

Easton College

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
2000-01**

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL***

The Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) has a legal duty to make sure further education in England is properly assessed. The FEFC's inspectorate inspects and reports on each college of further education according to a four-year cycle. It also inspects other further education provision funded by the FEFC. In fulfilling its work programme, the inspectorate 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.

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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.

Audit conclusions are expressed as good, adequate or weak.

Aggregated grades for aspects of cross-college provision and curriculum areas, for colleges inspected during 1999-2000, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1	2	3	4	5
	%	%	%	%	%
Curriculum areas	6	44	44	7	0
Cross-college provision	9	45	38	8	0

Source: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1999-2000: Chief inspector's annual report*

Sample size: 112 college inspections

Note: percentages subject to rounding

Student Achievements

Where data on student achievements appear in tables, levels of achievement are shown in three ways:

- as number of starters, which is the number of enrolments on qualifications where the student was expecting to complete the qualification that college year. For example, a student on a two-year programme who began their programme in October 1996, would appear in the results for 1997-98 because this is the year in which they expected to complete their qualification
- as a retention rate, which is the percentage of qualifications which students have completed as expected or where they are continuing their studies beyond the expected end date of the qualification. For programmes of study of two years or more, retention is calculated across the whole programme, that is, from the start to the end of the qualification
- as an achievement rate, which is the number of qualifications students have fully achieved as a percentage of completed qualifications with a known outcome. Partial achievements are not included.

Summary

Easton College

Eastern Region

Inspected October 2000

Easton College was established in 1974 following the merger of three agricultural colleges in Norfolk. There are well-established courses in agriculture, countryside, floristry, equine studies, animal care, horticulture, machinery operations and food manufacture. In recent years, the college has diversified and provides a wider range of programmes in computing, sport, recreation and leisure. Work-based NVQ programmes for adults form an important part of the college's work. The college produced its second self-assessment report in preparation for the inspection. It provided a useful basis for planning and carrying out the inspection. The self-assessment did not include sufficient analysis of data on students' achievements. The data recorded in the ISR on students' achievements for some years were not reliable. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report, but judged that insufficient weighting had been given to some significant weaknesses in animal care provision.

The inspection covered provision in agriculture, equine studies and animal care, horticulture and floristry. The college has excellent links with employers, external agencies, schools and the local community. The estate is well used as a resource to support teaching and learning and for community use. There is some good

teaching, particularly in practical, vocational areas. However, the proportion of lessons judged to be good or outstanding is significantly lower than the national profile. There have been recent improvements in students' retention and achievements. Students receiving additional learning support make good progress. Students receive good personal support from their teachers. Governors are fully committed to the college. They make a significant contribution to the strategic plan and draw on a wide range of expertise which benefits the college. The strategic planning process is well devised. The college should address: teaching which is not effective; the poor provision in animal care; low achievement and retention on some courses; shortcomings in the tutorial programme; lack of rigour in the monitoring and recording of students' progress; inadequacies in course planning and monitoring of the curriculum; insufficient use of targets and monitoring of the college's academic performance; the poor accommodation and inadequacies in teaching facilities and learning resources; deficiencies in the college charter; and weaknesses in the quality assurance procedures.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Agriculture	3	Support for students	3
Equine studies and animal care	4	General resources	3
Horticulture and floristry	3	Quality assurance	3
		Governance	2
		Management	3

The College and its Mission

1 Easton College is situated 7 miles from Norwich and was established in 1974 following the merger of three agricultural colleges in Norfolk. The 300-hectare estate includes the college campus, a working farm and facilities for amenity and commercial horticulture, sporting and conservation activities. It has an equestrian centre at the Norfolk showground which adjoins the college estate. Residential accommodation is provided in 101 single study bedrooms. In 1998, a sports and leisure complex with teaching facilities was completed. Substantial funding for the project was provided by local industry and the National Lottery.

2 There are well-established courses in agriculture, countryside, floristry, equine studies, animal care, horticulture, machinery operations and food manufacture. In recent years, the college has diversified and provides a wider range of programmes in computing, sport, recreation and leisure. An increasing number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have enrolled on vocational courses. The college is responsive to the changes in the land-based industries and works productively with employers to meet their needs for further education and training. Work-based national vocational qualification (NVQ) programmes for adults form an important part of the college's work. The college has worked collaboratively with other specialist colleges to provide diversification training for farmers, and on a national project to provide a learndirect hub for the land-based sector. Strong links have been established with the Morley Research Centre and the John Innes Centre. The college is an associate college of Anglia Polytechnic University and is a member of the Regional Federation of the University of East Anglia.

3 Norfolk has a population of 783,000 of which minority ethnic groups comprise 2%.

The average unemployment rate for Norfolk is 4.2%, which is close to the national average of 4.1%. However, this masks significant variations in employment across the county which is affected by seasonal fluctuations. Direct agricultural employment accounts for 1.3% of the population of Norfolk, although in rural areas it is substantially higher. Employment associated with manufacturing related to the food industries and agriculture accounts for about 17% of the population. Norfolk has some of the lowest individual disposable incomes in England with substantial areas of the county identified as areas of rural deprivation qualifying for European Union assistance. About 94% of industry in Norfolk comprises small businesses, compared with 88% nationally. In the rural business sector most businesses employ less than six people. Agriculture and food processing are identified as key industry sectors both in the Norfolk Economic Development Strategy 'Shaping the Future' and in the East of England Development Agency.

4 In July 2000, the college had 1,789 students, of whom 17% were full time and 83% part time. Of the college's students, 22% were 16 to 18 year olds. The majority of students were on courses leading to vocational and professional qualifications. Courses are offered from entry level to level 3 and can be studied full time or part time. In July 2000, the college employed 127 full-time equivalent staff, of whom 61 full-time equivalents were support staff. The provision is organised in four curriculum areas: horticulture and creative studies; countryside and sports; agriculture and food industries; and animal care and equestrian. The college's senior management team comprises the principal and two deputy principals. There is also a head of business development and a head of staff and student services. The college's mission is to be a college of which the students, staff and the community

Context

can be proud. The strategic goals to achieve the mission are to:

- 'enable students to achieve and maximise their potential
- encourage, empower and equip staff to achieve the mission
- enhance the economic development of the wider community
- ensure continued financial viability for its activities'.

The Inspection

5 The college was inspected during the week beginning 16 October 2000. The inspection team had previously considered the college's self-assessment report and information held by other directorates of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). Some data on students' achievements drawn from the college's individualised student record (ISR) returns to the FEFC proved to be unreliable. The college acknowledged that the ISR returns for 1998 and 1999 contained some inaccuracies, particularly for NVQs. The college submitted data on students' achievements from internal records for 2000. These were checked against primary sources such as class registers and pass lists issued by awarding bodies. The data were found to be largely accurate.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
NVQ and other vocational	2	17	16	6	0	41
Total (No.)	2	17	16	6	0	41
Total (%)	5	41	39	15	0	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1999-2000 (%)	17	45	31	6	0	100

Source for national average: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1999-2000: Chief inspector's annual report*

Note: percentages subject to rounding

6 The inspection was carried out by 10 inspectors and an auditor working in the college for a total of 35 working days. They observed 41 lessons, evaluated students' work and examined college documentation. Meetings were held with college governors, managers, other college staff and students. The Training Standards Council (TSC) team of four inspectors worked with FEFC inspectors. Where appropriate, evidence was shared between the teams. The TSC inspectors concentrated on work-based training supported by the college.

7 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1999-2000. Of the lessons observed only 46% were judged to be good or outstanding. This figure is significantly below the national figure of 62%. The percentage of less than satisfactory lessons was 15%, compared with the national average of 6%.

Context

8 The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1999-2000.

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Easton College	10.0	79
National average, all inspected colleges 1999-2000	10.3	76

Source for national average: Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1999-2000: Chief inspector's annual report

Curriculum Areas

Agriculture

Grade 3

9 Inspectors observed 14 lessons, covering a range of full-time and part-time courses. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report but identified additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- productive links with industry
- recent improvements in retention and achievement rates
- well-planned and well-integrated assignment programme
- good opportunities for students' progression to employment

Weaknesses

- insufficient monitoring of students' learning
- some inadequacies in curriculum planning and organisation
- poor organisation and management of some teaching
- inadequate course reviews

10 The college offers first diploma, national certificate and national diploma courses in agriculture. Opportunities for progression to employment, further or higher education are good. Recruitment to courses has declined, and is now below the college's target. Inspectors agreed that the college has productive links with the industry. A number of courses have been designed to meet specialist industry requirements. For example, a national diploma in poultry production has support from nationally recognised poultry companies. Students benefit from the strong links maintained with the industry through visits and work experience.

11 There are weaknesses in the planning and organisation of the curriculum and this is noted in the self-assessment report. Schemes of work are developed by individual subject teachers but, in many cases, they fail to link practical and theoretical work. Lesson plans do not clearly identify the learning outcomes. Some lessons are poorly structured. They are not planned to build on the topics covered in previous lessons. Course files are maintained for all courses and provide a useful record for course teams but the course review procedure is inadequate. It lacks critical monitoring of teaching and learning and this weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report. There is no direct involvement of students or representatives from the industry in the course review process. The action plans from course reviews are inadequate to address the weaknesses identified.

12 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that teaching is vocationally relevant. The college has developed a partnership with a local farming company to manage the farm on a commercial basis. This enables students to gain knowledge of up-to-date practical farming techniques and experience in the use of modern equipment. The routine farm duties provide students with good experience of the work environment. The livestock duties start in the early hours of the morning and form part of the students' assessment. Appropriate consideration is given to health and safety requirements. In practical lessons, teachers use demonstrations to illustrate specialist techniques. However, in a few lessons too much time is spent on demonstrations before students are allowed to undertake appropriate tasks themselves. Inspectors judged that there is insufficient monitoring of students' learning and this weakness is not acknowledged in the self-assessment report. In many lessons, teachers fail to check the quality of students' note-taking. In some poor lessons, teachers do not ask questions effectively to check and monitor students' progress. Opportunities to test

Curriculum Areas

individual students' understanding are often lost. Assignment briefs are well designed. They include clear task-based objectives and appropriate assessment criteria. Students' work is marked fairly and feedback from teachers is comprehensive. Internal verification procedures are effective. Most students produce work of a good standard and value the learning they gain from assignments.

13 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that there have been recent improvements in retention and achievement rates. Pass rates are good on all full-time courses and are now above the national average. Over the last two years, all the students who completed the national diploma in agriculture achieved the award. Retention rates have improved since the previous inspection. However, retention on the first diploma and the national diploma declined in 2000. Students can gain additional vocational qualifications in forklift truck operation, and competence certificates in pesticide application and the safe use of veterinary medicines which improve their employment prospects. Achievement rates for additional qualifications are good. A one-year work placement is an integral part of the

national diploma in agriculture and is highly valued by students. The placement is closely monitored and reports from it form part of the student's final assessment.

14 Teachers are appropriately qualified and many have relevant industrial experience. Teachers are encouraged to undertake staff development and gain a teaching qualification if they do not have one. There is a satisfactory range of specialist tools, equipment and workshops for teaching and learning. There is a good selection of books in the library which are supplemented by an industrial website directory.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in agriculture, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
First diploma	2	Number of starters	15	6	11
		Retention (%)	67	100	78
		Achievement (%)	70	33	100
National certificate	2	Number of starters	11	9	11
		Retention (%)	91	100	100
		Achievement (%)	60	56	90
National diploma	3	Number of starters	17	8	9
		Retention (%)	100	94	78
		Achievement (%)	82	100	100

Source: ISR (1998 and 1999), college (2000)

Curriculum Areas

Equine Studies and Animal Care

Grade 4

15 Inspectors observed 15 lessons. Inspectors identified several strengths and weaknesses that were not in the self-assessment report. There were significant weaknesses in the teaching and organisation of animal care courses that had not been identified by the college.

Key strengths

- good teaching and monitoring of students' progress on equine courses
- high standard of practical work in equine studies
- improving retention on full-time courses

Weaknesses

- poor teaching in animal care
- ineffective management and organisation of animal care courses
- poor achievement on animal care courses
- inadequate practical resources to support teaching in animal care

16 There has been a rapid expansion in full-time and part-time enrolments on animal care courses since the previous inspection. No students were recruited to part-time courses in equine studies in September 2000. Students from Great Yarmouth College of Further Education are able to study specialist aspects of animal care courses through a joint arrangement with Easton College. As the self-assessment report recognises, there are good links with industry through formal mechanisms such as the industry liaison groups and informal contacts.

17 The management and organisation of animal care courses is ineffective. This weakness was not recognised in the

self-assessment report. Schemes of work lack clarity and are not used effectively to inform lesson planning, which is often weak. Teachers set targets for recruitment, retention and achievement as part of the annual course review. However, progress towards achievement of these targets is not monitored. Students from Great Yarmouth College of Further Education have inadequate access to the library and insufficient opportunity for practical work in the animal care unit.

18 Teaching on equine studies courses is good. This strength was not identified in the self-assessment report. Teachers use a wide variety of appropriate methods and are effective in drawing clear links between theory and practice. In a lesson on conformation of the horse, students used chalk to mark the major muscles onto a horse. Students clearly understood the relationship between horse anatomy and conformation. Monitoring of students' progress in equine studies is thorough and good support is provided to students in individual tutorials.

19 Much of the teaching on animal care courses was weak. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report. Some of the staff were very new to teaching and relied too much on students copying notes from the whiteboard. There is a lack of variety in the teaching. Few teachers use handouts or worksheets effectively to help students learn. Some assignments in animal care are insufficiently challenging for the more able students. Few are effective in drawing clear links between theory and practice. Most are purely theoretical and do not use the specialist animal resources unit to demonstrate the applications of theory. Personal tutors provide valuable informal support and have a good rapport with students. The recording of students' progress in tutorials is poor. The targets set for students are not sufficiently demanding. This weakness was not recognised in the self-assessment report.

Curriculum Areas

20 Students on equine courses gain practical experience through well-organised morning and weekend yard duties. A points system has been introduced to reward students making exceptional progress. Second-year students benefit from the opportunity to supervise the work of first-year students. As the self-assessment report notes, work experience is well planned. First-year students gain experience in the college yard and only start work placements when they have gained sufficient competence. There are good practical resources for equine studies courses, including a well-maintained yard with 12 horses.

21 Arrangements for students to gain practical skills in animal care are inadequate. The college recognises that the increase in student numbers on animal care courses has not been matched by an appropriate growth in specialist resources for them to use. The animal unit has a range of small animals, including rodents, reptiles, birds and fish. There are no facilities in the college for students to gain experience in kennel and cattery work, although arrangements are made for students to visit local kennels.

22 The self-assessment report did not identify the strength of improving full-time student retention rates on both the animal care and equine courses. There has been a rising trend on full-time courses, with an average of over 90% student retention in 2000. However, achievement rates on full-time and part-time animal care courses have been well below the national average for the last three years. This weakness is not recognised in the self-assessment report. Over the last three years, no student has achieved the certificate in dog grooming. There is also a poor record of part-time students' achievements on equine studies. The college was unable to provide results from the British Horse Society awards. The pass rates on full-time equine courses were high in 2000. There are opportunities for full-time students to achieve additional awards, including those in first aid, customer care and riding and road safety.

Curriculum Areas

A summary of retention and achievement rates in equine studies and animal care, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
First diploma in animal care	2	Number of starters	44	49	27
		Retention (%)	89	86	89
		Achievement (%)	70	86	75
First diploma in horse studies	2	Number of starters	14	9	5
		Retention (%)	86	78	100
		Achievement (%)	92	86	100
National diploma in animal care	3	Number of starters	18	19	36
		Retention (%)	78	63	92
		Achievement (%)	79	67	79
National diploma in horse studies	3	Number of starters	*	*	8
		Retention (%)	*	*	88
		Achievement (%)	*	*	100
C&G dog grooming (part time)	3	Number of starters	†	14	19
		Retention (%)	†	93	84
		Achievement (%)	†	0	0

Source: ISR (1998 and 1999), college (2000)

*course not running

†data unreliable

Curriculum Areas

Horticulture and Floristry

Grade 3

23 Inspectors observed 12 lessons in horticulture and floristry. They agreed with some of the judgements in the self-assessment report but identified some additional weaknesses. The college has started to rectify weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- the high vocational relevance of floristry teaching
- good achievement rates on first diploma programmes
- well-managed work experience
- well-planned integrated assignment programme

Weaknesses

- some ineffective teaching
- low retention on many courses in 2000
- inadequate course reviews
- small range of course options in horticulture

24 The college offers a narrow range of provision in horticulture. There are few specialist options to attract a wider range of students. Enrolment to some horticulture courses declined sharply in 2000. The self-assessment report did not acknowledge the changing enrolment pattern on many courses. Part-time programmes include NVQ levels 2 and 3 in horticulture, first diploma and national certificate in floristry, and the Royal Horticultural Society certificate and a City & Guilds of London Institute (C&G) course in garden design. An entry level course provides for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that there are strong links with industry.

Local florists and horticultural businesses are used for visits and for students to gain work experience. Students can gain vocational qualifications in addition to their main qualification to improve their employability but few students take up these opportunities.

25 Floristry teaching has a high emphasis on vocational relevance. Practical teaching is good. Floristry students are invited regularly to provide arrangements for functions and have planned and prepared displays for a local church festival. Teachers demonstrate techniques carefully, ensuring that students appreciate the theory that underpins the work. In many lessons, teachers use well-chosen examples to show applications of theory. For example a range of plants is used to illustrate different displays and planting schemes. Most lessons are logically developed and teachers explain new terms clearly. However, in many lessons, teachers did not provide adequate introductions or summarise the lessons effectively at the end. The self-assessment report did not identify that in many lessons the teaching is ineffective. Discussion sessions are not well managed and teachers fail to ensure that most students are involved. In a few practical lessons, teachers did not make sure that some students were fully involved in the work. Students' learning is not checked effectively through questioning, discussion or observation of practical activities.

26 Most courses are well planned and well managed. However, where courses with low student numbers are combined for classroom-based lessons, there is insufficient planning by teachers to differentiate the content and level of work to meet the needs of students on the different courses. The college acknowledges that key skills are at an early stage of development and further work is being undertaken to improve integration with other aspects of the curriculum. Inadequate course reviews were not identified as a weakness by the college. Reviews and action plans to deal

Curriculum Areas

with weaknesses in student performance and the quality of teaching and learning are not clear and comprehensive.

27 All full-time students undertake well-managed work experience. Assignments are used effectively to ensure students benefit from their placement. Good use is made of assignments in college work which draw on realistic examples from industry to develop students' understanding and knowledge. However, the assessment criteria rarely include an indication of the relative weighting of the assignment tasks. Most written feedback provides good guidance on how students could improve their performance but some is insufficiently detailed. Much of the students' assignment work is of a high standard. The work shows a good deal of effort and enthusiasm on the part of students. The work produced by first diploma and certificate students, apart from a few exceptions, is of an acceptable standard. Inspectors judged that the records used for monitoring individual students' progress are inadequate.

28 The self-assessment report overestimated the strength of students' achievements. Retention has declined on the majority of courses and achievement on many courses is erratic. Pass rates on the first diploma courses are consistently above the national average. Over the last three years, achievement has improved on the national certificate in horticulture from 69% to 80% but over the same period it has declined on the Royal Horticultural Society general certificate from 64% to 50%. On the national diploma in horticulture and the C&G garden design course, retention has been consistently below the national average. A high proportion of national certificate and diploma students progress to other further education courses or employment. Few students progress to higher education.

29 Teachers in floristry and horticulture are knowledgeable, with commercial experience and

a good level of technical expertise. The college estate, which includes landscaped grounds and gardens with comprehensive plant collections and an arboretum, provides a good resource for practical work. There is a satisfactory range of specialist tools, equipment and workshops for students to use in their learning.

Curriculum Areas

A summary of retention and achievement rates in horticulture and floristry, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
C&G amenity horticulture	2	Number of starters	19	34	18
		Retention (%)	68	82	72
		Achievement (%)	100	68	100
Royal Horticultural Society general certificate	2	Number of starters	13	22	13
		Retention (%)	85	77	77
		Achievement (%)	64	53	50
First diploma in floristry	2	Number of starters	*	22	18
		Retention (%)	*	91	100
		Achievement (%)	*	75	100
First diploma in horticulture	2	Number of starters	14	16	7
		Retention (%)	93	100	71
		Achievement (%)	100	88	100
National certificate in horticulture	2	Number of starters	33	27	26
		Retention (%)	79	85	77
		Achievement (%)	69	83	80
National diploma in horticulture	3	Number of starters	4	9	16
		Retention (%)	75	78	75
		Achievement (%)	100	71	82

Source: ISR (1998 and 1999), college (2000)

**course not running*

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 3

30 Inspectors agreed with the majority of the college's judgements about support for students in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- excellent links with schools to promote understanding of rural issues
- good progress for students receiving additional support
- good personal support for day and residential students

Weaknesses

- inadequacies in tutorial support
- insufficient formal careers advice and guidance
- lack of rigour in recording and monitoring of student progress

31 Inspectors agreed with the college that it effectively promotes rural issues to local schools. A series of events is organised for local schools to promote land-based education and training and encourage a wider understanding of rural issues. The college estimates that 6,500 school pupils visited the college to attend open days and 'taster' days during 1999-2000. External funding from a local trust has been used to set up a rural resource centre in the college for children at key stage 1 from primary schools. The college also makes provision for secondary pupils not undertaking the national curriculum. Briefings are provided for Norfolk careers officers to keep them informed about changing patterns of rural education and employment.

32 Most aspects of the admissions and initial guidance process are satisfactory. The college has strengthened its system by appointing four client liaison officers to manage applications. The course publicity material is attractive, but

does not include sufficient information on equal opportunities, fees or the additional support available to students. There are helpful joining instructions for students coming into college residence. Students benefit from individual interviews with course tutors where they can find out about specialist courses. Students are able to transfer between courses up to the first half term after enrolling at the college.

33 The college revised its induction programme for September 2000 to give full-time students more guidance on the range of courses and enrichment activities available as part of curriculum 2000. Induction is generally well regarded by students, though some found it too long and many were unclear about the link between key skills and their vocational course. The college acknowledges that insufficient information is provided during induction about sporting and leisure activities. The equal opportunities policy is not discussed during induction. Inspectors judged that the guidance for students starting their courses after the start of the academic year was inadequate.

34 The arrangements and facilities for learning support have improved since the previous inspection. Demand for learning support has increased steadily over the past three years. Thirty-one students were identified as needing additional support in 1997-88, and 62 in 1998-99. The figure for 1999-2000 was 100 of whom 99 were retained and achieved their main qualification aim. There is good additional support in the classroom and in individual sessions, particularly for students with dyslexia. This strength is not identified in the self-assessment report. The screening and diagnostic process used by the college is cumbersome. Some of the students found the diagnostic tests too long and did not complete them. The self-assessment report recognises that not all students identified as needing learning support are taking it up and that course tutors need to monitor individual progress more rigorously.

Cross-college Provision

35 The quality of tutorial support is not uniformly good. This was acknowledged in the self-assessment report. The grades awarded by inspectors for tutorials ranged from grade 1 to grade 4. The college has recently amended its guidelines to staff in an effort to ensure that all tutorials are effective. Inspectors found that the attention given by tutors to action-planning and the recording of students' progress was often superficial. The tutorial programme offers little guidance on wider educational issues such as sex education, drugs awareness and health education. There is insufficient monitoring of the quality of tutorials. In some cases the time allocated for individual student support is inadequate.

36 Surveys of students' views have indicated student dissatisfaction with advice on careers. Course tutors are responsible for providing subject-specific advice. A careers officer from Norfolk Careers Service is available once a week and responds to individual requests from students. The use of the service is not formally monitored. Careers education is insufficient. Students are not routinely provided with advice on the range of career publications in the college library or prepared for interviews with future employers. The college recognises these weaknesses and is taking action to improve the quality of careers guidance.

37 As the self-assessment report notes, students have good personal support from tutors and from wardens in residence. Specialist counselling and financial advice is available. Students value the informal support provided by course tutors. A warden is on duty in the evening, overnight and at weekends to provide supervision and pastoral support for students in residence. Students are given support in organising social and sporting activities. These are effectively managed by a student committee. There is also a student representative committee, chaired by the principal, with representatives elected from each course.

General Resources

Grade 3

38 Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report. By the time of the inspection the college had begun to address some of the weaknesses identified in the report.

Key strengths

- attractive grounds and estate which provide good learning facilities
- the high-quality sports and leisure centre for student and community use
- good information technology (IT) resources

Weaknesses

- inadequate science laboratories
- poor access to key areas for people with restricted mobility
- the poor standard of the residential accommodation

39 The college estate is attractive and well maintained. The general public and a range of organisations use the facilities. The 300-hectare estate includes a teaching campus, farm, amenity and commercial horticulture units, sporting and conservation facilities, and a sports and leisure centre. A grade II listed building in the grounds serves as the administrative centre for the college. Signposting around the estate is good but arrangements for traffic flow around the buildings are not wholly effective. The farm and estate provide good learning facilities for students and this strength is noted in the college's self-assessment report. The college is in the process of disposing of some of its estate which will support the funding of a substantial capital refurbishment programme. A planned programme of reconstruction and renovation has enabled the college to adapt its buildings to meet changing needs.

Cross-college Provision

40 The sports and leisure centre provides excellent facilities. It comprises a coffee lounge and bar, a well-equipped fitness room, a large multi-purpose sports hall and a conference centre with meeting rooms. The centre stands alongside a hard-surfaced outside sports area and the college's playing fields. The centre is succeeding in its dual function of attracting a range of community and other users to its sport and conference facilities and in providing excellent teaching and social facilities for students. About a quarter of the classrooms are in temporary accommodation. These are in poor condition with inadequate ventilation and heating. Many classrooms lack displays of students' work. There are two science laboratories, one of which is in a temporary converted general classroom. The preparation facilities in the principal laboratory are poor and lack sufficient bench space and storage. The science laboratories are inadequate. Staff workrooms and administrative staff offices are in a good state of decorative repair but some, especially those for teaching staff, are small. The college's buildings are well maintained and have a good standard of cleanliness.

41 There are three hostel blocks providing a total of 101 single study bedrooms. One of these blocks is currently not in use and the occupancy of the remaining two is below capacity. Inspectors agreed with the college that the standard of this accommodation is poor. The self-assessment report identifies the need to upgrade the refectory and student common room. Action has been taken to address these weaknesses. At the time of the inspection, the college was reviewing its health and safety procedures to ensure compliance with statutory testing requirements for students' electrical appliances. The college has no childcare facilities on site.

42 The library and learning centres are located on the first floor of the main teaching block. Since the previous inspection an IT

'drop-in' learning centre and specialist learning support facility have been created. A lift has been installed which has improved access to these facilities. There are 64 modern computers with Internet access for students' use, providing a good ratio of computers to full-time equivalent students of 1:6.4. Students have good access to IT on a 'drop-in' basis. The self-assessment did not recognise this strength. The library currently has a stock of about 8,000 books, 110 journals, 250 videotapes and 30 CD-ROMs. There is an adequate selection of learning materials for the curriculum. The number of students borrowing books has increased significantly since the previous inspection.

43 Despite some recent improvements, people with restricted mobility do not have access to many parts of the college. The college estimates that a quarter of the academic areas are inaccessible. This includes all of the IT rooms with the exception of the IT 'drop-in' and learning support facility, and the private study rooms adjacent to the library. Access to some of the mobile classrooms is difficult. Eleven study bedrooms in the hostels are on the ground floor with no lift access to the remainder on the upper floors. The college conducted a space utilisation survey in May 2000. This indicates that the college currently has an over-capacity of buildings but many are unsuitable for its future needs.

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Quality Assurance

Grade 3

44 Inspectors agreed with some of the judgements in the self-assessment report but identified additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- strong commitment to continuous improvement
- significant improvements in achievement rates
- sound arrangements for lesson observations
- improvements resulting from surveys of students' views

Weaknesses

- poor integration between different elements of quality assurance
- insufficient impact of quality assurance procedures on teaching and learning
- ineffective course reviews
- poor college charter

45 The college has made some improvements to its quality assurance system since the previous inspection. It produced its second self-assessment report for the inspection, which is thorough and involved a wide range of staff and governors. Inspectors agreed that there is a strong commitment to continuous improvement. Governors work closely with senior managers on quality assurance matters. Collaborative projects with other agricultural colleges, including a beacon college, have reinforced the strong emphasis given to improving standards. Re-accreditation as an Investor in People was achieved in 1999. The college has acted to address poor performance on some courses. There have been significant improvements in overall levels of students' achievements between 1999 and 2000. At a senior level, the

responsibilities for quality assurance are clear. A quality and equal opportunities committee chaired by the principal and reporting to the academic board has an overview of the system. Below senior management level, there is uncertainty about how the different parts of the quality assurance framework relate to each other. The calendar of quality assurance events in the staff handbook is not up to date and does not cover all aspects of the college's work. The self-assessment report does not recognise the poor integration of the different elements of quality assurance as a key weakness.

46 In recognition of the defects in its system of course review and evaluation, the college has recently introduced a new system for reviewing the performance of courses. Greater attention is now given to setting targets for retention and achievement and the use of national benchmarking data. However, many aspects of course review are still ineffective. The analysis of teaching and learning and students' attendance is inadequate. Action plans lack sufficient detail to enable staff to address specific strengths and weaknesses. Some plans are not clearly written and lack measurable objectives or clear priorities. Some of the data generated through the college management information system have been unreliable. This has hampered the effective implementation and monitoring of quality assurance procedures. Steps have been taken to remedy this weakness. There is insufficient use of performance indicators and service standards to monitor performance and promote quality improvement in non-teaching functions, such as the library.

47 Inspectors agreed that the sound arrangements for lesson observations introduced in 1999-2000 are a strength. The procedures are well documented and thorough. Staff with responsibility for observing lessons are appropriately trained. The college is self-critical about the quality of teaching and learning. The profile of lesson observation grades awarded by the college closely matches

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grades awarded by inspectors. Quality assurance procedures have had insufficient impact on teaching and learning. Opportunities to discuss the lesson observations at course, section or faculty level so that good practice can be shared are often missed. There is no prioritising of activities to improve teaching and learning through staff development. The observation of lessons is not linked to the system of staff appraisal. FEFC and TSC inspectors agreed that internal verification procedures are not applied consistently. In some cases, internal verification had been left until too late in the course to be effective. However, the college has identified this weakness and is standardising its procedures.

48 There are effective processes for gathering the views of students. The college did not identify this strength. Elected student representatives meet with senior college managers twice each term. Students complete two questionnaires each year. Results of the surveys are analysed and published. The college has taken action in response to feedback from students by making improvements to communal facilities and IT resources. Action is also taken at course level to meet students' concerns. The content of the college charter is insufficiently detailed. It outlines the services that students can expect from the college but does not contain measurable standards. There are no current arrangements to monitor the charter commitments. The charter does not include the college's complaints policy. There is a central record of complaints. It shows that the college has been slow to deal with some complaints. The college does not produce an annual report on the complaints that it receives.

49 The college does not have a clear staff development policy. The annual budget for staff development is £24,000. It enables staff to participate in a wide range of activities. Individual activities are evaluated, but there is no whole-college evaluation of the staff development programme.

Governance

Grade 2

50 Inspectors were in broad agreement with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- commitment of governors to the college's mission
- appropriate and effective relationship with senior managers
- close involvement with strategic planning
- effective operation of the corporation and its committees

Weaknesses

- insufficient monitoring of the college's academic performance
- lack of formal training arrangements

51 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is good. 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.

52 The corporation agreed a determined membership of 18 in line with the statutory modifications to the instrument of government. The present membership includes six business governors, three co-opted governors, two staff governors, two local authority governors, three local community governors, one student governor and the principal. The corporation has taken positive steps to ensure that staff and students fully participate in their meetings. The governors have a broad range of skills, including those in agriculture, horticulture, business, finance, land agency, employment law and education. Inspectors agreed with the

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self-assessment report that the search committee operates effectively in seeking candidates and advising the corporation on the appointment of governors.

53 The governors have a clear understanding of the distinction between governance and management and this is noted in the self-assessment report. The corporation has sound arrangements for the appraisal of the principal and senior postholders and for their continuing training. One governor provided specific help and support on financial planning to the deputy principal (resources) and another joined the principal and a senior manager in working closely with the Royal Norfolk Agricultural Association on the Millennium Orchard Project.

54 Governors are fully committed to the mission of the college, particularly in its focus on enhancing the economic development of the area and this strength is stated in the self-assessment report. Governors use their wide knowledge and experience to give clear guidance on strategic issues and encourage the development of income earning activities and the formation of partnerships with other organisations such as the Morley Research Centre. Governors have been closely involved with the updating of the strategic plan and receive regular reports on progress. They ensured that the revised plan includes a sharper focus on issues identified in the previous inspection report concerning marketing and quality assurance. The final plan considered by the corporation was the outcome of joint efforts between senior managers and governors.

55 Governors have not yet established satisfactory arrangements for monitoring the college's overall performance using an agreed range of performance indicators and this weakness is partially recognised in the self-assessment report. The corporation has sought a better understanding of academic performance by involving governors in the academic board and ensuring that at every corporation meeting

there is a report on academic issues. Close interest is taken in the results of the survey of students' satisfaction and in the complaints received by the college.

56 All governors and senior postholders have completed the register of interests, which is updated annually. The corporation has a code of conduct, and revised its code of ethics to include the Nolan committee's seven principles of public life. Corporation agendas and minutes are readily available for public inspection. The corporation determined that governors will be limited to two consecutive terms of four years with a mandatory break of one year before re-election will be considered. Eligibility criteria and 'whistleblowing' procedures have been established. The corporation based its own self-assessment process on the completion of individual questionnaires and had a thorough debate about the outcomes of that survey. An outcome of this process is that they are currently considering performance indicators and setting targets against which they can monitor their own performance.

57 The governors recently appointed an independent clerk. The agendas and supporting papers for corporation and committee meetings provide a good basis for decision-making. Committee business is effectively reported to the full corporation. The corporation gives key approvals promptly. The calendar of corporation and committee meetings is set 12 months in advance. The clerk services all committees. Governors recognised the need to establish formal induction and training arrangements, and commissioned the clerk to prepare an induction pack, a governors' handbook, and a training programme.

58 The corporation has an appropriate committee structure of finance, audit, remuneration, and search committees. Committees' terms of reference clearly identify their responsibilities and relationship to the corporation. All meetings in the past year were

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well attended and quorate. The finance committee and the corporation consider the bi-monthly management accounts at their termly meetings. The audit committee established performance indicators for internal and external audit. It assessed its own performance, and the performance of the internal and external audit providers, and presented its annual report to the corporation on the state of the whole system of internal control within the college. The committee has not prepared a rolling schedule of recommendations from internal and external audit reports, though it does monitor the implementation of these recommendations.

Management

Grade 3

59 Inspectors agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report, but added more significance to some of the weaknesses. The college had addressed some of the weaknesses in the self-assessment report by the time of the inspection.

Key strengths

- well-formulated strategic plan and good strategic planning process
- strong and productive external links
- open and accessible management team

Weaknesses

- inadequacies in course planning and monitoring of the curriculum
- insufficient use of targets
- no systematic monitoring of equal opportunities

60 The college's management structure has been refined over the last two years. It is clear and staff understand their roles and responsibilities. Managers in new roles have received training in preparation for them. Staff

find senior managers approachable and open about issues facing the college. The principal holds monthly staff meetings and there is a weekly appointments sheet detailing the senior managers' movements. Managers at all levels recognise that communications throughout the college are not fully effective and have begun to develop a more consultative approach.

61 The increased role of staff in contributing to the college's strategic plan is acknowledged in the self-assessment report. The plan is clear and relevant to the context of the college. There are seven key priorities which form the basis of the principal's reports to the corporation. The plan is well informed by an analysis of labour market information, environmental influences and a comprehensive risk assessment. Recruitment figures and targets are carefully analysed to produce the curriculum plan. A new action plan for marketing was produced in the summer of 2000. At the time of the inspection it was too early to evaluate its impact. Operational planning at section and course level is weaker. There is little evidence of detailed monitoring of the performance of courses at section level. Course teams do not use plans as working documents to monitor the performance of courses. The progress of courses is routinely reported to the senior management team and the academic board and some poorly performing courses have been identified through this route. However, the reports are not all complete or accurate. The reporting structure cannot ensure that all emerging or actual issues reach the senior managers. At the time of the inspection, there was no reference to curriculum 2000 in section or course plans. The self-assessment report acknowledges the weaknesses in monitoring but not in course planning.

62 The college closely monitors student recruitment and uses data on recruitment, applications and enrolments to cost and plan the curriculum offer. The setting of targets at course level for retention and achievement is relatively

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new, and the college has not set attendance targets. Staff have clear guidance for setting appropriate targets and these are monitored by heads of faculty. However, the use of targets is underdeveloped. They do not inform planning effectively and are not used systematically in the analysis of performance. Overall, college targets have only a tenuous relationship with course targets. These weaknesses are not fully acknowledged in the self-assessment report. The college uses financial targets effectively.

63 Improvements have been made to the management information system since the self-assessment report was produced. Managers have increased the quality, accuracy and range of information to staff, though direct on-line access to data is available only to senior managers. A new initiative is a management information system handbook for senior managers which has a comprehensive range of regularly updated statistics showing three-year trends and comparisons with national benchmarking data.

64 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is adequate. A deputy principal, who is a qualified accountant, heads the finance function. Management accounts are produced every other month and include an income and expenditure account with a detailed commentary, a balance sheet, a rolling 12-month cashflow forecast, and report against key financial performance indicators. The timing of the production of the management accounts was an issue but has now been rectified. The senior management team considers summarised financial information monthly. The budget setting procedure is well documented, and budget holders were closely involved in setting this year's budgets. The college's financial regulations have not been formally revised since 1996. The college has started to address some omissions in the regulations. Statistical and financial returns to the FEFC are submitted on a timely basis.

65 The college has an appropriate range of policies, each with a review date. The equal opportunities policy was revised in 2000, with an implementation plan attached. As yet, there has been no systematic approach to implementing the policy and monitoring its impact. The health and safety policy was thoroughly reviewed and revised by the health and safety group, consulting relevant staff. The disability statement is poor and in need of revision.

66 Inspectors agreed with the college that it has good links with a range of relevant external bodies. The principal chairs the agriculture and food processing group within the Norfolk Economic Development Strategy 'Shaping the Future' group, which influences strategy plans in the county council and East of England Development Agency. The college uses its detailed action plans in support of bids for funding. An agriculture business adviser, providing advice on diversification to farmers, is based at the college. The college has a strong relationship with the Norfolk and Waveney Training and Enterprise Council (TEC). Relevant sectors of the industry, through industrial liaison groups and other links, contribute to the development of courses, provide work placements for students and sponsor prizes.

Conclusions

67 The college's self-assessment report provided a helpful starting point for the inspection. Inspectors agreed with many of the college's judgements in the report. However, they differed from the college in respect of the significance given to some of the strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors considered that insufficient attention was given to an evaluation of student retention and achievement rates in relation to national averages for the sector. At the time of the inspection, the college had made progress in addressing some of the weaknesses identified in the self-assessment

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report. The grades that the college awarded for lessons was broadly similar to those the inspectors gave. One of the three grades awarded by inspectors in curriculum areas was lower than that in the self-assessment. Inspectors agreed with all the grades for cross-college provision awarded in the self-assessment report.

68 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 2000)

<i>Age</i>	<i>%</i>
Under 16	0
16-18 years	22
19-24 years	15
25+ years	58
Not known	5
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (July 2000)

<i>Level of study</i>	<i>%</i>
Level 1 (foundation) and entry level	20
Level 2 (intermediate)	28
Level 3 (advanced)	34
Level 4/5 (higher)	1
Level not specified	17
Non-schedule 2	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (July 2000)

<i>Programme area</i>	<i>Full time</i>	<i>Part time</i>	<i>Total provision %</i>
Science	6	153	9
Agriculture	257	720	55
Construction	2	0	0
Engineering	0	145	8
Business	10	72	4
Hotel and catering	20	18	2
Health and community care	2	259	15
Art and design	0	30	2
Humanities	0	89	5
Basic education	3	3	0
Total	300	1,489	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1998-99 ISR data, the college recruited 8% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions' Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (July 2000)

	<i>Perm- anent</i>	<i>Fixed term</i>	<i>Casual</i>	<i>Total</i>
Direct learning contact	36	13	0	49
Supporting direct learning contact	17	0	0	17
Other support	61	0	0	61
Total	114	13	0	127

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1998	1999	2000
Income	£3,225,000	£3,582,000	£3,749,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	£16.27	£16.25	£16.66
Payroll as a proportion of income	53%	55%	59%
Achievement of funding target	98%	99%	94%
Diversity of income	53%	53%	56%
Operating surplus	£110,000	£222,000	-£235,000

Sources: Income – Council Circular 00/10 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)

ALF – Funding Allocations 1997-98 (1998), Funding Allocations 1998-99 (1999), college (2000)

Payroll – Council Circular 00/10 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)

Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1997-98 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)

Diversity of income – Council Circular 00/10 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)

Operating surplus – Council Circular 00/10 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)

Students' achievements data

Level	Retention and pass	Students aged 16 to 18			Students aged 19 or over		
		1998	1999	2000	1998	1999	2000
1	Number of starters	195	16	91	150	69	90
	Retention (%)	89	94	88	84	88	99
	Achievement (%)	64	8	93	50	15	100
2	Number of starters	139	198	183	152	303	257
	Retention (%)	84	90	89	80	86	86
	Achievement (%)	75	58	90	85	65	83
3	Number of starters	108	66	127	204	154	96
	Retention (%)	89	80	83	94	88	86
	Achievement (%)	76	82	92	85	23	85
4 or 5	Number of starters	0	0	0	3	4	23
	Retention (%)	0	0	0	67	100	74
	Achievement (%)	0	0	0	100	50	100
Short courses	Number of starters	252	186	189	1,330	1,579	1,189
	Retention (%)	95	94	98	96	97	99
	Achievement (%)	98	67	89	94	70	93
Unknown/unclassified	Number of starters	0	0	11	38	9	12
	Retention (%)	0	0	100	95	100	82
	Achievement (%)	0	0	100	91	n/a	0

Source: college

n/a not applicable

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