28	3
Entering new employment	162	18
Continuing current employment	86	9
Other	158	17
Not known	280	31
Total	912	100

QUALITY ASSURANCE

50 The college has a quality assurance statement which commits it to improving 'quality within all the services and activities undertaken'. The quality assurance cycle has four main elements: team meetings; course team reviews which include employers and former and existing students; course development meetings, which build upon information from the reviews and put together action plans for each course; and course reports, which review the previous cycle. There is a standard format for documentation but most records are poorly kept and uninformative. These quality assurance arrangements are not effective. Team meetings are largely concerned with information giving and with the progress of individual students. There is a lack of clarity as to the purpose of course team reviews and whether they should have an action plan associated

with them. The action plans resulting from course development meetings are vague. Course reports are largely a collection of minutes from meetings. The achievement of identified action to be taken is not well monitored.

51 The college collects the views of students and other customers but does not use the resulting information as part of the quality assurance cycle. Cross-college questionnaires are completed three times a year. Some questions are poorly phrased and there is limited opportunity for students to express their views in detail on the form that is used. Their responses reveal some dissatisfaction which appears not to have been addressed. Students receive no information about the outcomes of the surveys. Various managers also use their own questionnaires and meet groups of students to ascertain their views. The information they gather is not centrally collated or effectively used by the college.

52 There are three college-wide performance indicators. They specify an 85 per cent course retention rate, a 90 per cent achievement rate, and the gathering of information on the destinations of 75 per cent of college leavers. The retention rate is calculated annually and can therefore mask poor retention over a two or three-year course. The performance indicators refer only to full-time students, and not to part-time students who are almost four times as numerous. There are no action plans associated with the performance indicators. The college also sets standards for its main functions. These were developed by working groups representing a wide range of staff. They represent aspirations rather than true standards. They are not monitored and do not appear in quality assurance documentation. Most staff do not see themselves as having a role in ensuring that they are met.

53 The principal and vice-principal carry out internal inspections, which involve the observation of teaching sessions and the examination of documentation. Staff who are new to teaching are given priority in the cycle of classroom observations. Feedback is given to individual members of staff. There are no amalgamated reports for section managers that would feed into their own reviews. For individual members of staff experiencing difficulties there is a system of support and follow-up observations.

54 There are clear guidelines for the quality control of the college's franchised courses. Staff pay regular visits to centres where these are run. Their visits include lesson observations and discussions with staff and students. This has not ensured the quality of the provision. There are differences in the implementation of college systems at different centres. Some weaknesses identified during visits are not quickly rectified.

55 All students, including those on franchised courses, receive a copy of the college charter. They understand both its content and its implications. The college charter is regularly reviewed and updated. It includes a clear complaints procedure which students understand. Students feel that staff are responsive to complaints. Most complaints are dealt with informally

and records are not kept. The implementation of the formal complaints procedures requires review.

56 There is a systematic and supportive approach to identifying staff training needs, which is supported by an annual budget of £60,000. During November 1995, the college achieved the Investors in People standard. Every member of staff has an annual staff-development interview with his or her line manager. Needs are carefully prioritised in line with the strategic objectives of the college, but are not always met in good time. Much activity is related to staff acquiring the qualifications they need to teach courses. There is little emphasis on the further development of teaching skills or on support for new initiatives in the college. All new staff take part in an induction programme. They feel the process is supportive. However, it relies heavily on the informal support of managers.

57 Each of the college's curriculum sections and functional areas produces an annual self-assessment report. The reports are linked to the headings in Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement* and highlight strengths and weaknesses. They arise out of staff meetings and are not cross-referenced to evidence. They do not form part of the college's quality assurance cycle. Staff see the reports as a formal way of communicating with senior managers, and thus tend to use them to highlight resource issues. They pay little attention in the reports to students' experiences in the classroom. The senior management team used the reports to compile the college's self-assessment report for inspectors. It is clearly presented under the headings of Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. Much of it is descriptive. It most accurately identifies strengths and weaknesses in the section that deals with governance and management. The sections on teaching and the promotion of learning and students' achievements are brief. They do not reflect issues identified by inspectors.

RESOURCES

Staffing

58 Teachers in all curriculum areas have appropriate technical qualifications. Most have relevant, if not recent, industrial experience. Their close links with industry and with the college's commercial units help them to maintain an awareness of current developments. The college has a policy of supporting teachers who wish to achieve teaching qualifications. This is reflected in the high proportion of teachers who possess, or are working towards, such qualifications. To support changes in assessment procedures the college has given high priority to the achievement of training and development lead body awards. Over 60 per cent of teachers hold at least one award.

59 The number of teachers has been reduced from 42 full-time equivalents at incorporation to a current number of 35. This has allowed new appointments to be made in areas where there has been an increase

in demand. Teachers are not always used effectively. Work loads are uneven, although steps are now being taken to address this problem. Many courses rely heavily on a small core team of specialists, with substantial elements of the programme being taught by teachers from other sections, by instructors and by part-time staff. Often, teachers from outside the core team, and new teachers, are not kept sufficiently informed of course developments. Many teachers put a lot of time into preparing practicals and carrying out administrative work that could be done by support staff.

60 In most areas there is sufficient technician and administrative support. Most technicians also work as instructors. Their two roles are not always managed effectively and this can result in inadequate technician support at peak times. There is sufficient technical support to maintain the college's stock of computers but little readily accessible help for students when they are working on their own. Workers on the college's commercial and amenity enterprises make a valuable contribution to teaching. They assist in supervising students and in assessing their performance. They should be encouraged to work towards training and development lead body awards.

Equipment/learning resources

61 Most students have access to the machinery, tools, animals and plants that they need to support their learning. This is not the case in curriculum areas where student numbers have exceeded targets. The college receives considerable help from its industrial contacts in the form of goods and equipment. Machinery dealers and equipment manufacturers lend farm machinery, and a local company provides substantial quantities of fish feed.

62 The library provides a good service to staff and students alike. Good links exist between teachers and library staff for planning and feedback on book provision. Most of the specialist areas have an adequate and appropriate supply of books, though more multiple copies would be of help to students completing assignments. Not all teachers give the library sufficient notice of their needs and there is little attempt to co-ordinate assignment setting to reduce competing demands on books. There is a good supply of journals which includes a broad range of titles for all of the specialist areas. This range is supplemented by the library's membership of a specialist land-based retrieval service.

63 There are sufficient computers to meet teaching needs. However, computers are not always readily available to students who wish to work on their own, particularly those students based on sites away from the main campus. There are computers in the library complex but these are heavily used by students at peak times. Three rooms with computers near to the library are used for timetabled classes at certain periods in the week. One computer room is reserved for short-course work. It is often

unused and could be made available to students for individual work. Although there is a good range of generic software, very little vocationally specific software is used.

64 All rooms have overhead projectors and screens. Most teachers produce overhead transparencies which are clear and easy to read. Some of the sites used for franchised courses have a poor range of general teaching and learning resources.

Accommodation

65 The college operates from four sites on its estate: the main campus, Spinney Farm, Hives Farm and the Wreakeside Centre. The grounds surrounding the main campus are well kept and provide an attractive setting for the buildings on this part of the estate. Since 1994, the college has improved the utilisation of all four sites, but students who are not taught on the main campus have little opportunity to use the central learning resources. Accommodation for students wishing to work on their own has been significantly increased. An internal road system has improved travel between sites. For the last three years the college has operated a planned programme of maintenance; this has recently been extended to include sites away from the main campus. Buildings have been refurbished and accommodation appears well kept. Where possible, the college has made provision for students who use wheelchairs.

66 The development of courses has generally been linked to the establishment of specialist accommodation. There are good specialist facilities for horticulture. The Wreakeside Centre for countryside and fish studies has been established in converted pig buildings and provides good-quality accommodation. The stabling and riding facilities for equine students at the college are generally of a high standard. Some accommodation, such as the estate workshop, is overcrowded at times. Animal care facilities cannot accommodate the numbers of students wishing to use it, though a new building was being started at the time of the inspection. Workshop accommodation is adequate but would benefit from some reorganisation to maximise the space available. Noise interference is a problem in one area when welding is being carried out. The laboratories are of a good standard, though the rooms cannot take large groups.

67 The library and learning resources area provide high-quality accommodation. The library is overcrowded at peak times. Most of the general classrooms on the main campus are comfortable and well furnished. Some rooms and communal areas on other sites are in a poor state and have ineffective heating systems. Rooms have been improved by the use of pictorial displays. Many of the classrooms used by students on franchised courses at riding stables are of poor quality. The allocation of rooms is generally well controlled across the college. The college has too few large rooms to accommodate large groups.

68 Significant improvements have been made to some of the catering, recreational and other communal areas on the main campus. The new refectory provides high-quality accommodation. There are two common rooms for students, catering for non-smokers and smokers. The latter room becomes very crowded during the lunch period. There are extensive sports fields, including hockey, rugby and football pitches. The college has obtained planning permission to install an all-weather sports area. The recreational facilities have recently been enhanced by the addition of a multi-gym. Phased refurbishment of the residential accommodation is being carried out. Most rooms provide comfortable accommodation.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

69 The particular strengths of the college are:

- a range of provision in line with the changing nature of land-based enterprise and a national market
- effective publicity
- collaborative work with other colleges and centres to extend provision
- committed and supportive board members who clearly differentiate governance from management issues
- good strategic planning by senior managers
- a comprehensive system of pre-entry information, advice and admissions
- provision of learning support by trained staff
- teaching staff who have an awareness of current industrial developments
- the provision of equipment to support course development
- the library and the services it offers
- a clear accommodation strategy resulting in good-quality facilities
- the extensive and effective use of the college estate in the teaching and the promotion of learning.

70 If it is to build upon these strengths the college should:

- improve retention rates and achievement on some courses
- improve the management, control and quality of provision of the franchise operation
- address inconsistencies in the quality of teaching
- clarify key responsibilities and priorities at all levels in the management structure
- improve the quality and monitoring of course tutorials
- review the role of the counselling service provided by the team of wardens

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- improve implementation of the quality assurance procedures
 - develop stronger links between the various aspects of quality assurance
 - more effectively utilise teachers and technicians
 - remedy inadequacies in equipment and accommodation where student numbers have significantly exceeded targets
 - improve the availability of computers for students to work on their own.

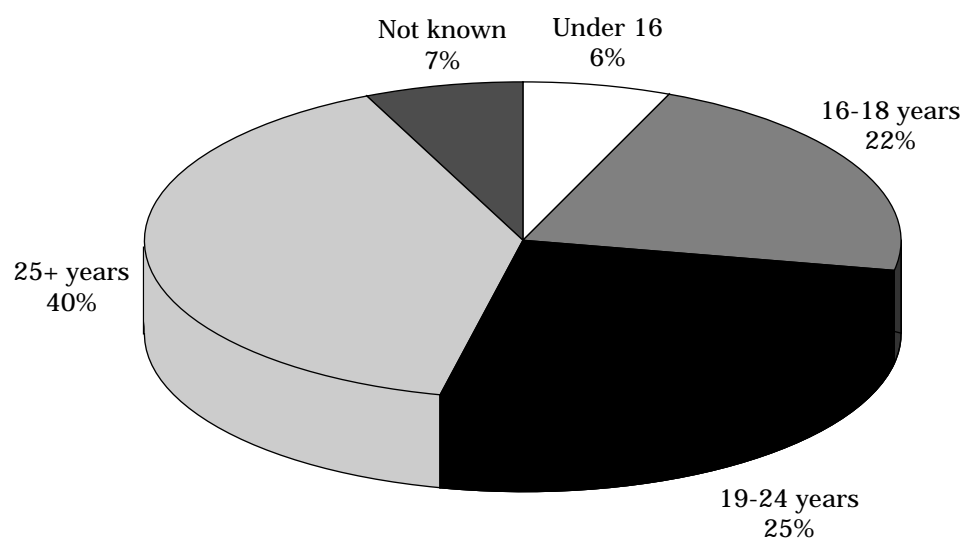
FIGURES

1	Percentage student numbers by age (as at July 1996)
2	Percentage student numbers by level of study (as at July 1996)
3	Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at July 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

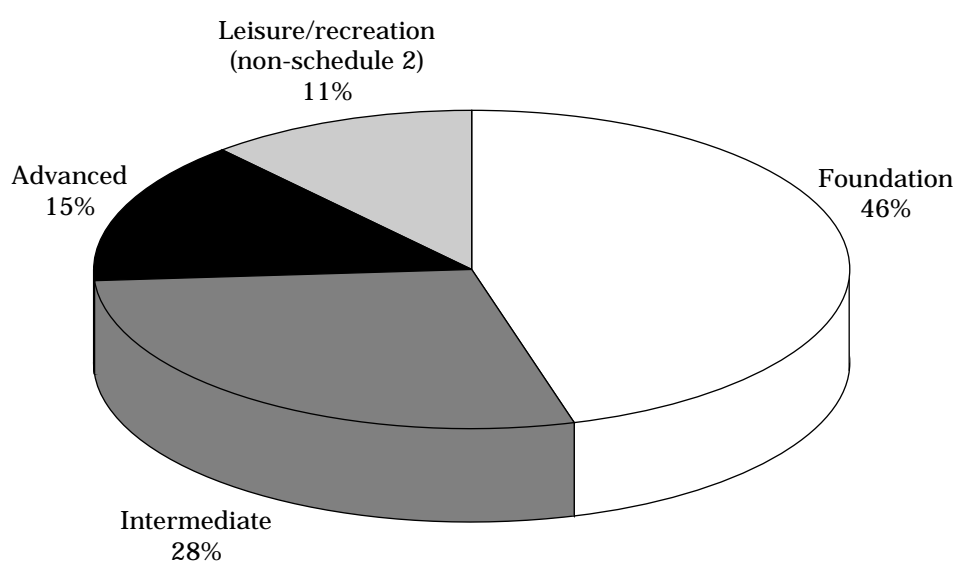
Brooksby College: percentage student numbers by age (as at July 1996)



Student numbers: 1,979

Figure 2

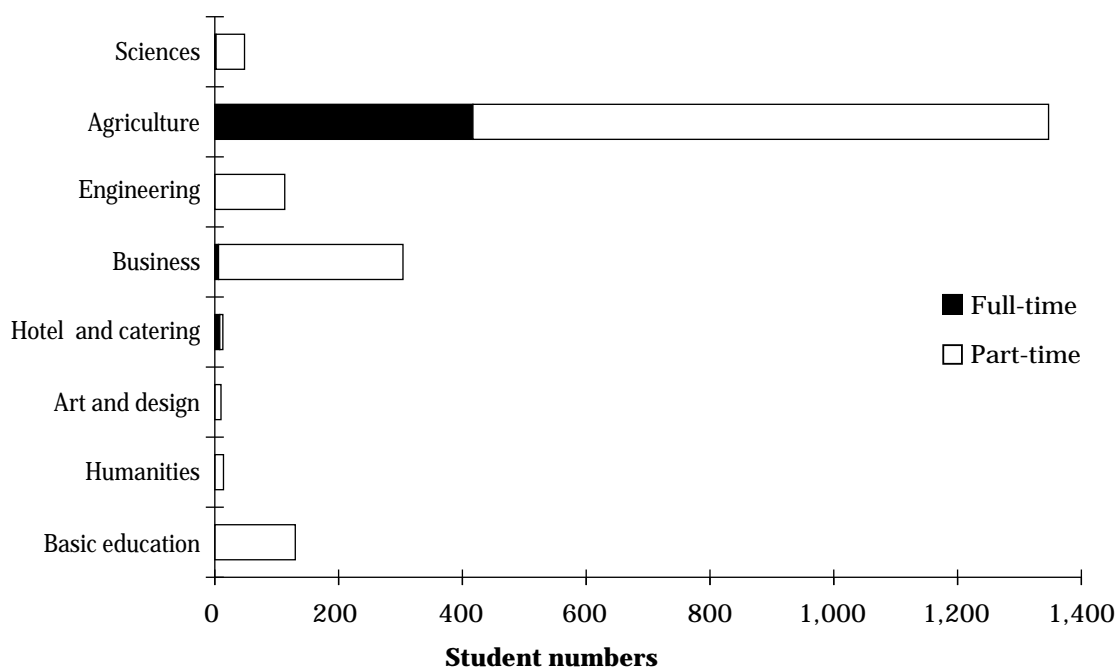
Brooksby College: percentage student numbers by level of study (as at July 1996)



Student numbers: 1,979

Figure 3

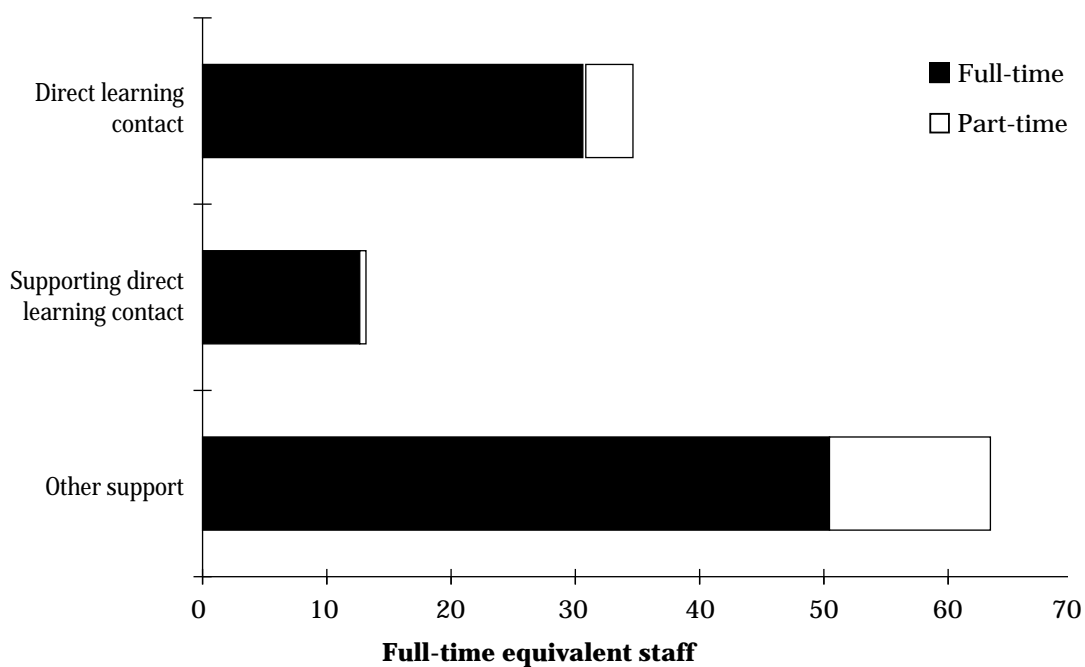
Brooksby College: student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at July 1996)



Student numbers: 1,979

Figure 4

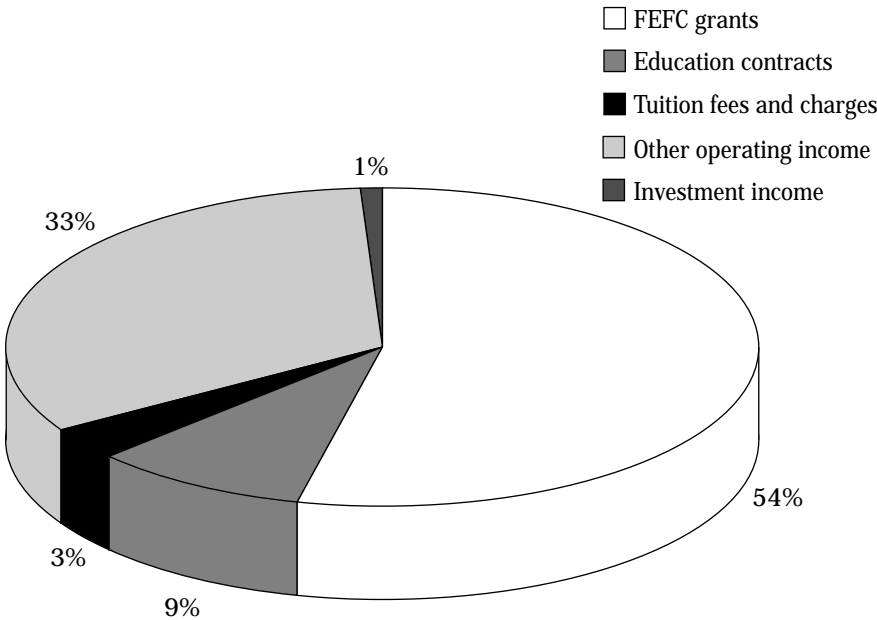
Brooksby College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (as at July 1996)



Full-time equivalent staff: 111

Figure 5

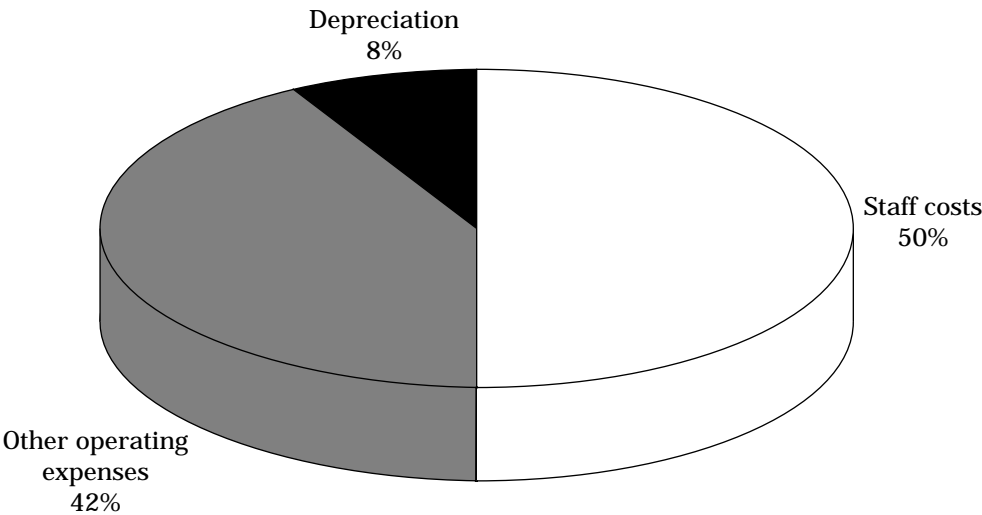
Brooksby College: income (for 12 months to July 1996)



Income: £4,040,000

Figure 6

Brooksby College: expenditure (for 12 months to July 1996)



Expenditure: £4,182,000

