

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

Holme Lacy College

May 1996

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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The Further Education Funding Council has a legal duty to make sure further education in England is properly assessed. The FEFC's inspectorate inspects and reports on each college of further education every four years. The inspectorate also assesses and reports nationally on the curriculum and gives advice to the FEFC's quality assessment committee.

College inspections are carried out in accordance with the framework and guidelines described in Council Circular 93/28. They involve full-time inspectors and registered part-time inspectors who have knowledge and experience in the work they inspect. Inspection teams normally include at least one member who does not work in education and a member of staff from the college being inspected.

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GRADE DESCRIPTORS

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

By June 1995, some 208 college inspections had been completed. The grade profiles for aspects of cross-college provision and programme areas for the 208 colleges are shown in the following table.

College grade profiles 1993-95

Activity	Inspection grades				
	1	2	3	4	5
Programme area	9%	60%	28%	3%	<1%
Cross-college provision	13%	51%	31%	5%	<1%
Overall	11%	56%	29%	4%	<1%

FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 84/96

HOLME LACY COLLEGE

WEST MIDLANDS REGION

Inspected September 1995-March 1996

Summary

Holme Lacy is a small college which offers courses in agriculture, horticulture, equine studies, small animal care, gamekeeping, business studies, leisure and tourism, and forestry. It is a regional centre for forestry. The college estate, with its two farms and woodland area, is a valuable educational resource. The governors' experience of land-based industries is helpful to the college. Work with local schools is very effective. Teachers have appropriate commercial and industrial experience and make good use of industrially-relevant examples in their teaching. Arrangements for induction and learning support are effective. The senior management of the college has recently been restructured but the benefits of this have yet to be realised. Curriculum management is weak. The college should ensure that the levels of courses and routes for progression are appropriate for students. Teaching does not adequately address the needs of students with differing abilities. Tutorial policies are incomplete and what is in place is not effectively implemented. Some of the college's courses have poor retention rates. Students' examination achievements vary and are often poor. College-wide policies for quality assurance and staff appraisal are inadequate, and staff development requires more support. The college has too few computers for students and information technology skills are inadequately developed.

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

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Agriculture, horticulture and floristry	3	Business studies	3
Forestry	3		
Equine studies and small animal care	3		

INTRODUCTION

1 Holme Lacy College was inspected in three stages. The college's enrolment and induction procedures were inspected at the start of the autumn term 1995. Specialist inspections took place in January 1996, followed by an inspection of cross-college provision in March 1996. Nine inspectors spent 44 days on the inspection. They visited 48 classes, involving 475 students, and scrutinised students' work. Meetings were held with members of the corporation, college senior managers and staff, students, parents, local employers, members of the local community and representatives from local schools. Discussions also took place with representatives of the local training and enterprise council (TEC). Inspectors examined college policy statements, the strategic plan, minutes of committees, working papers and documents.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 Holme Lacy College is situated in the Wye Valley, five miles south east of Hereford. The college traces its origins back to 1896. It moved to its present site in 1932 when Pound Farm was given to the county council. In 1962, the adjacent Bower Farm was acquired. Before incorporation, the aims of the college were to provide day-release training for the local farming community and to prepare students for more advanced study at other institutions. The county council's policy for funding students on advanced courses outside the county restricted college development. Since incorporation, the number of full-time students has more than doubled, and the number of part-time students has remained fairly constant. In September 1995, 194 full-time and 494 part-time students were enrolled. Thirty-six full-time students enrolled earlier in the year had already left. Enrolments by age, by level of study and by mode of attendance and curriculum areas are shown in figures 1, 2 and 3, respectively. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4.

3 In the summer of 1995, the new principal reorganised the management of the college, placing an emphasis on academic and support teams and marketing. Within the senior management team, responsibilities were allocated for resources management, academic management and strategic management. At the time of inspection, many staff had only recently taken up their new responsibilities.

4 The college has a 90 cow dairy unit with followers, a 60 head beef finishing unit and a 480 flock of ewes. The 247 hectare estate, which includes 88 hectares of arable land and 44 hectares of woodland, constitutes a valuable resource for education and training. The college offers a wide range of vocational courses in agriculture, horticulture, floristry, forestry, equine studies, gamekeeping, small animal care, business studies and leisure and tourism. Links have been formed with higher education institutions to develop environmental management. Expansion into outdoor pursuits has led to the joint delivery of the General

National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) in advanced leisure and tourism with West Malvern Outdoor Education Centre and the Hereford Sports and Leisure Centre.

5 There are two neighbouring colleges of agriculture and horticulture in the County of Hereford and Worcester. A college of further education, a college of art and design and a sixth form college are located in Hereford. There is co-operation with schools in the county, most of which provide education for 11 to 16 year olds.

6 The college aims to be responsive to the needs of individuals and industry in the development of personal and technical skills. It seeks to achieve this by providing a wide range of flexible land-based, business, leisure and tourism courses, which are environmentally aware, financially effective and accessible to all.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

7 Although staff are reasonably well informed about some national developments in further education, there are significant gaps in their awareness of others. Teachers in most areas of work are knowledgeable about National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs). Some have been active in national developments. For example, the forestry team has been involved with the industry lead body in the development of NVQs and is piloting the new awards this year. Some staff have not yet grasped the implications for course planning of next year's introduction of the GNVQ for the land-based industries. Middle managers are inadequately informed about aspects of Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) policies relevant to their planning responsibilities.

8 Starting from a low base, there has been considerable development of full-time provision over the last three years. In most areas, development is not complete. There are still gaps in the range of courses, and progression routes are not always clear or appropriate. Many new courses are planned for next year although the suitability of some of these has been questioned by the college's own staff. Specialist teachers and relevant employers are not as fully involved in these developments as they should be. In some areas of low demand, the range of courses available to students has been maintained by combining teaching groups. The lack of a modular structure restricts further development. To assist students from a thinly-populated rural area to travel to the campus, the college provides subsidised transport from Hereford and co-operates with other further education colleges in the town to transport students from other districts.

9 The college offers a wide range of forestry courses which attract students nationwide. Opportunities are provided for students with a range of pre-course experience and specialist interests. Entry and progression routes for full-time students, however, are not always clear or agreed by staff. The respective rationales for the national certificates and first diploma should be clarified.

10 Full-time courses in small animal care and equine studies have been developed over the last four years. Demand has been high and courses have achieved their recruitment targets. Only national certificates are offered full time. In agriculture, the first diploma and national certificate courses cater for students with varied previous experience. There is no advanced level provision. A national diploma is planned for next year. There is not always sufficient clarity about the level of course most appropriate for the individual student and the routes for progression which are available.

11 The college has recently established GNVQs in business, and leisure and tourism. Students on these courses now account for 20 per cent of full-time enrolments. The range of courses for business students is limited. There is no foundation course. The advanced GNVQ is not running because it could not recruit sufficient students; those accepted were transferred to the farm secretaries' national certificate course. There is uncertainty about the progression route for students currently studying on the intermediate GNVQ. The advanced GNVQ in leisure and tourism was offered for the first time this year. The college is introducing an intermediate course next year and increasing the range of specialist options to meet the strong demand for this subject.

12 Most full-time students have opportunities to gain additional qualifications, many of them practically based and directly relevant to their vocational studies. For those planning to take up employment in forestry and agriculture, the additional certification is sometimes a legal requirement for carrying out specific tasks. Students on the intermediate GNVQ in business studies can take additional administration or land-based vocational qualifications.

13 The college provides short courses for those employed in industry, often training and assessing workers in areas where certification is again a legal requirement for carrying out the work. A limited number of short courses related to leisure and tourism have recently been introduced. The college is exploring the possibility of increasing its range of vocational and general interest courses and has introduced arrangements for co-ordinating work.

14 The college is generally effective at promoting itself and its courses. A particular strength is the work with schools. This year it has introduced a voucher system which allows schools to use the college's specialist resources in return for the opportunity to display promotional materials in the schools. The initiative has been well received and 10 schools are already involved. Courses are advertised locally and good use is made of press releases to obtain free publicity. The college is reviewing its publicity materials for industry and for adults. The college prospectus is well presented but some of the information on courses is unclear. Course leaflets provide simple, clear information on courses and requirements for entry. However, there are no leaflets for some courses.

15 The college's knowledge of industry's needs is not sufficiently detailed to enable it to plan effectively. It has been recognised that arrangements for consulting with industry are inadequate; consultative groups for the main vocational sectors are being established.

16 Partnership arrangements have been developed with several other colleges and training providers. Strong links with two further education colleges in Hereford include joint distribution of publicity material. The college has a memorandum of co-operation with Worcester College of Higher Education and makes a significant contribution to its diploma in higher education. There are also links with the University of Wolverhampton. The college has an agreement with two local approved training centres which provide NVQ or equivalent options for the GNVQ in leisure and tourism. The college has a good working relationship with the Hereford and Worcester TEC and college representatives play active roles on the TEC's committees and groups. TEC funding for youth credits makes up a significant proportion of the college's income. The college has had little success in its bids for other TEC administered funds; its proposals have not always been related firmly enough to the relevant criteria. The TEC believes the college is often slow in responding to its requests for information.

17 In agriculture and forestry, good use is made of off-site locations for practical work and visits. Employers provide work experience for students on full-time and part-time courses. This year, the college is piloting the work-based delivery and assessment of NVQs in horse care, which involves close co-operation with employers. The college has good links with several community organisations and provides support for their work. The equine studies teachers have close links with the charity 'Riding for the Disabled', which has specialist facilities on the campus. Representatives of another local charity group speak highly of the college's development of a garden for people with physical disabilities. The college has worked with the Holme Lacy village school on an environmental improvement project.

18 There are strong curriculum links with local schools and a range of programmes to suit their needs. The college enriches the school curriculum by providing individually tailored courses and access to specialist resources. Schools are complimentary about the college's flexibility in meeting their requirements and about the quality of the feedback they receive from college staff. The college provides reports on individual pupils, including assessments of their personal development. This year, 150 pupils from 10 schools have weekly timetabled periods amounting to about 30 hours of work per student. Some pupils are working towards NVQ certification. The college also provides study visits for pupils from primary and secondary schools, contributing to aspects of the national curriculum and to General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) courses in geography and science.

19 The college has a commitment to promote equality of opportunity. Staff and students feel that the college meets this commitment and avoids discriminatory practices. The college operates an open policy on recruitment and attempts, through its publicity, to overcome the stereotype that some courses are for men and some for women. Arrangements for implementing the college's equal opportunities policy are in place, but procedures for monitoring are weak. There are no recent reports on what has been achieved. Staff do not understand where responsibilities lie for implementing the policy.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

20 The corporation has 11 members. There are seven independent members, one TEC nominee, the principal and two members elected by the staff. Two members of the board are women. A new member with equestrian experience has recently been recruited but no member has a background in small animal care. None of the corporation members have professional expertise in law or accountancy. Members' knowledge of the land-based industries has been used consultatively. For example, their advice has been taken on the management of the farm and on aspects of forestry. The corporation has not established a search committee. New members are approached informally. A library of useful information for governors has been established. The corporation has very recently adopted a code of conduct and a register of interests is being compiled. There is no formal training for governors. The clerk to the corporation is a full-time member of the college staff and is now receiving training for this post. Minutes of the corporation are available for public scrutiny. Staff governors provide regular feedback to college staff on key issues.

21 The corporation has established two subcommittees; audit and, very recently, a staff remuneration committee. Financial issues are dealt with by the full corporation without a supporting finance committee. In practice, this has meant that financial issues have figured largely in corporation meetings at the expense of other important issues. For example, no quality assurance policy has been approved and no policy for the appraisal of senior postholders has been implemented. Until the formal establishment of the staff remuneration committee and the academic board in February 1996, the corporation had not fully complied with its instrument and articles of government. The quality of corporation briefing papers has substantially improved in recent months. These now give clearer information upon which to base decisions. The corporation has not determined the performance indicators it will use in evaluating the college's performance and it has not reviewed its own performance. The level of attendance at corporation meetings is generally high.

22 The academic board held its first meeting in February 1996. Its aims include academic planning, a three-year planning framework, quality review, admissions policy and assessment and curriculum management. It is far too early to judge the effectiveness of this new body.

23 There is a clear understanding of the respective roles of the corporation and senior management. Consultation between the chairman and the principal is effective. In addition to formal meetings, the chairman visits the college at least once a month. Until the autumn of 1995 the corporation approved proposals coming from senior management without fully evaluating them. Stronger strategic oversight is now being exercised and the improved briefing papers help in this. The corporation is now involved in the strategic planning cycle and the major and continuing revision of the strategic plan which began in the summer of 1995. The corporation is supportive of the college's mission to enhance and update skills in the land-based industries and the rural economy, and to diversify the college's curriculum. The nature and extent of diversification has been the focus of lively debate although the corporation has not always received sufficient information to ensure that discussion is fully informed. The proposals to increase significantly the number of students are not based on a sufficiently thorough appraisal of market demand and the resources required.

24 The current weakness of strategic planning is being addressed through the development of a new planning cycle involving governors and staff. A revised mission and corporate objectives were being submitted to the corporation at the time of the inspection. The original 1994-97 plan was insufficiently detailed in respect of operational objectives and measurable targets. Programme leaders view the planning process as operating from the top down. The development of new course proposals is being undertaken by an external consultant and there is limited liaison with the staff who will be involved in running and teaching these courses. Subject and programme teams have not so far been effectively involved in course planning, although there is an intention that they will be. Curriculum objectives, derived from the strategic plan, provide a useful planning framework for each of the subject teams but the plans provide insufficient detail on target dates, responsibilities and the resources required. There are few fully-developed curriculum area development plans and managers are unclear about the strategic objectives for their areas.

25 The college had a deficit of £173,000 on a budget of under £2 million in 1994-95. This was partly accounted for by the loss of the training for work contract with Hereford and Worcester TEC. The college has planned for a further, although smaller, deficit in 1995-96. This is likely to be larger than expected because of a significant decline in income. Corporation members are keeping this under close scrutiny and recognise the need to bring the budget into balance.

26 The college uses the services of an accountancy firm, appointed after appropriate procedures, to provide strategic financial information and to make returns to the FEFC. A partner acts as college finance director and liaises with an internal finance officer. The intention is that, as systems become fully established, more routine activity will be carried out in the

college. These arrangements give the corporation and senior management more detailed information than in the past.

27 The college sets annual enrolment targets for each course. Very ambitious internal targets have been adopted to increase the number of units funded by the FEFC. It did not achieve its FEFC-funded numbers/units in 1993-94, but exceeded them in 1994-95. It has already lost a significant number of students since the beginning of this academic year. The college's target was 200 full-time equivalent students and 194 were initially enrolled. On 1 November 1995, 170 full-time students were on roll and numbers had fallen to 158 by early March. The college's average level of funding in 1994-95 was £25.02. The median for colleges of agriculture was £24.58. The college's estimated income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1996 are shown in figures 5 and 6.

28 The corporation has been strongly supportive of the restructuring of college management. It believes that this will enable the college to make better use of staff expertise. It also recognises an urgent need to train senior managers to carry out their new responsibilities successfully. The principal has been advised by an external consultant. Clear job descriptions were established for senior managers. The senior management team comprises the principal, three full-time managers responsible for academic management, strategic planning and resources management together with a part-time finance manager. Below this level, a number of team leaders have been appointed, some of whom are part-time staff. A permanent team leader for business studies, leisure and tourism has yet to be appointed.

29 The intentions behind the restructuring are clear and well founded. They are to devolve responsibility, accountability and decision-making to appropriate levels within the college and to establish a teamworking ethos. Full and effective implementation of the restructuring has yet to be achieved. There are continuing weaknesses in the management of the curriculum. Poor guidance and the absence of monitoring has resulted in curriculum management which varies significantly in its effectiveness and curriculum delivery which, in many cases, is weak. There is a lack of clear overall responsibility for tutorial policy, quality assurance, learner support and the accreditation of students' prior learning. The phasing of curriculum and assessment elements is not always effectively co-ordinated. Retention issues are not consistently addressed. Most team leaders lack understanding of how recruitment targets are set.

30 The new organisation is helping to promote communication but there is still too much reliance on informal arrangements. The full-time senior managers meet informally on a weekly basis and monthly with the finance manager for more formal, minuted meetings. The principal holds weekly, minuted meetings for all staff. Programme area meetings are structured to a common format. Staff welcome and value these meetings; in most cases, the minutes are full and contain clear action points. Senior

managers regularly meet the middle managers for whom they are responsible, but there is no programme of meetings for all senior and middle managers, to address, for example, the links between curricula and resources. Weaknesses in communication persist. Teachers new to an area are not well briefed. Some staff are poorly informed about matters which are vital for carrying out their responsibilities. Senior managers' awareness of the implementation of initiatives is sometimes weak. Senior staff's interpretation of the responsibilities of the cross-college learning co-ordinator are not in accord with that of the postholder.

31 The management information system is able to give information about enrolment and achievements. Some staff do not have complete confidence in its accuracy. Although the collection of data is reasonably efficient, the information held by course teams does not always tally with that held centrally. Little use is made of the system. Team leaders neither get nor request much information from it. There is a need to raise the level of awareness of the value of management information to managers at all levels.

32 Policies are in place for health and safety and for equal opportunities but there are no policies for student support or environmental issues. There are weaknesses in the monitoring of the equal opportunities policy. Formal risk assessment and safety audits are not carried out and the college's health and safety policy is being rewritten to take account of this. A comprehensive staff handbook is in an advanced state of preparation. This should assist staff in carrying out their duties.

33 Budgets are delegated to the senior management team and, to a lesser extent, to team leaders. The senior management team has recently reviewed the correct apportionment of responsibility for individual budgets and tightened up accountability. Improved financial accounting should help in providing the information vital to effective management. No significant increase in staff-development expenditure is planned, despite the college's acknowledged need to strengthen opportunities for training and development.

34 The senior management team are paying close attention to controlling expenditure against the budget with some success. However, it has had some difficulty in maintaining and increasing income. The college's failure to achieve its target for income has contributed to the growth of the 1995-96 deficit. There are no plans to remedy this within the current financial year. Although the college is beginning to address the serious issue of student retention through closer monitoring, few actions have been taken to try to improve the situation. There is no unit costing at present but systems are being put in place to develop unit costing.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

35 The college runs general and subject-specific information days for parents and students every one or two weeks during most of the year.

Parents and students find the days helpful and informative. They appreciate the tour of the college, the opportunity to meet students and the individual advice interviews. In a few cases, staff do not convey clear messages about the content and level of courses and career outcomes. Some students who had been advised that they would do mostly practical outdoor activities found this was not the case when they started the course.

36 There are clear college-wide procedures for admissions. Inquiries are carefully recorded and followed up. Students are invited to attend either a general or a subject-specific information day. They are usually offered an interview within one month of making an inquiry. Admissions documentation is clear. The application form provides no opportunity for students to express a general interest or to indicate uncertainty about what they want to study. Occasionally, the early choice of course results in staff failing to explore with students other study options which might be available. Efforts made to identify the need for learning support during the admissions processes are not systematic. A few students find that they have enrolled for courses at the wrong level, given their ability and level of literacy.

37 Students are sent a letter confirming their place and welcoming them to the college. It includes a range of helpful information on, for example, reading lists, where to purchase books and the nature and cost of the protective clothing required. Students are sent copies of the college rules and regulations which define their responsibilities as students. They are not formally advised of their rights although staff emphasise that they recognise such rights in practice. The college assists students who need to find residential accommodation. Useful information about different kinds of financial support is given before enrolment and further support is offered if requested. The college has an access fund and a hardship fund of around £3,500 for this year. Generally, staff and students are not aware of these. Students can borrow protective clothing from the college if they cannot afford to purchase it. The college offers no childcare support.

38 There are comprehensive induction arrangements for all students. Practice is informed by the review of the previous year's induction. Students gain a helpful overview of their course and the college; for example, the different approaches to learning, health and safety information, and arrangements for tutorial and student support. The students' handbook is useful but it lacks important elements such as the student charter and details about tutorials and learning support. The induction programme is generally well planned and well structured. Occasional weaknesses in organisation include arrangements for the tour of the college and the collection of fees. There are clear overall objectives for students' induction to their courses but the purpose of individual sessions was not always made clear to students and some questioned their relevance. A few sessions failed to engage students' interest. Most students were reasonably satisfied with their induction but some thought the programme was too long, or paid too little attention to subject-based activities.

39 Arrangements for the assessment and accreditation of students' prior learning are underdeveloped. Most tutors discuss with students the possibility of having their previous learning assessed and a few students have been exempted from part of a course because they possess relevant qualifications. However, several students complained that their previous practical experience and achievements, even when these had been gained on other courses at the college, were not taken into account. Some students with NVQ level 2 awards were working at lower levels for practical work and had not been given the opportunity to have their previous learning assessed.

40 Students are helpfully advised on how to transfer between courses if they consider a different course is more suitable. Sometimes students have to transfer to other courses if the course for which they are enrolled does not recruit a sufficient number to make it viable. Occasionally, this leads to students following courses which do not meet their needs.

41 Students and parents commented positively on the warm welcome given by staff and on their general helpfulness. There is an annual parents' evening. Parents receive a report on students' progress at the end of the autumn term but no end-of-year report.

42 The stated aims of the college's tutorial procedures are to review progress, discuss welfare issues and offer careers guidance. Implementation is inconsistent and, in some cases, inadequate. Tutors have insufficient guidance on ways of conducting tutorials. Students have an entitlement to tutorials three or four times a year, usually with their course tutor, but not all students receive their entitlement. Some weaker students are not seen early enough in their studies. Group tutorials are run in only a few subject areas. The college has no tutorial programme to cover areas such as personal and social development or the preparation of curricula vitae and practice for interviews. Some students receive advice as part of their courses but others do not. Most students find their individual tutorials helpful; a few derive little benefit from them. Some tutors have insufficient time to give to their tutees because of the number for which they are responsible. The number of tutees allocated to a tutor varies from 15 to 70.

43 A common recording system for tutorials has been introduced this year but the standard of recording varies. There is little focus on setting learning targets with students or making plans for their studies or careers. While studying at the college, students do not keep a national record of achievement, although many bring one from school. There is a low level of awareness among staff about the national record of achievement. There are no alternative arrangements for students to record broader achievements which lie outside their course.

44 A range of support services is available to students. A confidential counselling service was established two years ago, run by a member of college staff. Just over 200 counselling interviews were held with students

during 1994-95 covering a range of personal and study-related issues. Students are well informed about the service and value the support it offers. The counsellor receives suitable supervision from a professionally-qualified external counsellor. The college has expanded its learning support services this year by appointing a half-time tutor along with two trained volunteers. Students and staff are well informed about the support available although no information is provided in the college's prospectus. Full-time students' learning support needs are identified through a literacy and numeracy screening exercise which they complete during induction. In addition, tutors refer students to the service or students themselves sometimes seek help directly. Currently 20 students are receiving support on a regular one-to-one basis. Four students who have difficulties with writing have been provided with laptop computers. The quality of the learning support is generally good. The support tutor is careful to link work with students' studies. Students do not keep a record of their achievements to help them see the progress they are making and to plan their next steps with the tutor. The liaison between the learning support tutor and the students' course tutor is not as effective as it might be. Support for students with disabilities is arranged by course tutors. Staff lack the specialist expertise for arranging such support. The college has a co-ordinator for students with learning difficulties but not for students with disabilities.

45 The student committee, comprising two elected representatives from each course, makes a valuable contribution to student life. Helped by two members of staff the committee meets weekly and is responsible for arranging sporting and social activities for students. There is discussion with the principal on issues raised by students, and the college seeks the committee's views on reviewing and improving the prospectus and other issues.

46 The college has no planned careers education programme. Advice on careers is provided under an agreement with the local careers service. Students are well informed about this and value what is offered. Many make individual appointments with the careers officer who visits the college for a half day about every two weeks. Students also receive careers guidance from their course tutors and have access to a good stock of careers publications in the college library.

47 Students' absences are closely monitored by course tutors and followed up promptly. Action is taken to find out the reasons for absence and tutors offer support and encouragement if this is needed.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

48 Of the 48 sessions inspected, 44 per cent had strengths that outweighed weaknesses. This compares with a national average for this curriculum area of 70 per cent in 1994-95. Fifteen per cent of sessions were judged to have more weaknesses than strengths. In the sessions

inspected, the average level of attendance was 87 per cent. The following table summarises the grades given to the teaching sessions inspected

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GNVQ		0	2	3	1	0	6
NVQ		0	6	3	1	0	10
Other vocational		2	4	10	0	1	17
Other		2	5	4	4	0	15
Total		4	17	20	6	1	48

49 In most areas, good-quality documentation gives students clear information about the content of courses. There are detailed assessment schedules, usually supported by helpful guidance notes and proforma. Teachers' work plans are generally weak. They lack sufficient detail and are not always shared with other members of the team. An exception is in floristry. Detailed schemes of work are available and these are shared with the students. They enable staff to plan their work effectively and to integrate assessments with other aspects of the programme.

50 Assessment methods generally reflect the aims of the courses. For horticulture students the range of assessment methods is rather narrow; there is too heavy a reliance on short tests and assignments. There are some imbalances in the spread of assessments; forestry students in particular are critical of this. Students on some first-year courses are set too few assignments in the first term to enable weaknesses to be identified and tackled at an early stage. Work is promptly marked and returned, in most cases, with helpful written comments. Arrangements to ensure consistency and agree standards for the marking of coursework are weak.

51 For most of the Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) courses there are effective arrangements to record the students' development of skills in such areas as problem solving and communication. Insufficient attention is given to integrating these skills with vocational aspects of the curriculum. Some first diploma students are inadequately briefed and question the relevance of some of the skills. For many courses, there are insufficient opportunities for less experienced students to develop information technology skills. Some students receive inadequate formal instruction in information technology in the early stages of their studies. Students are not always sufficiently aware of the vocational applications of information technology and teachers make little use of computers. Students were critical of this aspect of their studies.

52 Assignments for national diploma students are well organised. Most exercises are realistic and relevant. There are effective written briefs and clear guidance on tasks and expected outcomes, including assessment requirements. For many first diploma students the assignments are set at

too low a level. In forestry and animal care, assignments should stretch able students more.

53 All full-time students are given work experience during their courses. The documentation provides a good level of detail on assessment arrangements. However, the rationale for the work and role of the employer is not always clearly specified. Employers, and most students, expressed satisfaction with the guidance and support they received. Some employers found the assessments difficult and time-consuming to carry out. Most students valued their work experience but the quality of the placements varied widely and some felt they had not gained as much as they might have. Some students and employers expressed concern about initial weaknesses in the organisation of the placements.

54 In agriculture, horticulture and floristry teachers used appropriately varied methods of teaching and students experienced a good range of learning activities. There was effective integration of the practical work and related assessments. In many cases, the aims of the lessons were not clear and teachers missed opportunities to consolidate learning and to check students' understanding. In agriculture and horticulture the practical work was often based on real operations which were effectively integrated with the management of the college estate. The effectiveness of some practical lessons was weakened by poor organisation and time management. Group work was not always well managed; the more experienced students were allowed to do too much and teachers failed to monitor the progress of all the students. Good use was made of industrially-relevant examples to illustrate classroom topics and maintain students' interest. In floristry, some classroom lessons were exceptionally well illustrated by displays and demonstrations. In many lessons teachers took too little account of students' individual needs, particularly where classes contained students from different courses.

55 In forestry, most teachers made effective use of their technical knowledge to provide realistic examples and illustrations. The practical work was generally of a high standard. Practical lessons were effectively structured to allow for demonstration of techniques, followed by opportunities for the students to practise their skills and develop their confidence. Students were given well directed, helpful guidance on how to improve their practical work. In a number of practical lessons there was an over-reliance on verbal instruction and students' time was wasted waiting for guidance. In much of the classroom work, teachers took too little account of the individuals' learning needs. Lessons were not always effectively structured; in some of the longer sessions, for example, activities were not varied enough to keep students' attention. Most teachers used question and answer techniques but often they were badly managed; for example, the more able and experienced students often dominated discussion.

56 In most business studies lessons, teachers used a variety of theory and practical work to maintain students' interest. They drew effectively on their business experience and introduced vocationally-related examples to illustrate topics. In practical work, teachers continually checked students' understanding. However, practical activities were not always organised to suit students' differing levels of ability. The result was that able students were sometimes undertaking insufficiently challenging work or less able students were still completing their work while the teacher was discussing the next topic.

57 In equine studies and animal care, related elements of the curriculum were not effectively linked and this led to a lack of continuity in students' learning. Theoretical and practical studies were not always well integrated. Although teachers made good use of their knowledge to provide realistic examples for students, the lack of specialist resources adversely affected students' learning in many practicals. In some lessons, learning activities were not varied enough or the pace of the work was too slow for students. A few teachers made good use of visual aids and worksheets to support and structure the learning.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

58 Most students enjoy their studies and many show considerable commitment to careers in their chosen vocational area. Some are very knowledgeable about certain aspects of the industry and are strongly motivated by their involvement in industrially sponsored competitions and trials. Last year, a team of students from Holme Lacy College won a national award for a calf-rearing project.

59 Students work well together. More competent students often help weaker students. There were examples of group discussions leading to the solution of practical problems. Students enjoy their practical work and carry it out safely. Full-time agriculture and forestry students work at an appropriate level of competence and achieve a high standard in some of their vocational work. In equine and animal care studies the level of students' practical competence is often below the accepted standard.

60 Many students' information technology skills are underdeveloped and there is insufficient awareness of the vocational applications of information technology. Some students' weaknesses in literacy and numeracy limit their progress on other aspects of their studies.

61 Most students are developing knowledge and understanding appropriate to the level of the course they are studying and are achieving a reasonable standard in their coursework. Some of the national diploma in forestry assignment work is of a high standard: well researched, effectively structured and clearly presented. Some of the first diploma students' work is of a low standard. There was little evidence that students on the first diploma in forestry could apply their knowledge, and their assignments showed little development in their understanding over the

first term of the course. Few national diploma students record their own notes.

62 The success rate for full-time students varies widely between courses and years. There are some consistently good performances on a number of the courses but achievements are generally below average for the sector. A significant proportion of students leave the college before finishing their course, many within six weeks of enrolment. By early March 1996 almost 20 per cent of the students who had enrolled in September 1995 had left without completing their studies. Although individual cases are reviewed and guidance provided, there is insufficient analysis of the reasons for the low retention rates.

63 A high proportion of animal care students complete their studies and gain the award for which they are aiming. Last year all 13 students completed their studies and 11 gained the full award: all gained additional certification for the safe use of veterinary medicines. For the first year of the national certificate in the management of horses last year, a relatively low overall pass rate of 75 per cent was recorded for the 16 students enrolled on the 1 November. So far this year, the proportion of students withdrawing is low. The proportion of full-time equine students gaining qualifications in addition to their main award is relatively low. A reasonably high proportion of part-time equine studies students complete their studies but only 57 per cent achieved the full award last year.

64 In 1995, there was a sharp decline in pass rates for the national certificate in agriculture, compared with the previous two years. Although all of the 13 students enrolled on 1 November completed their studies, only 62 per cent gained the award. Students on the first diploma in agriculture course achieved good results; 90 per cent of those enrolled achieved the award, a marked improvement on the previous year when only 67 per cent were successful within the normal time. A relatively low proportion of part-time agriculture and horticulture students achieve the full award. The college should develop alternative ways of certifying the achievements of such students.

65 Last year, there were poor initial success rates for full-time forestry students. About 50 per cent of students taking national certificates and the national diploma in forestry achieved the award within the normal time. Many of these students achieved units towards the qualification and all of the national diploma students who failed to achieve the award within the normal period have now gained the award. Twenty per cent of the national certificate students achieved the award. A high proportion of full-time forestry students achieve qualifications in addition to their main award, thus strengthening their employment prospects. All last year's national diploma in forestry students achieved the full NVQ award, including the certificate of chain-saw competence.

66 For business students there is significant variation in the level of achievement between subjects and years. For example, the results in

stage II typing are excellent, but results for GNVQ students taking stage I typing are poor. Students taking the intermediate GNVQ in business achieved results in line with the national average.

67 About half of the students completing courses last year remained in full-time further education and almost a third got jobs. Nearly all first diploma students continued their studies. Most national certificate students following land-based courses get jobs; a high proportion of those following the national certificate in agriculture course remain in full-time education. Many students continue their studies at Holme Lacy College but, for some of these students, the course studied is not the most appropriate.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

68 Although staff have a commitment to the quality of provision and its improvement, the college's systems for quality assurance have been developed in piecemeal fashion. They are fragmented, inconsistent and, in many respects, inadequate. A policy for strategic quality management was written in January 1994. While it has been discussed with staff it remains incomplete and has not been approved by the governors. The college's strategic objectives contain no reference to quality assurance. Division of senior management responsibility reduces the effectiveness of control and has resulted in inconsistent practice. The college has secured International Standards Organisation (ISO) 9002 accreditation in relation to its work in youth and adult training programmes. Standards of service are specified in a number of college documents, notably the charter, the handbook of procedures, the policy for strategic quality management and the quality manual procedures. Inconsistencies between these need resolving. There are very few clear action plans to address identified weaknesses.

69 The college's charter has a number of shortcomings. Many standards are expressed too generally and there are no specified monitoring procedures for determining the extent to which they are achieved. There are no complaints procedures for students or others. The dissemination of the charter has been poor. Neither students nor staff have been issued with copies and there is no reference to the charter in the students' handbook. The college should review its charter taking account of the FEFC's recent national survey report.

70 Most arrangements for collecting evidence on quality are not systematic or rigorous enough. Questionnaires are widely used in the college to elicit students' views. Most do little to help improve quality. Many are imperfectly designed and generate little concrete information on strengths and weaknesses and how the latter may be addressed. Frequently, the responses to questionnaires are not thoroughly analysed or formally discussed by programme teams and other relevant groups including the students themselves. There is no consistent policy or practice

for the analysis of key performance indicators at college or programme level. There are no formal mechanisms for eliciting employers' perceptions of courses and, currently, no practice of classroom observation. The extent to which issues raised in moderators' reports are formally discussed, and action targets formulated to address them, varies across programme teams.

71 There is some review of performance at programme team meetings. There is a clear framework for the meetings and arrangements to support their operation. Meetings are minuted and action points recorded. However, the guidance for teams on the monitoring of provision is inadequate. There is no reference to the college charter and other standards, to the quality of teaching and learning and tutorial provision, to any performance indicators or to standards of students' achievements. Statements of strengths and weaknesses prepared by programme teams place too much emphasis on the strengths. Where weaknesses were identified these were not always addressed. Some programme teams have prioritised the issues facing them and have set annual targets to be tackled in the forthcoming academic year. This is not common policy or practice across the college.

72 At levels beyond the programme team there are some examples of effective quality assurance. The library, for example, has recently conducted two surveys amongst students to identify how its services and resources could be improved. The college counselling service undertakes appropriate self-evaluation and an effective review was carried out of the students' induction programme. These practices should be extended to all parts of the college. An overall evaluation of the college's performance is set out in the self-assessment report supplied to the inspection team. The report contains some perceptive comments but it is largely descriptive and limited in scope.

73 An appraisal scheme was established in November 1993, covering both teaching and support staff. It has not been implemented. The college has now revived the scheme and is linking the appraisal of staff more closely to the college's corporate objectives. This is associated with the college's intention to seek Investors in People accreditation in 1997.

74 There is no formal induction for new staff. Staff development in the college is poorly managed. There has been no policy for staff development and no clear structures and procedures through which staff-development needs on an individual, team and college basis can be identified and prioritised. Staff development has been largely a matter of responding to individuals' requests. Since 1993, the bulk of staff-development activity has focused on preparation for incorporation and on the achievement of Training and Development Lead Body awards. The college is not well advanced in this. There has also been some planned updating of teachers' technical skills. Three staff are currently being supported through the certificate in education. Inadequate use has been made of staff development to support new developments in the college. A draft policy

for staff development has recently been prepared. It requires clearer explanations of how staff development relates to the college's strategic objectives, how staff-development needs at individual, team and college level will be identified and prioritised and how staff development will be evaluated. Over 70 per cent of expenditure on academic and staff development for the financial year up to 31 January 1996 has been in connection with consultancy relating to course development.

RESOURCES

Staffing

75 There are adequate numbers of staff to support the courses provided by the college. There are 16 full-time teachers and approximately 6.5 full-time equivalent part-time teachers. Some areas, notably business, small animal care and equine studies are heavily dependent on part-time teachers. The teaching staff have appropriate technical and professional qualifications. Just under a third hold a degree. The staff have appropriate industrial and commercial experience, good technical expertise and maintain effective links with industry. All areas have good, informal links with employers and there are effective links with appropriate land-based organisations. Levels of technician and administrative staff are adequate with the exception of technician support for small animal care, equine studies and information technology.

76 The staff bring enthusiasm and commitment to their work but this has not yet been harnessed to best effect. Significant numbers of staff lack experience and expertise in a number of aspects of their work including teaching and assessment, student guidance and quality assurance. This is compounded by a lack of teaching qualifications and access to appropriate staff development. Under half of the full-time teaching staff have a teaching qualification at postgraduate certificate of education level or its equivalent. At present only one-third of the staff have obtained Training and Development Lead Body qualifications. A further third are in the process of securing them.

Equipment/learning resources

77 In most curriculum areas, there is a good range of specialist equipment; in a few there are significant shortages. There are effective arrangements to organise the supply of equipment. In the horticulture section and the workshop areas, there are effective systems for recording the use of equipment. Students take responsibility for maintaining the quality of the tools.

78 Equipment for agriculture and horticulture courses is good. The shared use of some equipment with the farm works well. There is also good equipment for specialist forestry work. Protective clothing and equipment is available for loan by forestry students; some clothing and boots are in need of replacement. There is sufficient equipment in the

schools and ready access to the farm and other specialist resources. The equine yard has horses appropriate for most students' needs but there is a lack of horses for novices and advanced riders. There is a shortage of good-quality tack and equipment for use in teaching. The small animal care unit is inadequately resourced. It lacks a sufficient variety of animals for the students to gain the required practical experience. The animals are well cared for and this provides a good example for students.

79 The library's ground-floor location facilitates access for wheelchair users. In addition to the library there is an adjacent room used for quiet study and meetings. At peak times, the number of study spaces is inadequate. The range of learning materials is sufficient in most subjects. There is a shortage of books to support business courses. The library has a good range of periodicals, pamphlets and videos. The library catalogue is computerised, although there is no computerised issuing system. There are two computers in the library area, both with a careers database. One of the computers has access to the Internet although students' access is restricted. A compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) database drive has recently been added but the lack of any specialist CD-ROMs limits its use. During term time, the library is supervised at all times of the day by a qualified librarian or by the experienced library assistant. There is effective liaison between the library and course teams enabling the library staff to plan for periods of heavy demand on key texts.

80 The overall number of computers in the college is insufficient. One room has been equipped with 14 modern computers for students' use but the room is too small for some of the groups that use it. Its use for group teaching restricts students' opportunities to work on their own. As there are only six further computers available for students' use, they are unable to make effective use of information technology in completing their assignments.

81 The provision of visual aids is effectively co-ordinated through the resource centre. All classrooms are equipped with overhead projectors and screens. There are video recorders in three rooms, and portable equipment is available from the resources centre. Some classrooms have no blackout facility which restricts the use of some visual aids. Worksheets and visual aids are not always well designed or used effectively. There is little evidence of the use of study packs or learning resources to support work on individual topics.

Accommodation

82 The college farm is a valuable resource that is widely used by students for practicals, work experience and assignments. Key strengths are the effective use of the farm in teaching and the active involvement of students in its operation. The agriculture students carry out activities in commercially realistic settings. The range of enterprises covers most major subjects in their curriculum. All the major crops are grown except

potatoes. The only significant gap in the range of livestock is pigs. These deficiencies are made up for by off-site visits. The classroom at Pound Farm is also used as a students' baseroom and, in consequence, it serves neither function effectively. Toilet facilities at the farm are inadequate.

83 Physical and financial data from the farm provide a potentially valuable source of information for students but some of these data are not readily available to them. Some information relating to the college enterprises is available in the resource centre, including the college 'herdfile' database on one of the computers. Other records are available at the appropriate farm office. An estate guide and diary would help students to make full use of the facilities.

84 The college estate has a range of woodland areas and a wood yard and workshop at Bower Farm. These facilities are used extensively by students. The wood yard provides fencing and building material for the estate and for sale. There is close co-operation between the staff responsible for these facilities and the academic staff. The facilities are complemented by the effective use of local woodlands and forest areas. The college is sympathetic to environmental conservation in the management of the estate but does not provide documentation to illustrate these practices for students. The range of habitats throughout the estate is useful in the teaching of rural studies and conservation courses.

85 The equine yard has sufficient stabling for the 12 horses. It has been approved by the British Horse Society but it is not an examination centre. There is a shortage of practical teaching areas; in particular, the college has limited access to an indoor riding school facility. Full use is made of the outdoor arena which has recently been resurfaced. The equine paddocks are in poor condition. The animal care unit has facilities for dog grooming, small animal housing and a day kennel unit. There is no accommodation for cats. The unit is too small for routine use as a classroom when also used for animal housing. More classroom and practical accommodation is needed. There is little effective use of the records from the equine yard or small animal care unit by staff or students. Neither section has a dedicated computer facility.

86 The horticultural unit is a compact and sound resource. There is wheelchair access which allows the unit to be shared effectively with a local charity for people with disabilities. This resource is further supplemented by a range of flower beds and trees around the college. The engineering workshops are spacious and well equipped but, with the exception of the chain-saw workshop, they are underused.

87 General accommodation is sufficient for demand but the quality varies widely. Teaching accommodation is generally clean and tidy. More use could be made of students' work and wall displays to give interest to the classrooms. The Orchard Block, built in 1990, provides two good-quality classrooms with a partition allowing them to be converted into a large lecture hall. The main teaching block houses good-quality lecture rooms and the resource centre which provide a pleasant environment for learning.

A major weakness is the heavy reliance on the use of poor-quality mobile classrooms, most of which are too small for the classes using them. The laboratory is used as a general teaching area for animal care; there are no other laboratory facilities. The college is aware that the typing room is inadequate and typing is to be rehoused in the near future. Some staff offices are too small to be used for meetings between tutors and their students. Bower House is being converted for use as the college's administration centre.

88 The newly-refurbished refectory has a relaxing atmosphere; it has seating for 80 and is well used by students. The students' common room is too small. The sports hall is well used by students who co-ordinate its use for a range of activities. The college has a rugby pitch that is in regular use. It also has access to other local sports facilities.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

89 The strengths of Holme Lacy College are:

- the range of forestry courses
- the effective work with schools
- the use of the governors' experience and knowledge of land-based industries to support the college
- the clear college-wide admissions procedures
- the effective induction and learning support arrangements
- the industrial and commercial experience of the staff
- the quality of the college estate as a teaching resource.

90 The college should address the following issues:

- the poor quality of curriculum management and planning
- the failure of much of the teaching to meet the needs of students of differing abilities
- the poor retention rates
- the poor examination pass rates
- the failure to implement a consistent tutorial policy
- the lack of arrangements for the accreditation of students' prior learning
- unclear progression routes for students
- the lack of a clear, consistent approach to quality assurance
- low funding for staff development
- the lack of formal risk assessments and safety audits
- the inadequate number of computers
- the poor quality of some of the teaching accommodation.

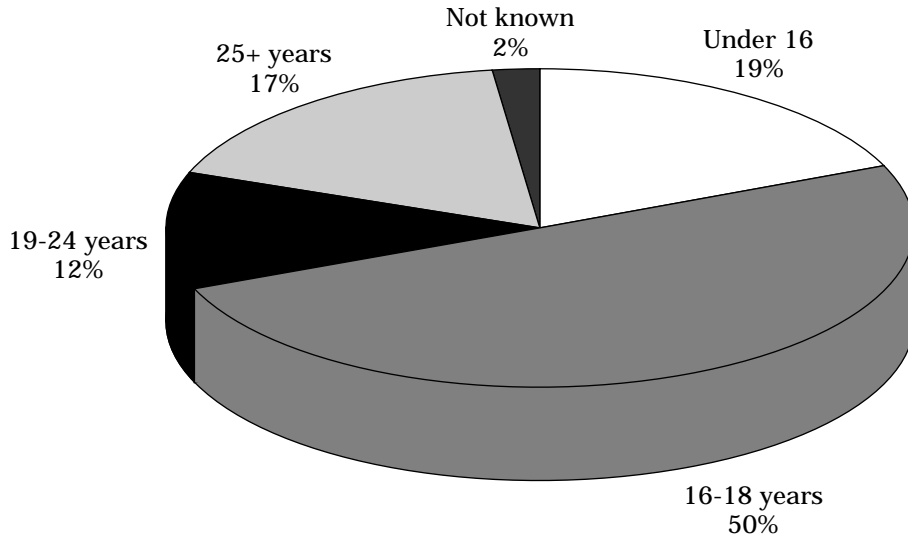
FIGURES

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| 1 | Percentage enrolments by age (1995-96) |
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| 5 | Estimated income (for 12 months to July 1996) |
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Note: the information contained in the figures was provided by the college to the inspection team.

Figure 1

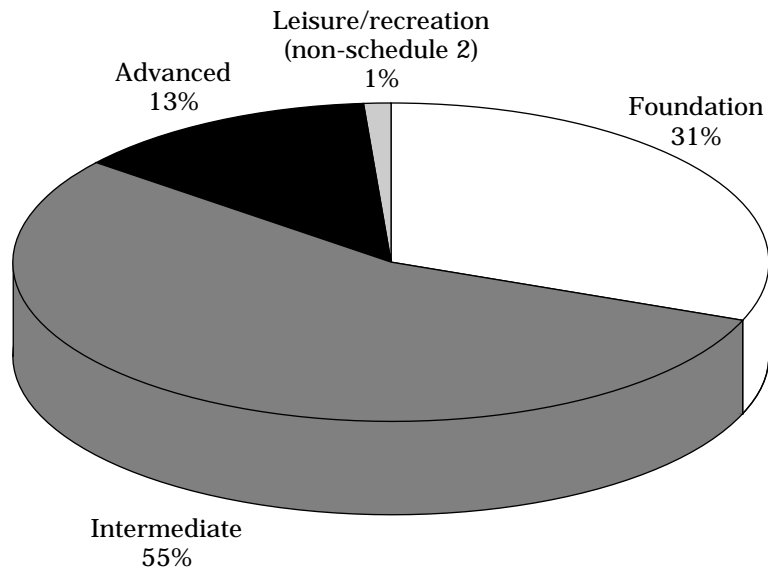
Holme Lacy College: percentage enrolments by age (1995-96)



Enrolments: 688

Figure 2

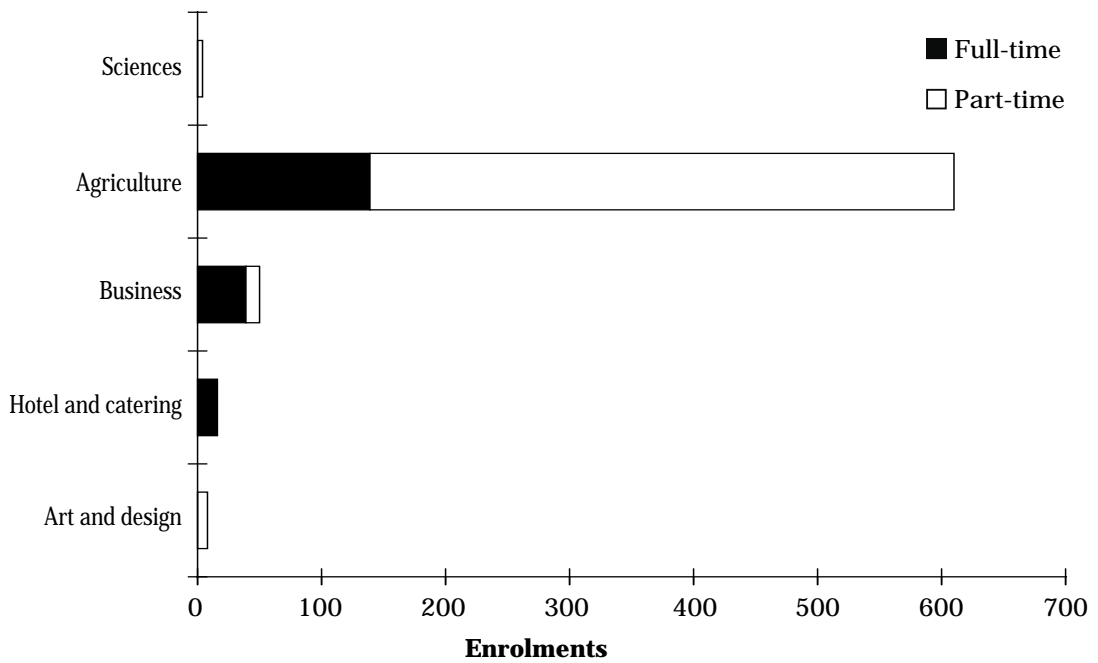
Holme Lacy College: percentage enrolments by level of study (1995-96)



Enrolments: 688

Figure 3

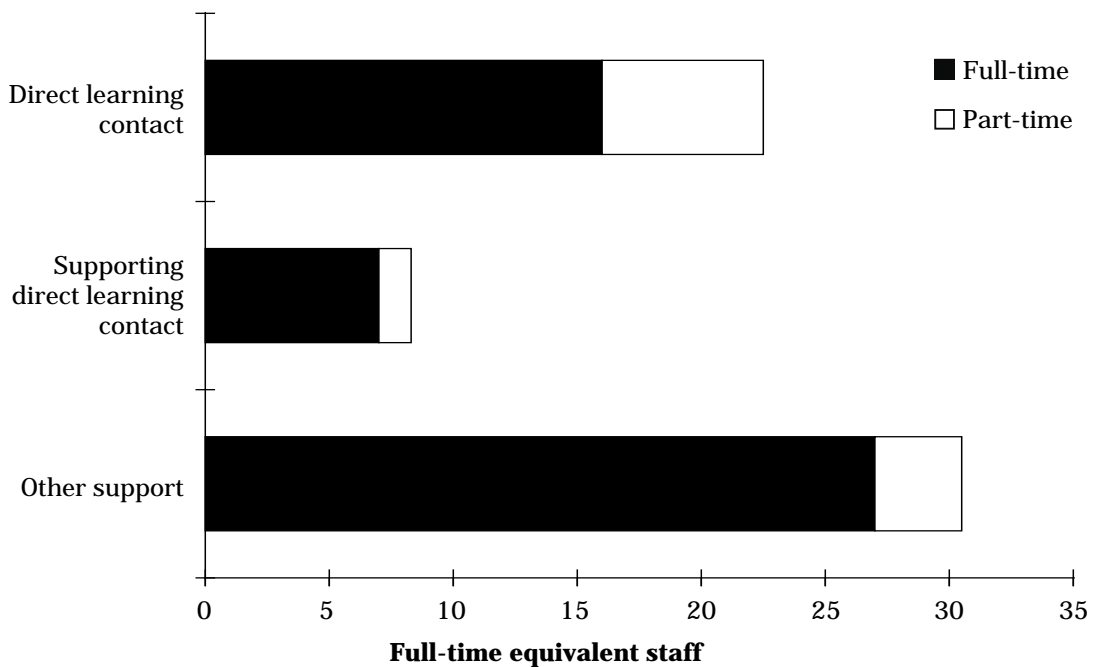
Holme Lacy College: enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1995-96)



Enrolments: 688

Figure 4

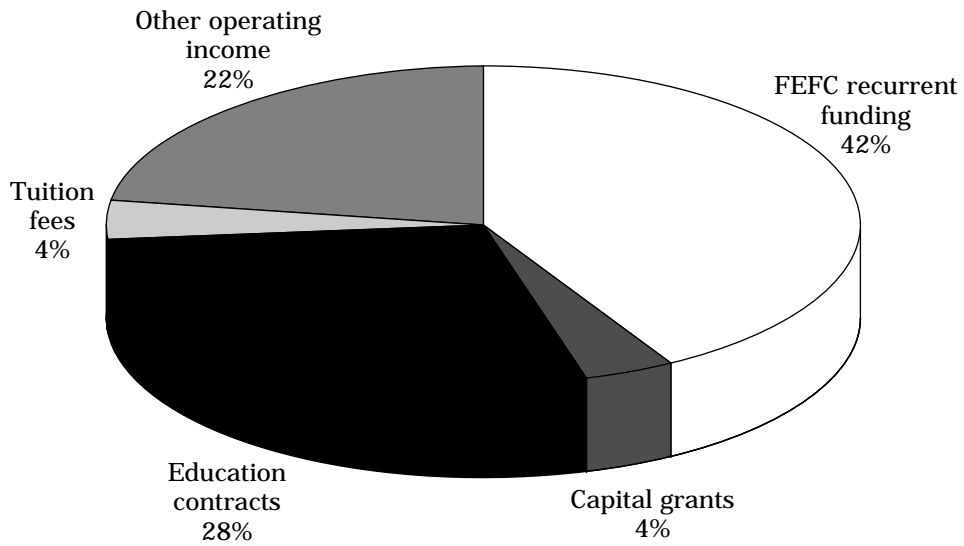
Holme Lacy College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1995-96)



Full-time equivalent staff: 61

Figure 5

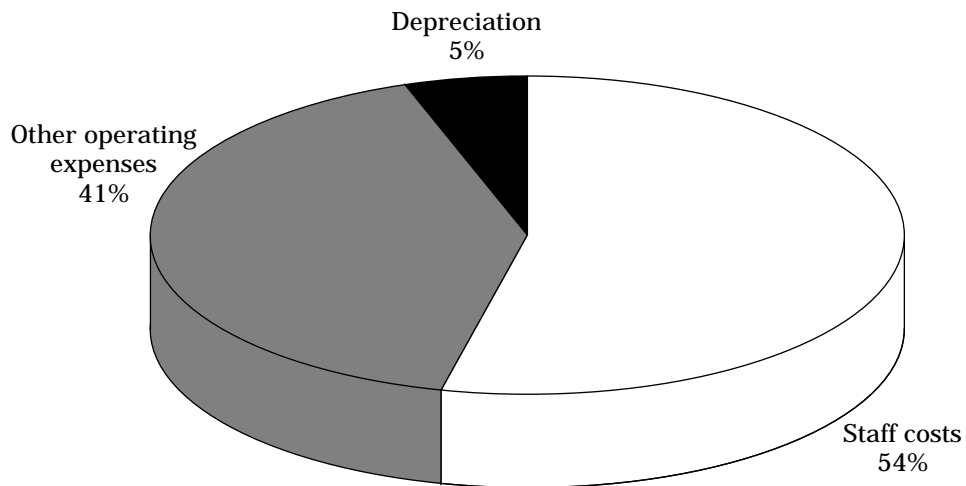
Holme Lacy College: estimated income (for 12 months to July 1996)



Estimated income: £1,702,000

Figure 6

Holme Lacy College: estimated expenditure (for 12 months to July 1996)



Estimated expenditure: £1,831,000

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