

Cannington College

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1997-98**

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

***THE FURTHER EDUCATION
FUNDING COUNCIL***

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

College inspections are carried out in accordance with the framework and guidelines described in Council Circulars 97/12, 97/13 and 97/22. Inspections seek to validate the data and judgements provided by colleges in self-assessment reports. They involve full-time inspectors and registered part-time inspectors who have knowledge of, and experience in the work they inspect. A member of the Council's audit service works with inspectors in assessing aspects of governance and management. All colleges are invited to nominate a senior member of their staff to participate in the inspection as a team member.

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

© FEFC 1998

You may photocopy this report. A college may use its report in promotional material provided quotes are accurate, and the findings of the inspection are not misrepresented.

Contents

Paragraph

Summary

Context

The college and its mission 1

The inspection 5

Curriculum areas

Agriculture and countryside management 7

Horticulture and arboriculture 12

Animal care 18

Cross-college provision

Support for students 25

General resources 33

Quality assurance 39

Governance 46

Management 53

Conclusions 62

College statistics

Grade Descriptors

Inspectors assess the strengths and weaknesses of each aspect of provision they inspect. Their assessments are set out in the report. They use a five-point scale to summarise the balance between strengths and weaknesses.

The descriptors for the grades are:

- grade 1 – outstanding provision which has many strengths and few weaknesses
- grade 2 – good provision in which the strengths clearly outweigh the weaknesses
- grade 3 – satisfactory provision with strengths but also some weaknesses
- grade 4 – less than satisfactory provision in which the weaknesses clearly outweigh the strengths
- grade 5 – poor provision which has few strengths and many weaknesses.

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

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

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

Retention and Pass Rates

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

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

Summary

Cannington College

South West Region

Inspected March 1998

Cannington College in Somerset specialises in courses for the land-based industries. The college's self-assessment process was thorough. It involved teachers, support staff and governors. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the report. A few sections contained insufficient evaluative judgements. Since the report was written, the college has addressed some of the weaknesses identified in it.

All of the courses inspected fall in the FEFC's agriculture programme area and span the range from foundation level to higher education. Good working relations with other colleges and zoos enable the college to provide courses for students in Bristol, Paignton and Yeovil. Most teaching is closely related to the practical applications of the subject. There is effective teaching and assessment of key skills. Most students undertake appropriate work experience and are able to achieve additional relevant vocational qualifications. Staff are well qualified and there are some good specialist facilities and resources. Examination pass rates are generally high. There are regular reviews of individuals' progress and appropriate arrangements for

initial guidance, student welfare and additional learning support. There is a well-established quality assurance system. Governance and management have improved since the last inspection. The college should: improve pass rates and retention rates on some courses; rectify some ineffective teaching; improve the guidance given to personal tutors on their role; finalise measures to address the planned reductions in FEFC funding; address weaknesses in the quality of some course reviews; improve some unsatisfactory teaching accommodation; and improve access to the buildings for people with restricted mobility.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Agriculture and countryside management	2	Support for students	2
Horticulture and arboriculture	2	General resources	3
Animal care	3	Quality assurance	2
		Governance	3
		Management	2

Context

The College and its Mission

1 Cannington College, situated four miles west of Bridgwater, was founded in 1921. It specialises in courses for the land-based industries. Most of its courses are in the Further Education Funding Council's (FEFC's) agriculture programme area but there are also courses in a number of other programme areas, particularly science and engineering. Its specialist provision includes golf course management and animal care courses which focus on zoo animals. The college has centres at Bristol Zoo, Cricket St Thomas (near Chard), Paignton Zoo, and Yeovil. All four centres provide animal care courses and other courses, sometimes with the assistance of other colleges. There is little public transport to the college from some of the surrounding rural areas. The college is working with other colleges, a local bus company and several local businesses to provide transport during term time and to set up video-conferencing facilities to improve access to education for people living in remote areas. The college has links with local schools and with colleges throughout the south-west, and partnerships with a range of local, regional, national and international organisations. It undertakes some overseas consultancy and development work.

2 In October 1997, unemployment in the south-west region was 4 per cent, compared with a national figure of 5.1 per cent. The region has a higher level of employment in agriculture and related industries than most other regions. In June 1997, 35,000 people were employed in agriculture. There were fewer than 400 unfilled vacancies in agriculture for the three months ending in October 1997 which was low compared with other industrial sectors. The south-west has a high proportion of small rural businesses involved in agriculture, horticulture, countryside management and food manufacturing. Many farms have diversified into farm-based leisure and tourism, food

processing and farm food retailing. The college provides education and training for these industries as well as programmes related to the local tourism industry, such as amenity horticulture, equine studies and golf course management.

3 Student numbers at the college have increased steadily in recent years. Part-time students have accounted for most of the growth. At the time of the previous inspection in February 1995, there were 1,710 students. In 1996-97, there were 2,047 students, of whom 63 per cent were part time and 61 per cent were aged 19 or over. Ten per cent were studying on higher education courses. About 40 per cent of full-time students come from Somerset. Most of the remainder come from elsewhere in the south-west, but some are recruited from other parts of the country and from overseas. In February 1998, there were 192 full-time equivalent staff of whom 123 were teachers or in roles directly supporting learning.

4 The recently revised mission of the college is 'to provide quality assured education and training for people and businesses involved with plants, animals or environmentally sensitive land use'. The mission is supported by a vision statement which describes the college's intentions in 10 key operational areas including the curriculum, finance, land and buildings, and quality assurance. Extracts from the vision statement are set out in the strategic plan to provide a context for more specific objectives.

Context

The Inspection

5 The college was inspected in March 1998. The inspection team had previously studied the college's self-assessment report and had access to information about the college held by other divisions of the FEFC. The college's data on students' achievements for the three years 1995 to 1997 were checked against class registers and results issued by examining bodies and proved to be reliable. The college was given two months' notice of the sample of provision to be inspected. The inspection was carried out by a team of eight inspectors and an auditor working in the college for a total of 32 days. They observed lessons, assessed students' work, examined college documentation, and met students, governors, teachers and support staff.

6 Lessons were observed at the main site in Cannington and in Bristol, Paignton and Cricket St Thomas. Of the 35 lessons observed, 60 per cent were judged to be good or outstanding and 11 per cent were less than satisfactory. This compares with the averages of 61 per cent and 8 per cent, respectively, for all colleges inspected in 1996-97 according to *Quality and Standards*

in Further Education in England 1996-97: Chief inspector's annual report. The average level of attendance in the lessons inspected was 78 per cent, which is similar to the average for the sector. The average class size was 10.7, which is also close to the average of 10.8 recorded in the chief inspector's annual report. The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
Advanced vocational	3	11	5	0	0	19
Other vocational	0	7	5	4	0	16
Total	3	18	10	4	0	35

Curriculum Areas

Agriculture and Countryside Management

Grade 2

7 Inspectors observed 12 lessons in agriculture and countryside management. The inspection confirmed the majority of the judgements in the college's self-assessment report, which were found to be supported by reliable evidence. By the time of the inspection, action had been taken to address some of the weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- the high standard of teaching in most lessons
- teaching that is closely related to practical and commercial applications
- high pass rates and retention rates on most courses
- the achievement of additional vocational qualifications by many students
- good business and operational standards set by the farm

Weaknesses

- insufficient attention given to the needs of some of the weaker students
- low pass rate on national certificate courses in 1997
- lack of sufficient detail in some schemes of work

8 Courses are provided in agriculture and countryside management from foundation level to higher education, so that opportunities for progression within the college are good. First diploma programmes have been adapted to meet the needs of students with learning difficulties. Most of the teaching is good. In the better lessons, teachers explain the learning objectives clearly to students and check their understanding of previous lessons. In theory

classes, teachers explain the vocational relevance of the topics being studied and make frequent references to practical and commercial applications. Most lessons are well structured and proceed at an appropriate pace for the whole group. A suitable variety of teaching methods are used. For most students, college work is supplemented by work experience and visits to local industrial and commercial sites. Countryside management students benefit from involvement in local projects, for example work to improve the River Parrett Trail. Practical teaching is generally of a high standard. Teachers ensure that students' skills are developed progressively. Inspectors confirmed the judgement in the self-assessment report that appropriate attention is paid to the application of health and safety legislation in practical lessons. In a few lessons, teachers did not draw all students into class discussions; weaker students, in particular, made few contributions. Some students had poor numeracy skills and opportunities to develop these were sometimes missed. A few staff took little account of students' practical experience and did not draw on this to enhance the learning of the group as a whole.

9 There are good attendance, retention and pass rates on most courses. The overall pass rate on national diploma courses has increased over the past three years and in 1997 was 96 per cent. The overall pass rate on national certificate courses was high in 1995 and 1996, but fell sharply to 59 per cent in 1997. Many students achieve additional vocational qualifications, for example in fork-lift truck driving and the use of chainsaws. Most assignments provide suitable opportunities for students to gain and apply knowledge. Students' responses are carefully researched and well presented. However, some students do not analyse the information they have gathered in sufficient detail and are not able to draw meaningful conclusions from it. When they leave the college, most students progress to

Curriculum Areas

other further or higher education courses or to related employment.

10 Courses are well managed. Schemes of work are prepared to a common format. In a minority of cases these consist of a list of topics without explanation of how the subject will be developed through teaching and assignments. Assessment schedules are prepared at the beginning of the year and are usually followed. Course handbooks are supported by a useful pack containing all the documentation needed by students. Assignment briefs follow a common format which, for all full-time courses, includes assessment criteria for both vocational skills and key skills. Work is marked and verified accurately, but sometimes insufficient written feedback is provided. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that improved analysis of students' achievements is needed in order establish more realistic targets for pass rates and retention.

11 Staff have appropriate qualifications and experience. Their links with industry enable them to keep up to date with current developments. They use their experience effectively during lessons to illustrate how theory is applied in practice. The college farm, which includes a highly-productive dairy and an award-winning piggery, sets good business and

operational standards. Students undertake many of the planning and practical operations on the farm. The inspection confirmed the college's judgements about the benefits of the farm and estate for students' learning. Resources meet the requirements of the courses. Practical facilities include machinery and estate workshops. The college library is well stocked with books and periodicals.

Examples of students' achievements in agriculture and countryside management, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
National diploma courses	Retention (%)	91	97	73
	Pass rate (%)	88	90	96
National certificate courses	Retention (%)	74	84	77
	Pass rate (%)	84	87	59
First diploma courses	Retention (%)	90	82	77
	Pass rate (%)	79	86	71

Source: college data

Curriculum Areas

Horticulture and Arboriculture

Grade 2

12 Inspectors observed 12 lessons covering full-time and part-time courses from foundation to advanced level. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report. However, the report overlooked some weaknesses and overstated the strengths related to students' achievements.

Key strengths

- well-linked theory and practice teaching
- effective teaching of key skills
- well-planned arrangements for assessment
- the high proportion of students progressing to employment
- good specialist facilities for horticulture

Weaknesses

- some lack of appreciation of the needs of weaker students
- low pass rate on Royal Horticultural Society courses
- insufficient analysis of students' achievements by course teams

13 Full-time horticulture courses are offered from foundation to advanced level. There are opportunities to progress to higher education. The self-assessment report states that demand for these courses has declined in recent years. Current student numbers are well below target. The college has attempted to increase recruitment by offering programmes at Yeovil and Bristol and by extending its range of part-time courses. The national certificate in arboriculture meets a demand from mature students seeking career development. Some adults who enrol on this course do not seek a formal qualification. Productive links with

industry extend students' opportunities for practical work. For example, arboriculture students work in local woods, which enables them to develop tree felling and climbing skills. Work experience is well managed and effectively supported by local employers. However, there is no formal mechanism for employers to provide advice on curriculum issues in arboriculture.

14 In most lessons, the teaching of theory is clearly linked to practice. For example, in some cases, the financial implications of alternative practical applications are explored. Teachers are well informed about the relevant industries and they use their knowledge to provide appropriate examples. Competence is effectively developed in practical lessons and students are questioned about related theory. Demonstrations are often used effectively. Students are often encouraged to review their own performance. Exercises used in key skills lessons are related to the vocational work. Students appreciate the relevance of the topics to their future employment. In some lessons, weaker students are not always involved in class discussions and practical activities. Teachers are not always aware of some students' lack of understanding, for example when new terminology is introduced. The self-assessment report did not mention these weaknesses.

15 A suitable range of methods are used to assess students' progress. The assessment schedule is well planned and there is an appropriate balance between the assessment of theoretical knowledge and practical skills. Regular testing helps to make students aware of their progress. Complete records of progress are kept and discussed with students on a regular basis. Most assignments are based on realistic vocational problems. Most teachers' written comments clearly explain the reasons for the grade and identify areas for improvement; a few lack sufficient detail. Comprehensive records of students' achievements in key skills are kept in their portfolios of work. These are used to identify

Curriculum Areas

particular learning needs. Many mature students, returning to study, welcome the structured opportunities to improve their key skills.

16 Most horticulture students' responses to their assignments are thoroughly researched. The most successful students gather information effectively and demonstrate a good understanding of the subject. Some students' portfolios are comprehensive, including a wealth of detail and well-chosen photographs. Last year all students passed the national diploma in arboriculture. In contrast, pass rates on the national certificate in arboriculture have been low for the last three years. However, nearly all of these students gained the certificate of chainsaw competence and about three-quarters achieved national vocational qualification (NVQ) level 2 key skills. Many full-time horticulture students who do not pass at the end of the year continue on a part-time basis and obtain the qualification. Some pass and retention rates for the part-time Royal Horticultural Society courses are low. However, many of the students who take this course choose not to take the examination. Insufficient analysis is undertaken at course level of students' achievements. Nearly all the national diploma students and three-quarters of the national certificate students completing in 1997 entered employment.

17 The inspection confirmed the college's assessment that specialist facilities for horticulture are good. The Cannington campus includes a walled heritage garden, a small vineyard, an orchard, a large glasshouse and a wide variety of plants, including four national plant collections. These specialist facilities provide a realistic setting for work in horticulture. There is a good range of equipment for arboriculture students, including climbing equipment, but the arboriculture workshop is too small for large practical groups.

Examples of students' achievements in horticulture and arboriculture, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
National diploma courses	Retention (%)	95	68	83
	Pass rate (%)	100	68	87
National certificate courses	Retention (%)	89	77	77
	Pass rate (%)	55	66	65

Source: college data

Curriculum Areas

Animal Care

Grade 3

18 The inspection covered full-time animal care courses based at Cannington, Yeovil, Bristol and Paignton. Eleven lessons were observed. The self-assessment report was thorough in its identification of strengths and weaknesses, but the college's assessment of its weaknesses did not attach sufficient weight to the issue of low student retention.

Key strengths

- good opportunities to learn about, and work with, zoo animals
- clear and appropriate assignments
- effective teaching and assessment of key skills
- opportunities for a wide variety of work experience

Weaknesses

- low retention rates
- insufficient links between theory and practice teaching
- insufficient opportunities to achieve additional vocational awards
- some ineffective assessment of practical skills

19 The college provides animal care courses at Cannington and three other centres across the south-west: Bristol Zoo, Paignton Zoo and Cricket St Thomas Wildlife Park. These links provide students with opportunities to work under the supervision of keepers. Courses focus on zoo animals and scientific aspects of animal care. They do not fully meet the needs and aspirations of students who would like a more practical course, or more emphasis on pets, in particular cats and dogs. Students have insufficient opportunities to achieve additional relevant vocational awards.

20 Some teaching is well planned and effective. In the best lessons, objectives are clear, activities are set in the context of previous lessons and an appropriate range of activities maintains students' interest. Teachers are responsive to individuals' different needs. For example, in a class on behaviour, students chose an animal to observe over a period of time. Prepared sheets were available to record each animal's behaviour, but the more able students were encouraged to design their own recording system. Links between theory and practice are not always effectively developed. Opportunities are sometimes missed to provide students with appropriate practical experience. For example, students studying supervisory skills are not given the opportunity to supervise others.

21 Students gain experience of work through blocks of work experience and regular working sessions with keepers at the two zoos and the wildlife park. Students keep a diary of their practical work. Entries in their diaries are assessed, but the practical tasks themselves are not. The self-assessment report recognises that practical duties are not always effectively assessed in line with course requirements. Opportunities for practical sessions at kennels and catteries are insufficient and do not meet the course guidelines. Assignments are set at an appropriate level and cover course requirements. Most assignment briefs are clear and include criteria for success. Assignments are fairly marked and promptly returned to students with constructive comments. Key skills are clearly identified and assessed in vocational assignments.

22 The inspection confirmed the college's assessment that the students who complete their courses achieve good pass rates. In 1996, all students who completed the national diploma were successful. In 1997, the pass rate fell to 88 per cent. On the first diploma course, pass rates have ranged from 85 per cent to 96 per cent. The college recognises in its self-assessment report the low retention on animal

Curriculum Areas

care courses. Only 66 per cent of all students enrolled since 1994 have completed their studies. Attendance rates were also identified as a weakness in the self-assessment report. Inspection confirmed this; 73 per cent of students attended the lessons observed by inspectors.

23 Staff at each centre meet regularly to discuss course issues. Links between centres are improving, but there are still difficulties due to the distances involved. Some common assignments are used at all the centres, but the sharing of good practice is underdeveloped. Course administration is good. Staff keep detailed records of students' attendance, learning support needs, tutorials and overall progress, but they rarely set students realistic and challenging targets for improvement. Schemes of work outline the syllabus, but do not normally identify links between theory and practice or links with other areas of the curriculum.

24 In addition to the facilities provided by the zoos and the wildlife park, the college has small animal units at these centres and at Cannington. The animal unit at Cannington is too small to enable students to perform realistic duties in it; it is currently being extended. The grooming room is small. It has only two tables and students have to wait for their turn. Staff at each of the centres are enthusiastic, well qualified and have appropriate experience.

Examples of students' achievements in animal care, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
National diploma courses	Retention (%)	*	65	58
	Pass rate (%)	*	100	88
First diploma courses	Retention (%)	98	84	80
	Pass rate (%)	91	96	85

Source: college data

*course not running

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 2

25 The college's self-assessment includes many clear judgements supported by reliable evidence, although there was a lack of judgements on tutorial support. Appropriate actions are identified to address weaknesses. There was a close match between inspectors' judgements and those in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- strong links with local schools
- clear admissions and guidance procedures
- effective provision of learning support
- effective individual tutorials
- good careers advice
- wide range of welfare services

Weaknesses

- inconsistent group tutorial practice
- the lower level of support at some centres away from Cannington
- insufficient accreditation of prior learning

26 The college has clear policies and procedures on admissions and guidance. There are good links with schools. Open days, 'taster' days and careers events provide opportunities for students and parents to visit the college. A questionnaire is sent to school careers staff to evaluate the effectiveness of these activities. Adult students receive sound guidance. The college is an adult guidance centre for the Rural Opportunity Network. All full-time and most part-time students at Cannington are interviewed by the careers co-ordinator, staff from the vocational areas, and a member of the learning support team. Interviews at the other four centres are conducted by the centre co-

ordinator or course tutor. All interviews result in an individual student action plan.

27 Students commented favourably on their induction programmes. Full-time students' induction includes a vocational study skills programme which helps students to develop their learning skills. At the start of the year, a programme of social events helps residential students to settle into college life. There is an induction checklist for tutors, but no guidance on how the aims of induction might best be achieved. The self-assessment report does not comment on the implementation of induction. The inspection confirmed the college's view that procedures for accrediting students' prior learning are weak. The college has not met its target for training staff to accredit prior learning and few students have been accredited.

28 The college has a clear framework for providing learning support. Inspectors agreed with the college's comment that learning support is a strength. Full-time students take a basic screening test. The results are used to assess the need for learning support and may also be used to redirect students to a more appropriate course. The college provides an appropriate range of support, including a learning workshop, individual support, for example, for dyslexic students, and double-staffed key skills lessons. Learning support tutors attend course team meetings and work closely with vocational teachers. The college recognises the need to develop further the learning support skills of some vocational staff. There is access to learning support at the college's other centres, but the college acknowledges the need to improve its availability.

29 The college is committed to extending opportunities for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. It has active links with special schools, social services and the regional health authority. Five special schools use the college for residential link courses and work experience. There are several part-time

Cross-college Provision

courses for students with learning difficulties. Some students with moderate learning difficulties are successfully studying on full-time courses.

30 The college provides good individual tutorial support. Tutorials are timetabled each week for full-time students. At individual tutorials, tutors monitor progress, review attendance and address personal issues. An effective system of 'concern notes' enables teachers to inform tutors of issues that need to be raised. Records of tutorial meetings, and associated action plans are signed by student and tutor. In many cases, tutors' entries are brief. Formal reviews of progress take place twice a year. Reports are given to students and, where appropriate, their parents. There is an inconsistent approach to group tutorials. The college does not provide enough guidance to tutors about topics to be covered in group tutorials and there are no arrangements to enable good practice to be shared.

31 Appropriate careers advice is available. The college careers co-ordinator visits all course groups, including those at the four centres. A Somerset careers service adviser attends the main site one day each fortnight. Students' higher education references are written by their programme managers. There is no college procedure for monitoring the standard of these references. Arrangements are made for students at the other centres to use local careers offices and the careers libraries at Filton and Yeovil colleges. Careers education, for example job-seeking and interview skills, is not consistently addressed in tutorials.

32 The college welfare team provides a wide range of services. A qualified counsellor offers a drop-in and an appointment service. Counselling is also available to students at the other centres. Inspection findings confirmed the college's assessment that the residential wardens provide good support for the 180 students who live on the campus. There is a 24-hour emergency telephone number for all

students living both on and off campus. A college recreation manager supports and encourages students' sports and social activities. The welfare team also includes a part-time chaplain and a liaison tutor who provides a link between the welfare team and course tutors.

General Resources

Grade 3

33 Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report. Some strengths were omitted. Some weaknesses of which the college is aware, for example access difficulties for people with restricted mobility, were not fully acknowledged.

Key strengths

- attractive, well-maintained grounds
- a well-stocked library providing a good study environment
- a well-equipped learning support workshop
- the amenity value of the estate for students and the community
- some well-furnished, good-quality teaching rooms

Weaknesses

- under-utilisation of accommodation
- poor access to many buildings for people with restricted mobility
- some bleak teaching rooms

34 The college grounds are attractive, well maintained and clearly signed. The majority of buildings at Cannington were built in the 1970s. One of the older buildings, Cannington Court, a grade I listed building, is not entirely suitable for educational use. The standard of general teaching rooms varies. The rooms in a recently-restored historic building known as Priory Barn

Cross-college Provision

are attractive, comfortably furnished and well equipped. There are also some bleak or unsatisfactory classrooms, for example at the Crockers site in Cannington. The self-assessment report does not identify these weaknesses. Accommodation is under-utilised. This is acknowledged in the self-assessment report which quotes low room-utilisation figures based on 1996-97 surveys.

35 The library provides a good study environment. The stock of books and periodicals is sufficient for the number of students in college. Study rooms adjoining the library enable some students to discuss their work while others study in silence. Student surveys show high levels of satisfaction with the help provided by library staff and with the long opening hours, which include some evenings, Saturdays and holidays. Inspectors agreed with the positive self-assessment of the library and the separate learning workshop. The workshop is well equipped with learning support materials and course study packs developed for independent learning. It is open in the daytime and evenings.

36 There are insufficient modern computers for the number of students. The college is currently implementing a development plan for information technology (IT). However, inspectors did not agree with the college's judgement that computing resources are a strength. Most of the computers for students' use are in the IT centre. Only one of them has internet access. Students value the centre's long opening hours, which include evenings and weekends, and the technical support available during the day from trained staff. The centre is used for timetabled classes as well as private study. Investment in IT for staff has been considerable. All full-time teachers have either a portable or a desktop computer. The college is in the process of installing electronic mail and video-conferencing links with all its other sites.

37 Student communal facilities are appropriate for a residential college. The cafeteria provides breakfasts, evening meals and a weekend service for residents as well as lunches and snacks. The large common room has recently been redecorated by the students' union. There are other common rooms in residential areas and on other parts of the Cannington campus. Some of these are sparsely furnished. There is a comfortable bar. Residential rooms are of adequate size and most have washing facilities. Students are generally satisfied with residential and communal facilities. There is a small sports hall and sports pitches. Visits are arranged to a fitness centre and swimming pool. The college has a nursery which has 23 places for children aged one to five. There is plenty of space for play outside, and a bright and welcoming environment inside the nursery.

38 The main block at Cannington is accessible to wheelchair users, but many other buildings are difficult for people with restricted mobility. Special arrangements have enabled students in wheelchairs to use residential accommodation and enrol on full-time courses. The self-assessment report comments on the programme to improve access but understates current difficulties. The college actively develops its site for the benefit of students and the public. For example, the college is a partner in the Parrett Trail which borders its land. The amenity value of the site is also enhanced by the nine-hole golf course, a nature trail and a new cycling centre. These facilities, and the college gardens, are open to students, staff and the public. The development of the college estate for environmental education and conservation is not emphasised as a strength in the self-assessment report.

Cross-college Provision

Quality Assurance

Grade 2

39 Inspectors confirmed many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment of its quality assurance arrangements. Since the self-assessment report was drawn up, some of the weaknesses have been addressed.

Key strengths

- well-documented quality assurance system
- effective monitoring of quality assurance procedures
- thorough course review and evaluation process
- ample opportunities for students to express their views
- clear links between strategic planning and staff development
- thorough self-assessment process

Weaknesses

- lack of realistic targets in some course reports
- insufficient evaluative comments in some sections of the self-assessment report
- some quality assurance information not well timed for informing strategic planning

40 There is a clear and well-documented quality assurance system. It applies to teaching and support services at Cannington and at centres away from the main site. The college is accredited to the ISO 9001 quality standard. The quality assurance system follows an annual cycle. However, as acknowledged in the self-assessment report, the cycle does not always produce information at the most suitable time to inform strategic planning.

41 The college carefully monitors the effectiveness of its quality assurance arrangements. External ISO 9001 audits show a high level of formal compliance with quality procedures. The self-assessment report notes that, in the past, the college did not monitor the quality of the information generated by the system. Consequently there was too much variation in the quality of course reviews and other reports. A quality review group has recently been established to monitor the effectiveness of quality assurance activities. This supplements existing arrangements to audit compliance with procedures. Monitoring is also carried out by a curriculum audit team consisting of teachers and support staff. They carry out a termly audit to identify strengths and weaknesses in course development and delivery. The academic board monitors the findings of the curriculum audit team. It also considers internal verification reports and the annual reports produced for each course. The board has acted on issues identified in these reports, for example by approving a policy on absenteeism and investigating why many students do not achieve their qualification within the intended timescale.

42 The course review and evaluation process is thorough. The quality assurance manual sets out the issues which must be addressed. Each course team reviews its course at the end of each term. At the end of the year, each team produces an annual report and an action plan. The reports summarise information from termly reviews, student questionnaires, and internal and external verifiers reports. They also include information on enrolments, retention, achievements and destinations. The annual reports contribute to an academic report which is discussed by the senior management group, the academic board and the corporation. Termly reviews and annual course reports vary in quality. Some teams do not set realistic and measurable performance targets. The college identified this weakness in its self-assessment report.

Cross-college Provision

43 Students have adequate opportunities to express their views in responses to questionnaires and during attendance at course team meetings. The views of employers are also sought through advisory panels. A monitoring committee ensures that internal verification is effective. Another committee approves proposals for external validation of new courses. Regular training events assist staff involved in the assessment and grading of students' work. The college's charter is a descriptive document. It makes few commitments that can be monitored easily.

44 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that staff development is effective. There is a clear staff development policy. Staff development targets are set out in the strategic plan and in annual staff development plans. Targets cover teacher training, management and technical qualifications. The benefits derived from individuals' development activities are not often disseminated to other people. Staff appraisal covers teaching and support staff. Staff development and appraisal systems operate effectively and are supported by staff.

45 The self-assessment process was thorough. It involved all college staff and governors. Between September 1997 and March 1998, over 70 lesson observations were carried out. The grades awarded by the college for these observations were much higher than those awarded by inspectors. Self-assessment was overseen by a steering group comprising the principal, assistant principal, a governor, a local businessman and a programme manager from one of the other centres. A few sections of the self-assessment report are too descriptive and contain too few evaluative comments. Most action plans are clear. Actions are prioritised; they indicate the person responsible, a progress review date and a completion date.

Governance

Grade 3

46 Inspectors and the audit service agreed with the majority of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. However, inspectors judged that the college underestimated weakness in the corporation's response to the planned reductions in funding faced by the college.

Key strengths

- involvement in strategic planning
- broad range of relevant experience
- regular monitoring of college performance
- effective operation of the board and its committees

Weaknesses

- lack of overall measures approved by the corporation to address further funding reductions
- insufficient emphasis on curriculum at corporation meetings
- lack of monitoring of the equal opportunities policy

47 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is adequate. The corporation substantially conducts its business in accordance with the instrument and articles of government. It also substantially fulfils its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC. The self-assessment report identifies appropriately evidenced statements which concur with the audit findings.

48 Governors bring a wide range of experience of rural industries, the professions, education, business and administration to their

Cross-college Provision

work with the college. The corporation has 20 members of whom only two are women. There are currently two vacancies for co-opted members. Governors have completed detailed questionnaires to evaluate their performance as part of the self-assessment of governance. They also participated in the self-assessment steering group. The final self-assessment report was approved by the corporation. Governors regularly participate in training activities, sometimes with the governors of other colleges.

49 The corporation plays an active role in strategic planning. Last year senior managers and governors spent a day considering planning proposals. Together they agreed a vision statement which reflects the distinctive character of the college. The corporation formally approved the strategic plan and its associated three-year financial forecast. Reductions in costs have been made in recent years, but the plan does not outline fully how the college will deal with further funding reductions. For some time, the corporation has been aware of the need to reduce expenditure further and generate income to compensate for significant reductions in FEFC funding resulting from the planned convergence of funding across the further education sector. While the college has managed a substantial reduction in the average level of funding from £43.86 per unit in 1993-94 to £22.98 in 1997-98, this will be further reduced to £16.20 over the next three years. The college is developing various funding projects to address this issue. The corporation has approved, on an individual basis, a number of these projects. However, an overall framework, with associated estimates of income and expenditure, has not yet been considered or approved.

50 Inspectors agreed with the college that the corporation has an appropriate range of well-organised committees. Each has approved membership and terms of reference which have recently been updated. Membership of the corporation and its committees is reviewed

annually. The corporation has an agreed code of conduct and a register of interests which is updated every year. Procedures for the conduct of meetings are in place; some FEFC guidelines on good practice are not followed.

51 Governors receive effective support from the clerk, who provides clear agendas, papers and minutes. Sometimes, as noted in the self-assessment report, papers are not received sufficiently in advance of meetings. Inspectors also found that some discussions about funding projects had not been recorded. Corporation meetings are well attended. Members fully understand their responsibilities and properly distinguish between their role and that of managers. Business is conducted in a professional and efficient manner.

52 The corporation has appropriate procedures for monitoring the performance of the college. Governors receive regular reports from the principal and senior staff on the work of the college. These enable them to monitor performance against objectives in the strategic plan and performance targets in curriculum area operating statements. There is effective oversight of the health and safety policy, but implementation of the equal opportunities policy has not been monitored. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment judgement that there has been insufficient emphasis on curriculum matters in corporation meetings. Corporation members are keen to develop closer links with staff. Before each corporation meeting, members visit one curriculum area and one support section. This has improved mutual understanding between staff and governors.

Cross-college Provision

Management

Grade 2

53 The college adopted a self-critical approach to the assessment of management. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified, and concluded that good progress had been made in addressing some of the weaknesses identified.

Key strengths

- consultative management style
- involvement of staff in strategic planning
- clear and comprehensive management accounts
- action taken to recruit students from under-represented and disadvantaged groups
- flourishing and extensive external links

Weaknesses

- plans to address reduced funding not fully incorporated in the strategic plan and forecasts
- some inadequacies in management information about students
- lack of operating statements for some cross-college services

54 The college has made significant progress since the last inspection. Student numbers have increased, major accommodation developments have been undertaken, financial management has improved, management has been restructured and expenditure reduced. During this difficult period the management team has worked effectively to gain staff confidence by adopting a consultative management style. Much remains to be done and this is not underestimated by the principal and management team.

55 There is much good management of the college, the farm business and its other diverse resources. The strategic management team, comprising the principal, the assistant principal, the director of finance and the director of studies, meets frequently. The larger senior management group, comprising the management team together with other managers, meets to consider major developments. There is a flat management structure which helps the college to respond quickly to change and to the demands of new markets. Inspection findings confirmed the college's view that most staff understand their roles. However, some managers are not fully conversant with new roles, and there is some inconsistency in the management of the four smaller sites used by the college.

56 The college's strategic planning process involves managers, staff, governors and external representatives. Preparation of the plan involved a thorough needs analysis based on detailed labour market information. Action plans are included for each corporate objective. The annual operating statement includes targets based on the FEFC's performance indicators. Individual responsibilities are clearly identified. Curriculum operating statements deal with the implementation of strategic objectives. However, it is unclear what action is required when targets, for example those for retention, are not achieved. Operating statements have not yet been developed for all cross-college services.

57 The self-assessment report claims that internal communications have been improved. This was supported by inspection findings. Staff are well informed about strategic and day-to-day issues. Electronic mail is often used to disseminate information. The academic board and college committees provide opportunities for staff to participate in college decisions. Staff see the academic board as a more responsive channel for curriculum development since a

Cross-college Provision

recent review of its composition and functions. Communication with the four sites is improving.

58 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is adequate. The director of finance is a qualified accountant and is supported by an appropriate number of experienced staff. Clear and comprehensive monthly management accounts are supported by analytical commentary. They are monitored each month by the strategic management team. Cashflow forecasts are prepared to the year end, but are not rolled forward on a 12-monthly basis. This is now being addressed by the director of finance. The financial regulations have been recently updated and are supported by comprehensive financial procedures. Budget holders receive clear monthly statements of actual and committed expenditure. They receive training on budget management. The internal auditors have not identified any significant weaknesses in the college's systems of internal control.

59 Considerable progress has been made during the last three years in reducing expenditure in response to the lower level of funding. The strategic management team has considered a range of plans and projects to address the issue of further reductions in funding. Some projects have been fully costed. However, they have not yet been fully incorporated in the strategic plan and forecasts.

60 The management information system provides regular reports for managers and the corporation. Financial reports to budget holders are reliable, well designed and produced on time. The college also meets the requirements and timescales for returns to the FEFC. The college has well-advanced plans to improve management information about students. The need for this improvement is recognised in the self-assessment report.

61 The college has strong links with a wide range of land-based industries and countryside

interests. Most vocational areas are supported by advisory panels. They help the college to be responsive to the needs of local industry and the rural community. New courses and activities, such as a diploma in arboriculture with Westonbirt Arboretum and development of the River Parrett countryside trail have resulted from effective external links. Good contact with schools throughout Somerset raises school-leavers' awareness of opportunities for careers in the land-based industries. As noted in the self-assessment report, many activities in the college show a commitment to equal opportunities, particularly the inclusion of students from under-represented and disadvantaged groups.

Conclusions

62 The self-assessment report provided a useful basis for planning and carrying out the inspection. Strengths, weaknesses, evidence and action plans were clearly presented. In general, the report identified many of the college's strengths and weaknesses. In some sections there were too many descriptive statements, and some weaknesses relating to teaching and learning and students' achievements were understated. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report but concluded that two grades had been underestimated and three were overgenerous.

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

College Statistics

Student numbers by age (July 1997)

<i>Age</i>	<i>%</i>
Under 16	0
16-18 years	36
19-24 years	18
25+ years	43
Not known	3
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (July 1997)

<i>Level of study</i>	<i>%</i>
Foundation	33
Intermediate	24
Advanced	25
Higher education	10
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	8
Total	100

Source: college data

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

<i>Programme area</i>	<i>Full time</i>	<i>Part time</i>	<i>Total provision %</i>
Science	105	78	9
Agriculture	591	865	70
Engineering	32	107	7
Hotel and catering	0	138	7
Health and community care	0	67	3
Art and design	0	17	1
Humanities	9	24	2
Basic education	14	0	1
Total	751	1,296	100

Source: college data

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (February 1998)

	<i>Perm- anent</i>	<i>Fixed term</i>	<i>Casual</i>	<i>Total</i>
Direct learning contact	94	3	5	102
Supporting direct learning contact	13	3	5	21
Other support	43	7	19	69
Total	150	13	29	192

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Income	£5,683,000	£6,464,000	£6,087,000
Average level of funding (ALF)			
Out-turn to 1995-96; funded 1996-97	£25.43	£25.41	£27.28
Payroll as a proportion of income	53%	54%	56%
Achievement of funding target	127%	117%	107%
Diversity of income	41%	44%	40%
Operating surplus	-£95,000	-£52,000	£63,000

Sources: Income – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

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

Payroll – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1995-96 (1994-95 and 1995-96), college (1996-97)

Diversity of income – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

Operating surplus – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

Performance data for students aged 16 to 18

Qualifications		1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Advanced vocational	Number in final year	37	46	30
	Percentage achieving qualification	62%	96%	77%
	Position in tables	bottom third	top 10%	middle third
Intermediate vocational	Number in final year	*	87	61
	Percentage achieving qualification	*	91%	77%
	Position in tables	*	top 10%	top third

Source: DfEE

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

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

*1994-95 intermediate vocational results not available

FEFC Inspection Report 74/98

**Published by the
Further Education Funding Council
July 1998**