

# Lackham College

REPORT FROM  
THE INSPECTORATE  
1998-99

THE  
FURTHER  
EDUCATION  
FUNDING  
COUNCIL

***THE FURTHER EDUCATION  
FUNDING COUNCIL***

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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 1997-98, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1	2	3	4	5
	%	%	%	%	%
Curriculum areas	9	60	29	2	–
Cross-college provision	18	54	24	4	–

Source: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1997-98: Chief inspector's annual report*  
Sample size: 108 college inspections

## Student Achievements

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

- as expected completions, which is the number of initial enrolments on qualifications where the student expected to complete the qualification in a given year. For example, a student on a two-year programme who began their programme in October 1995, would appear in the results for 1996-97 because this is the year in which they expected to complete their qualification
- as a retention rate, which is the percentage of qualifications which the students have completed as expected (or are continuing with the prospect of late completion). 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 shown.

# Summary

## Lackham College

### *South West Region*

#### **Inspected May 1999**

Lackham College is the major provider of further education land-based courses in Wiltshire.

The college offers courses in agriculture, horticulture, animal care, equine studies, countryside management, engineering, leisure and tourism and IT. There have been significant improvements to the estate and its facilities since the last inspection. The college's first self-assessment report was prepared specifically for the inspection. The college carried out a thorough self-assessment process involving staff and governors and produced a clear and detailed report. The curriculum sections of the report gave appropriate emphasis to teaching and learning and students' achievements.

Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the report, but some weaknesses were omitted, in particular weaknesses in financial management and monitoring.

The inspection covered provision in agriculture and countryside management, animal care and equine studies and engineering. Teaching and learning is effective in most theory and practical lessons, particularly in agriculture, farm mechanisation and countryside management.

The college has excellent links with employers, schools and the local community. Governors are fully involved in strategic planning and have a good knowledge of curriculum issues. Students receive good informal support from their

teachers. Learning is supported by sufficient, high-quality specialist resources. Effective staff development is linked to strategic priorities. The estate and buildings are well maintained. The college should address: low retention and achievement rates on some courses; the unreliability of some data on students' achievements; unsystematic co-ordination and monitoring of learning support; inadequacies in course review procedures and records; the underdeveloped quality assurance of support services; weaknesses in financial management, financial reporting and the management information system; and insufficient oversight of the college's financial position by the corporation.

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

<b>Curriculum area</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Cross-college provision</b>	<b>Grade</b>
Agriculture and countryside management	2	Support for students	2
Animal care and equine studies	3	General resources	2
Engineering	3	Quality assurance	3
		Governance	3
		Management	4

# Context

## The College and its Mission

1 Lackham College was established by Wiltshire County Council in 1946 to provide training and education for the local agricultural industry. It is situated 3 miles south of Chippenham. The 212 hectare estate includes the college farm, ornamental gardens and grounds, woodland, river and water courses. A tourist facility, Lackham County Attractions, provides a valuable resource for schools and the local community. Facilities open to the public include an agricultural museum, farm park, college gardens and riverside walks. Each year the college has over 10,000 visitors. Specialist facilities include indoor and outdoor arenas and stabling for 30 horses, a purpose-built animal centre, veterinary science facilities and workshops for engineering and farm mechanisation. The horticulture section has access to a large walled garden, glasshouse areas, workshops and extensive grounds for amenity horticulture. Lackham House, a grade II listed building, has recently been refurbished. It accommodates the library, information technology (IT) facilities for students and rooms used for commercial courses. There is residential accommodation for 126 students and sports and recreational facilities. There are five further education colleges in Wiltshire, the nearest of which is Chippenham College. For most of the college's courses there is no direct competition. The nearest land-based college is Hartpury College, 48 miles to the north-west.

2 Most college courses are in the Further Education Funding Council's (FEFC's) agricultural programme area. These include courses in agriculture, horticulture, equine studies, countryside management and animal care. There are also courses in science, engineering and leisure and tourism. In recent years there has been moderate growth in the number of further education students and a significant increase in the number of higher education students. Of the college's students,

65% come from Wiltshire, but the college also recruits nationally and internationally. On 1 November 1998, there were 474 full-time and 1,056 part-time students. There were 83 students on higher education courses. In May 1999, the college became an associate faculty of the University of Bath. As a result it expects to more than double the number of higher education students in 1999-2000. In the last two years there has also been significant growth in the number of commercial courses and non-farming commercial activities, such as weddings and conferences.

3 The college's senior management team comprises the principal, deputy principal, who is also director of studies, and four directors responsible for resources, finance, commercial operations, and personnel and administration, respectively. Day-to-day curriculum management is the responsibility of two assistant academic directors and four programme managers. In November 1998, the college employed 122 full-time equivalent staff, of whom 40 are teachers and a further 19 directly support teaching. The college has established a wide range of partnerships with industry. As a result it has attracted private sector funds to support capital investment in, for example, farm buildings, an animal hospital and a farm information centre. Private finance has also funded a variety of research projects, including arable trials and dairy herd genetics.

4 The college's mission is 'to be a leading provider of high-quality education and training'. Current priorities include: the provision of high-quality teaching and learning; the extension of collaborative ventures with further and higher education institutions; increasing funding through partnerships with private sector organisations; enhancing students' opportunities to progress to further and higher education, professional training or employment; and to be responsive to local and national initiatives.

# Context

## The Inspection

5 The college was inspected during the week beginning 10 May 1999. The inspection team had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and information about the college held by other directorates of the FEFC. Some data on students' achievements drawn from the college's individualised student record (ISR) return to the FEFC proved to be unreliable. Consequently, the report contains some incomplete tables of students' achievements and it has not been possible to include a table showing aggregated achievements at the end of the report. Inspectors based their judgements

on both college data and ISR data. The inspection was carried out by seven inspectors and an auditor working for a total of 34 days. Meetings were held with governors, managers, employers, college staff and students. Inspectors observed 43 lessons and examined students' work and college documentation.

6 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1997-98. Of the lessons inspected, 67% were judged to be good or outstanding. This figure is above the average of 65% for all lessons observed by inspectors in 1997-98.

### Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GNVQ and NVQ	4	5	3	0	0	12
Other vocational	7	12	8	2	0	29
Other	1	0	0	1	0	2
Total (No.)	12	17	11	3	0	43
Total (%)	28	39	26	7	0	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1997-98 (%)	19	46	29	6	0	100

Source for national average: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1997-98: Chief inspector's annual report*

7 The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1997-98.

### Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Lackham College	13.3	85
National average, all inspected colleges 1997-98	10.4	77

Source for national average: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1997-98: Chief inspector's annual report*

# Curriculum Areas

## Agriculture and Countryside Management

### Grade 2

**8 The inspection included full-time and part-time courses at foundation, intermediate and advanced level, in land and environment, agriculture, rural studies and farm mechanisation. Twelve lessons were observed. Inspectors agreed with most judgements in the self-assessment report.**

#### Key strengths

- the wide range of full-time courses
- well-planned and effective teaching
- 100% pass rate on the national diploma in agriculture in 1998
- the high standard of students' practical work
- strong emphasis on health and safety
- good specialist resources

#### Weaknesses

- inadequate written feedback on some assignments
- less satisfactory achievements on some part-time courses

9 The college provides a wide range of full-time courses in agriculture, rural studies and farm mechanisation. The full-time general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) foundation land and environment course provides a useful introduction for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The two certificate courses in countryside-related studies have attracted a significant number of adults who wish to make a career change. The college also provides part-time courses, short courses for people in employment, higher national diploma programmes, and part-time programmes funded by Wiltshire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC).

10 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment judgement that teaching and learning is well planned. Most teaching is good. Lesson plans are used effectively to manage students' learning. New concepts are carefully explained and are often supported by well-prepared handouts. In a few lessons, students copy too many notes from the board, and this slows down the pace of the work and results in the loss of some students' attention. Practical teaching is well organised and vocationally relevant. Teachers draw on their practical experience and make frequent reference to good commercial practice. Students are encouraged to contribute to the development of topics using their knowledge and experience. There is a strong emphasis on health and safety which is covered in depth at induction and is subsequently reinforced at the start of each practical session. The self-assessment report understated the contribution of the farm and estate to students' practical activities and the teaching of theory. Students are involved in a wide range of activities and conservation projects in a real working environment. In particular, they gain valuable practical experience by undertaking early morning, evening and weekend duties on the college farm and other nearby farms.

11 Courses are well structured and effectively managed. Appropriate assignment schedules ensure an even flow of work for students. Most assignment briefs are clear and grading criteria are carefully explained. Assessment and internal verification are accurate, but the quality of some tutors' written feedback on assignments is poor and it fails to give students adequate advice on how they might improve their performance. Tutorial records of students' progress sometimes fail to identify the action required by the individual.

12 Students show a high degree of commitment and enthusiasm for their courses and the college. Attendance levels are above average. The level and standard of assignment



# Curriculum Areas

work by students is good. Retention and achievement rates on full-time courses are close to national rates. In 1997, the pass rate on the national diploma in agriculture was just below the national rate at 92%, but in the following year 100% of completing students passed. Most students who complete this course progress to related employment or higher level courses. Apart from below average retention in 1996-97, the national certificate in agriculture course has consistently maintained retention and pass rates above the national rate. The self-assessment report failed to highlight the relatively poor performance of students on some of the part-time programmes. On some part-time courses pass rates are below national rates. Students on the higher national certificate in agriculture take too long to complete their studies. Since the course was established in 1994, very few students have successfully completed the programme. Many of these students are still continuing several years after initial registration.

13 Teaching staff are well qualified and experienced. Staff have relevant industrial experience and maintain close contacts with land-based organisations. Students appreciate the high level of support provided by staff. Commercial sponsors have helped to fund a range of activities and developments on the college farm and estate. For example, a wide range of crop and livestock demonstration activities have been established and there has been significant investment in new farm buildings. A well-organised farm information centre is regularly updated by farm administration students and is used effectively by students to access physical and financial data relating to the farm and estate. There is a good range of up-to-date agricultural machinery for students' use. Students also undertake work experience, practical work and visits to local farms and businesses to extend their experience of other farming methods and types of equipment. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment judgement that specialist resources are a strength.

# Curriculum Areas

## A summary of achievement and retention rates in agriculture and countryside management, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
National certificate in agriculture	2	Expected completions	15	10	20
		Retention (%)	87	70	90
		Achievement (%)	*	100	94
National certificate in countryside-related studies	2	Expected completions	35	35	32
		Retention (%)	83	86	84
		Achievement (%)	*	93	96
National certificate in agriculture	3	Expected completions	21	37	42
		Retention (%)	90	100	86
		Achievement (%)	95	92	100
Advanced national certificate in countryside-related studies	3	Expected completions	26	18	21
		Retention (%)	*	*	76
		Achievement (%)	*	*	93
G&C agriculture and horticulture	3	Expected completions	*	*	23
		Retention (%)	*	*	78
		Achievement (%)	*	*	67

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

\*data unreliable

# Curriculum Areas

## Animal Care and Equine Studies

### Grade 3

**14 Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report, but considered that key weaknesses in teaching and in students' achievements were underestimated or omitted. Twenty-one lessons were observed.**

#### Key strengths

- the good range of teaching methods and learning activities
- high retention rates on equine studies courses
- well-managed courses
- good practical resources

#### Weaknesses

- low retention on animal care courses
- declining pass rate on the national diploma in animal care
- ineffective management of practical animal care lessons
- insufficiently demanding assignments, lacking appropriate links between theory and practice

15 There is a wide range of full-time and part-time courses in animal care and equine studies. Progression is available for full-time students from intermediate level to higher education in animal care and to advanced level in horse care. Full-time students undertake work experience. A high proportion of students gain employment on completion of their studies.

16 There is some good teaching by knowledgeable teachers. Students receive a suitable balance of theoretical teaching and practical instruction. Most teachers use their vocational experience to illustrate the teaching of theory. Students respect the technical

expertise of teachers. There is a good range of teaching methods and learning activities, including yard and unit duties, presentations, group work and visits. The best lessons are well planned and their objectives are shared with the students. Effective questioning and discussion is used to check that learning takes place. In a few weaker theory lessons, teachers fail to vary the work appropriately and students lose interest. Some worksheets and handouts are well produced. Others are poor photocopies or handwritten sheets that do not effectively support learning. Most assignments are well presented and the tasks are clear, but some assignments are not demanding enough for the more able students. Few assignments make appropriate links between theory and practice. These assignments do not require students to make sufficient use of the college's animal care resources.

17 Practical teaching of horse care is good. In a practical equitation lesson, students worked on improving their skills at sitting trot. The teacher gave good individual feedback to students and questioned them to ascertain their level of understanding of their own weaknesses. A useful handout was given at the end of the lesson to reinforce the key messages. There are weaknesses in the teaching and management of practical animal care lessons. In some, students are not made aware of the need to work at a pace which would be acceptable in industry. There is insufficient consolidation of students' theoretical knowledge in practical lessons. In two practical animal care lessons, students were unaware of the breed or type of animal with which they were working.

18 Clear health and safety procedures are followed in practical equine lessons and in the laboratories. Insufficient attention is given to some aspects of safety in practical animal care lessons. For example, in a lesson on worming reptiles, the latex gloves worn by some students were torn. A rota system for practical duties in animal care ensures that students gain

# Curriculum Areas

experience with different animals. However, the large number of students on duty at any one time prevents all students gaining a worthwhile experience. For example, first-year students are supervised by second-year students but much of the value of this supervision is lost as there are nearly as many supervisors as first-year students. Duties for horse care students are more demanding. They enable students to develop their practical skills and increase their pace of working to meet industrial expectations.

19 Retention rates on equine courses are high. Retention rates on the one-year national diploma and national certificate courses in animal care were above the national rate in 1996, but in each case fell to well below the national rate in 1997. Retention and pass rates on the national diploma in animal care fell between 1997 and 1998. Of the 38 students who started this two-year course in 1996, only 17 successfully completed the course in 1998. Many students achieve qualifications in addition to their main award. Animal care students are offered a national vocational qualification (NVQ)

in caring for animals, first aid and computer literacy and information technology awards. Most students on full-time horse care courses take British Horse Society stage tests, first aid and riding, road safety awards or NVQs in horse care. Achievements in part-time veterinary nursing examinations are good. However, 10 students are enrolled on a part-time NVQ animal care course for which the college does not currently have approval.

20 Courses are well managed. Course tutors maintain detailed information in course files. Students complete evaluation sheets following external visits. These are used to inform future planning. There is a thorough internal verification process for the setting and marking of assignments, although the process does not effectively evaluate the level or balance of the curriculum. There are good practical resources to support teaching. Practical facilities are well managed and there is a good range of animals which are used in teaching, although not all cages are clearly labelled.

## A summary of achievement and retention rates in animal care and equine studies, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
First diploma in animal care	2	Expected completions	23	19	27
		Retention (%)	87	74	81
		Achievement (%)	100	86	77
National certificate in animal care	3	Expected completions	12	16	24
		Retention (%)	92	69	79
		Achievement (%)	80	89	89
National diploma in animal care	3	Expected completions	*	*	38
		Retention (%)	*	*	66
		Achievement (%)	*	*	68
Veterinary nursing part 1 and part 2	3	Expected completions	*	*	19
		Retention (%)	*	*	100
		Achievement (%)	*	*	79

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

\*data unreliable

# Curriculum Areas

## Engineering

### Grade 3

**21 The inspection covered the GNVQ intermediate and GNVQ advanced courses in engineering. Ten lessons were observed. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the college's self-assessment report. However, the self-assessment report did not recognise weaknesses in students' achievements.**

#### Key strengths

- good teaching in most lessons
- good work experience opportunities for GNVQ advanced students
- well-maintained files of students' notes and portfolios of work
- the good achievements of first diploma students in 1996 and 1997
- specialist agricultural engineering workshops, machinery and tools

#### Weaknesses

- failure of some teachers to manage questioning of students effectively in lessons
- unsatisfactory pass rates on the GNVQ advanced course in 1997 and 1998
- low enrolment and unsatisfactory achievements on the GNVQ intermediate course in 1998

22 Engineering courses focus on the provision of education and training for people who wish to work in land-based industries. The GNVQ advanced programme includes additional units which meet the specialist requirements of agricultural engineering employers. It is a three-year course with students undertaking work experience in agricultural engineering in their second year. In addition to the two GNVQ courses, the college offers higher national diplomas in agricultural engineering and water

and environmental engineering. This range of courses provides appropriate progression for students. Part-time NVQ programmes funded by Wiltshire TEC are also offered.

23 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report about some good teaching. Lessons are well organised and most teachers vary their methods appropriately to maintain students' interest and extend their learning. In a few lessons, the pace of work is too slow at times and students' attention is lost. Teachers make effective use of their experience to link theory and practice. Most make good use of questions and answers to ensure that all students participate, although in some cases questions were not sufficiently well directed to involve all students. The work in some lessons enables students to develop a range of key skills. For example, in a lesson on costing, students worked in small groups to calculate the operating costs of different items of agricultural machinery. The findings of each group were presented to the class and debated. The lesson contributed to the development of students' numeracy, communication and presentation skills. Assignment schedules for the year are designed to distribute students' workload evenly. However, teachers have not been able to keep to schedules and work has been concentrated towards the end of the year.

24 Inspectors could not agree with the self-assessment report's judgement that students' achievements are good. On the GNVQ advanced course retention rates declined from 70% to 56% between 1996 and 1998. The 1997 figure of 64% is well below the national benchmark figure for that year of 92%. However, in several cases, the students who left the programme took up employment with the employers who provided their work experience in their second year. These students all continued with NVQ programmes. The pass rate on the course in both 1997 and 1998 was 56%. This compares with the national benchmark figure for 1997 of 66%. The achievements of students on the first

# Curriculum Areas

diploma courses in 1996 and 1997 were good. In both years all those who completed the course were successful, although there were only seven students on the course which ended in 1997. In 1998, this course was replaced by the GNVQ intermediate programme, which ran with only three students, none of whom successfully completed the course. Most students work conscientiously during lessons and keep neat notes for revision and reference purposes. Their GNVQ portfolios are well maintained. Students' performance in practical lessons is particularly good. They work confidently and productively on their assigned tasks, with help from tutors when needed. Most students' assignment work is of an appropriate standard. Some is wordprocessed and well illustrated.

25 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment judgement that resources are a strength. Agricultural engineering workshops are spacious and well maintained, but the engineering processes workshop is small. The floor is uneven and the workshop is cluttered with unused items of equipment. The self-assessment report identified a shortage of technical support staff. Since then the situation has improved, but there is still a shortage of support for teachers in some areas. Students have access to a wide range of up-to-date agricultural machinery and tools. Staff are appropriately qualified. Engineering students have good access to college IT facilities, which include an appropriate range of hardware and software.

## A summary of achievement and retention rates in engineering, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GNVQ intermediate and precursors	2	Expected completions	20	**	**
		Retention (%)	85	**	**
		Achievement (%)	100	**	**
GNVQ advanced and precursors	3	Expected completions	*	*	16
		Retention (%)	*	*	56
		Achievement (%)	*	*	56

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

\*data unreliable

\*\*insufficient enrolments for tabular presentation

# Cross-college Provision

## Support for Students

### Grade 2

**26 Inspectors agreed with the majority of judgements made by the college about support for students. However, the self-assessment report omitted some strengths and weaknesses and did not comment on the quality of the tutorial provision.**

#### Key strengths

- good informal support for students
- strong links with schools
- effective arrangements for initial guidance, advice, enrolment and induction
- good support for residential students
- the range of opportunities for careers advice

#### Weaknesses

- unsystematic delivery and monitoring of learning support
- inconsistent recording of the outcomes of individual tutorials

27 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that recruitment procedures are effective and well regarded by both full-time and part-time students. There are good links with local schools, including special schools. Courses are effectively promoted through a wide range of marketing activities such as open days and 'taster' programmes, some of which are residential. The prospectus is attractive, but the language is difficult for some students to understand. Before students are offered a place at the college, curriculum specialists discuss each individual's requirements with them. Students feel that this helps them to make well-informed decisions about courses. The college has qualified staff in most programme areas to accredit the prior learning and experience of students. The self-assessment

report acknowledged that the accreditation of students' prior learning is not effective in all areas.

28 Induction is effective and well regarded by most students. Course managers add specific course information to a common core programme which informs students about their rights and responsibilities, college support services and social facilities. An additional induction session is held for residential students. Course and college information is summarised in a useful handbook which is given to all students. The self-assessment report recognised that induction for second-year students and those who enrol late is less effective.

29 A combination of central support for individual students and classroom support by teachers effectively meets the learning support needs of most students. The literacy and numeracy needs of students are assessed on entry, if requested by course tutors. This year 212 students were assessed, an increase of 37% on the previous year. Of the 86 students who were identified as needing learning support, 60% have taken up the offer of individual help. Students are positive about the quality of this central support and course tutors are well informed about their progress. There is also good learning support for dyslexic students. Teachers provide learning support in a range of ways when they identify a need for it. For example, there are weekly study skills sessions, additional help with course work, or joint teaching with a specialist learning support tutor. Although staff and students speak positively about the provision of learning support, there is no strategy to co-ordinate all aspects of learning support and there is no formal monitoring or evaluation of its effectiveness. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report.

30 There is strong and informal support for full-time and part-time students in all curriculum areas. Students on full-time and substantial part-time courses are entitled to at least one individual tutorial each term. Many

# Cross-college Provision

students receive two or more individual tutorials. Most tutorials are useful and well recorded, but in some sessions observed by inspectors, tutors did not record the action agreed with students in sufficient detail. Individual tutorials are often supplemented by group tutorials for all students on a particular course. However, this practice is not implemented across the college. The college has effective systems for monitoring absences and reacting to poor attendance and performance. Reports are given to students twice yearly and, where appropriate, to their parents. Regular parents evenings are held in some curriculum areas.

31 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment judgement that the good-quality advice and guidance opportunities for students seeking access to further education, higher education and employment are strengths. Students consider the support from specialist careers staff and curriculum staff to be helpful and practical. The college has a partnership agreement with Wiltshire Lifetime Careers and all students who request an interview are seen by specialist advisers. Most teaching staff integrate industry-related education and advice with the course subject matter. There is an easily accessible careers library. The college publicises job vacancies and employers contribute to lessons on interview techniques.

32 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment judgement about the strength of support for residential students. The college provides residential accommodation for 127 students in college-maintained hostels. Another 40 students lodge in houses near the college. A team of wardens provides effective pastoral support for residential students. Wardens work closely with students to achieve an appropriate balance between support and discipline. The wardens also maintain good communication with the staff who teach residential students. Medical services are available to residential students and counselling services are available for all students.

33 There is an active students union which organises events, 'rag week' and a summer ball. The 'Lackham Squealer', a newsletter produced by students, keeps them informed about matters of interest to them. Students are able to raise issues of concern through the student council, which consists of representatives from all courses. There is also student representation on the academic board. However, students consider that they do not always receive sufficient feedback on the issues they raise, for example, in connection with the eating arrangements for residential students.

## General Resources

### *Grade 2*

**34 Inspectors agreed with the majority of judgements in the self-assessment report. Action has already been taken to address some of the weaknesses identified in the report.**

#### **Key strengths**

- major improvements to the estate and its facilities since the last inspection
- good library facilities
- easy access to sufficient modern computers
- good sports and social facilities

#### **Weaknesses**

- the unsatisfactory quality of some of the temporary classrooms
- inflexible eating arrangements for residential students
- difficult access to a few areas for people with restricted mobility

35 The Lackham College estate is attractive and well maintained. It is a valuable resource that is used by students for practical activities, commercial farming experience and recreation. The facilities are also widely used by the general



# Cross-college Provision

public, schools and a range of other organisations. This helps to generate income for the college. Since the last inspection, farm resources have been developed and improved through commercial sponsorship and collaborative agreements with a number of agricultural businesses and other organisations. Lackham House, a grade II listed Georgian building, has an attractive reception area which is welcoming to visitors. It contains teaching rooms, administrative offices, the library and the IT teaching centre. Some ground-floor rooms have been refurbished and are used for weddings and conferences. The college has over 90 individual buildings. Most are in good condition and suited to their purpose. A few temporary classrooms and staff offices are less satisfactory. There is some under-utilisation of teaching accommodation. The college records room usage but makes little use of the information

36 The quality of teaching accommodation, laboratory accommodation and general resources has also improved considerably since the last inspection. A comprehensive accommodation strategy, published in 1997, effectively supports the college's strategic objectives. It provides for new facilities in all curriculum areas and the development of library, IT and laboratory resources. The animal care centre and science laboratories have been completed and significant improvements have been made to engineering and horticulture facilities. Temporary classrooms are gradually being replaced by permanent accommodation. Six will be vacated during the 1999 summer vacation. The self-assessment report judged building maintenance to be good and inspectors agreed. Following an accommodation survey, a 10-year maintenance programme was initiated in 1998. Internal decoration in most buildings is good. External decoration is poor on a minority of buildings, in particular the student residential accommodation.

37 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment judgement about the strength of the library facilities. In 1998, the library was extended to cover the first floor of Lackham House. It is a pleasant working environment which is open for 12 hours each weekday and on Sunday afternoons. Bookstocks are adequate in most subject areas. The facilities are well managed, although there is little liaison between teachers and library staff to plan resources for students' assignments. There are sufficient modern computers available for students' use. In addition to 21 open-access computers in the library there are three computer rooms on the second floor of Lackham House. These are mainly used for timetabled IT lessons, but other students may use any spare machines that are available. Students also have access to these rooms in evenings and at weekends.

38 There are good sports and social facilities for both residential and day students. There are level playing fields and a well-equipped sports hall and fitness centre. A social events programme covers a wide range of visits and activities. A comfortable bar is available in the evenings. A small college shop sells stationery and other useful items. Residential students have satisfactory accommodation in single study bedrooms. These bedrooms are of adequate size with basic furniture and a hand basin. Each hostel has a small common room, but there are no self-catering facilities. Many residential students express dissatisfaction with their eating arrangements. Their boarding contract includes the provision of meals at set times in the garden restaurant. It does not give them the flexibility to use the cafeteria. The cafeteria provides a good range of snacks and drinks until 16.30 hours each day. It is very popular with the students and queues form at peak times. It is not, however, open at weekends.

39 Most staff work areas are of adequate size, but some are crowded. Some staff areas do not yet have computers, although access is available

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nearby. It is difficult for staff and students with restricted mobility to use some areas of the campus. There is a lift in Lackham House and a chair lift in the student centre, but some offices and a few of the teaching rooms are not accessible to wheelchair users, although classes can be relocated to accommodate wheelchair users in suitable rooms. This weakness was understated in the self-assessment report. There are no childcare facilities on site, but arrangements can be made to provide these elsewhere if the need arises.

## Quality Assurance

### *Grade 3*

**40 Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment of its quality assurance arrangements, but concluded that some key strengths and weakness had been understated.**

#### Key strengths

- thorough self-assessment process
- effective course file management and monitoring
- comprehensive feedback from students and employers resulting in changes in provision
- effective staff development linked to college objectives

#### Weaknesses

- lack of standard procedures and records for the course review process
- underdeveloped use of targets and performance indicators by course teams
- underdeveloped quality assurance of support services and commercial operations
- insufficient monitoring of charter commitments

41 The college had a thorough and systematic approach to its first self-assessment report, produced for the inspection. All staff and governors were involved. The observation of 74 lessons by senior managers made an important contribution to judgements about teaching and learning. The college judged 82% of these lessons to be good or outstanding, compared with 67% of the lessons observed by inspectors. Feedback to staff on these observations was detailed, constructive and informative. A quality assurance review panel, comprising three senior managers and a governor, oversaw the self-assessment process. It checked the validity of supporting evidence and self-assessment reports from curriculum teams and support areas. The report takes account of the views of students and employers. An action plan for each section clearly addresses weaknesses, and identifies timescales and responsibilities.

42 There is an established pattern of annual course reviews. Reviews take place in July each year. They are informed by the results of the three questionnaires to students, feedback from parents, employers, external and internal verifiers, and teaching observation. Although discussion of individual students' achievements takes place at course and programme area meetings, the course review process does not include sufficient analysis of retention and achievement data for the whole cohort. The course review process results in a detailed action plan for each course. These plans inform a programme area action plan which is presented to the academic board. However, apart from the course action plans there are no standard procedures or records of course review. In some areas, there are no minutes of meetings at which courses were reviewed. These weaknesses were not identified in the college's self-assessment report.

43 The self-assessment report recognised that students, parents and employers have good opportunities to express their views. Full-time students complete questionnaires three times a

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year. The first questionnaire focuses on marketing and induction; the second deals with teaching resources and the third seeks students' perceptions about the quality of teaching. Findings are centrally analysed and reported to course teams but they are not always fed back to students. There are many examples where feedback has resulted in changes to provision. For example, comments from part-time adult students resulted in the college providing more study areas for mature students. Feedback from employers, sitting on advisory panels, led to changes in the IT provision on the farm business course.

44 There is an effective framework for course file management. Standard contents of course management files are specified and include, for example, an overview of the course assessment arrangements, details of internal verification and responses to external verifiers' reports. Files are audited by the quality assurance manager. All the files looked at by inspectors conformed to the college framework. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment report that internal verification procedures are well established and effective. All programmes have an internal verifier and an internal verification plan which includes the setting and marking of assignments.

45 Staff development is effectively planned, delivered and monitored. Development activities are matched to college objectives and individuals' needs identified through staff appraisal. The staff development budget is allocated under headings which match the college's strategic objectives. This helps managers to identify the extent to which staff training supports college strategic priorities. Teaching and support staff benefit from extensive professional development opportunities provided both internally and by outside organisations. However, dissemination of the outcomes of training activities to other staff is underdeveloped. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that processes for

staff induction and appraisal are well organised and rigorously evaluated. All college teaching and support staff have annual appraisals. Appraisals are up to date, properly documented and regarded positively by staff.

46 Although a strong commitment to quality assurance is reflected in the mission statement and strategic priorities, the quality assurance framework does not extend to all college support services and its commercial services. Few service standards have been set in support areas. The college achieved Investor in People status in 1995 and was successfully reassessed in 1998. Inspectors agreed with the college's view that arrangements for monitoring the effectiveness of the college charter have yet to be established. The charter sets out the college's commitment to its students, and is summarised in the student handbook. Most students were aware of its existence, but not of its purpose. Most complaints are dealt with promptly but the complaints procedure is underdeveloped and insufficiently publicised.

## Governance

### *Grade 3*

**47 Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report. However, inspectors and auditors identified weaknesses in financial oversight which had not been included in the report.**

#### **Key strengths**

- full involvement in development of the strategic plan
- high levels of expertise and relevant experience
- close links with teaching departments
- appropriate role in the self-assessment process

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## Weaknesses

- insufficient oversight to ensure sound financial management
- insufficiently detailed monitoring of the strategic plan
- inadequate operation of the remuneration committee
- no formal evaluation of corporation performance before self-assessment

48 Governors possess a relevant range of business, professional and agricultural expertise, with specialisms in accountancy, higher education, charities and land-based industries. They are fully aware of the needs of rural, farming and countryside industries. They bring a great deal of dedication and commitment to their role. Members have links with curriculum areas in which they have expertise. They sit on advisory groups, take a close interest in curriculum developments, attend major college events and informally share their specialist knowledge. Before each corporation meeting there are presentations by college staff and opportunities to visit college facilities. Several governors hold, or have recently held, appointments at chief executive or senior board level in major enterprises. There is a balance of long-serving and new members.

49 As stated in the self-assessment report, governors effectively influence the strategic direction of the college. There is a clear planning cycle which provides good opportunities for consultation between governors and managers. In addition, two strategic review groups, each consisting of senior managers and governors, regularly meet to consider curriculum planning and college resources. These groups make a valuable contribution to strategic development. This year, governors have decided to hold additional meetings before final approval of the strategic plan so that plans, targets and budgets can be considered in more detail. To date, the principal's annual report has enabled the

corporation to monitor achievement of broad objectives. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment judgement that this is not sufficiently discriminating and more detailed reporting on each strategic objective is needed.

50 Inspectors and auditors could not agree with the self-assessment report's judgement that the corporation effectively monitors the financial position of the college. The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is weak. The corporation does not substantially conduct its business in accordance with the instrument and articles of government. The corporation does not substantially fulfil its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC. Late in 1997, governors expressed concern about the format and accuracy of the financial reports provided by managers and about the colleges systems of financial control. They received an internal audit report which failed to identify significant weaknesses and stated that there were no significant areas of concern. However, college systems for cashflow forecasting were weak. Subsequently, the college's financial health has worsened considerably and revenue expenditure has exceeded income in the 1998-99 year. The format, content and accuracy of financial information considered by the corporation and its committees about income, expenditure and capital contracts remains inadequate for effective monitoring and decision-making.

51 The board has established an appropriate committee structure. Each committee has terms of reference, membership and quorum requirements. The business of the corporation and committees is generally supported by effective clerking with clear papers and agendas. The corporation has established appropriate procedural standing orders for corporation and committee business and the code of conduct and code of ethics reflect best practice. The register of members' interests is comprehensive and it is updated annually.

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52 Despite earlier audit advice, the terms of reference of the remuneration committee were only approved in September 1998. The remuneration committee has not been formally involved in the full range of decisions falling within the normal remit of such a committee, including the departure of the director of finance in November 1998. There are formal minutes for only one meeting of the committee.

Although the current board has a range of skills, the search committee has not formally considered the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) guidance on succession planning from August 1999 or carried out a formal skills audit of existing governors. The process for identifying, evaluating, nominating and approving new and re-elected governors is not in accordance with best practice. There are introductory briefings for new governors but, as noted in the self-assessment report, until recently there has been a lack of systematic training for board members.

53 Corporation members were fully involved in the self-assessment process. The vice-chairman was a member of the panel which reviewed all contributions to the self-assessment report. Another board member chaired the working group considering the self-assessment of governance. The full board endorsed the report before it was sent to the FEFC. However, before self-assessment, the board had not previously evaluated its own performance in a regular and structured way. Members have yet to develop criteria and targets against which they can evaluate the effectiveness of the board.

## Management

### *Grade 4*

**54 Inspectors and auditors agreed with some of the judgements about college management in the self-assessment report, although they considered that major weaknesses in financial management and information systems had been omitted.**

#### **Key strengths**

- good communications between managers and staff
- wide range of marketing and promotional activities
- excellent and productive links with a wide range of organisations

#### **Weaknesses**

- weak financial management
- poor financial systems, controls and reports
- underdeveloped management information system
- some unreliable data on students' achievements
- slow development of achievement targets and performance indicators

55 Since the last inspection the college has expanded its range of courses and significantly improved its facilities. Following the principal's appointment in 1996, the college was radically restructured. This reorganisation was managed successfully, achieving its aims of reducing payroll costs, maximising opportunities for commercial income and ensuring the more effective deployment of staff. The current senior management team comprises the principal, the director of academic studies, who is deputy principal, and three directors responsible for administration and personnel, resources and student services, and commercial operations. The former director of finance, who left the college in November 1998, was a member of the senior management team. Communication between managers and staff is generally effective. Staff are consulted as part of the strategic planning process. There is a comprehensive calendar of meetings and a weekly informal staff meeting to which all staff are invited. The director of administration and personnel, who also acts as clerk to the corporation, will be leaving in summer 1999.

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This will lead to a further adjustment to senior management responsibilities, including finance and administration. It is important that this results in a structure which is able effectively to address weaknesses in financial management.

56 The FEFC's audit service concludes, that within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is weak. The college is in a poor financial position and it does not have systems, controls and reports to monitor its position effectively. Different parts of the financial accounting system are not appropriately integrated. The system is over-reliant on manually produced reports. There has been inadequate reconciliation of ledgers, bank accounts and the cashbook. Cashflow forecasts have been inaccurate, with the result that overdraft requirements were substantially underestimated. The financial reports presented to managers and governors are insufficiently detailed and do not make sufficient distinction between different college operations. They do not comply with best practice in that cashflow reporting is deficient and the reports do not make use of ratios, performance indicators or commentary. Internal and external audit reports for 1997-98 overlooked many of these weaknesses and they were not referred to in the self-assessment report. Since the director of finance left the college, temporary staffing arrangements have been in place. Progress has been made to establish the true financial position, stabilise cashflow and improve cashflow reporting. However, remedial action to address the college's financial health has not been finalised.

57 The self-assessment report recognised that the management information system is inadequate. Improvements to the system are being pursued. Information on applications, enrolments, attendance and aspects of academic performance is available. However, standard reports are not readily available, and those reports which can be produced do not provide sufficient detail either for course teams or for

managers and governors. Some course teams rely on their own records. Some data on students' achievements used for the inspection, based on the college's ISR returns, were found to be unreliable.

58 The use of targets and performance indicators is underdeveloped. College targets for pass rates and retention rates apply to all full-time courses. The absence of targets for individual courses was not noted in the self-assessment report. These will be introduced for 1998-99. Performance trends are not analysed at course or college level. Curriculum management is generally good. Action plans are widely used. This enables managers to effectively monitor aspects of progress in each curriculum area. The increased emphasis on attracting students for higher education has been successful and full-time higher education numbers have tripled from a low base. However, income from short courses, farming, commercial activities and TEC-funded training has not reached anticipated levels. Effective monitoring of health and safety practice is a high priority, although examples of poor practice sometimes occur. The college also conducts environmental audits which set an example in environmentally responsible land use.

59 Marketing has improved since the last inspection. Under the principal's direction, the college presents an attractive image, while maintaining the traditional advantages of an agricultural college. The range of marketing activities has been widened and promotional materials have been improved. The college frequently features in local and regional media. There are monthly promotions in towns throughout the area to encourage enrolments from groups which have not usually entered further education. The effectiveness of different promotional activities is evaluated. The introduction of Saturday morning courses was in response to identified need.

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60 The college's excellent links with many outside bodies were identified in the self-assessment report. Partnerships with major agricultural manufacturers have enabled the college to provide up-to-date specialist agricultural facilities. Employers are well represented on active industrial liaison committees covering the main areas of the college's work. Community organisations and those with a rural interest, such as the Young Farmers, regularly use the college's facilities. There are strong links with schools, colleges and universities.

## Conclusions

61 The detailed and informative self-assessment report provided a useful basis for planning and conducting the inspection. There was an appropriate emphasis on teaching and learning and students' achievements in the curriculum sections of the report. The thorough self-assessment process involved staff and governors. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the report. They considered some strengths and weaknesses to be understated. Some weaknesses were omitted. In particular, significant weaknesses in financial management and in the corporation's oversight of the college's financial position were omitted or given insufficient emphasis. Lessons observed and graded by the college resulted in a higher profile than that awarded by inspectors. At the time of the inspection, action had been taken to address some of the weaknesses identified through self-assessment and an updated action plan was provided at the beginning of the inspection. Inspectors awarded lower grades than the college in two of the three curriculum areas inspected and three of the five cross-college areas.

62 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 (November 1998)

Age	%
Under 16	5
16-18 years	42
19-24 years	22
25+ years	30
Not known	1
Total	100

Source: college data

## Student numbers by level of study (November 1998)

Level of study	%
Foundation	2
Intermediate	51
Advanced	33
Higher education	5
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	9
Total	100

Source: college data

## Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (November 1998)

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	42	26	4
Agriculture	345	667	66
Construction	15	0	1
Engineering	56	107	11
Hotel and catering	13	0	1
Health and community care	0	108	7
Art and design	0	10	1
Humanities	3	0	0
Basic education	0	138	9
Total	474	1,056	100

Source: college data

## Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 3% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

## Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (November 1998)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	39	1	0	40
Supporting direct learning contact	18	1	0	19
Other support	57	3	3	63
Total	114	5	3	122

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



# College Statistics

## Three-year Trends

### Financial data

	1996	1997	1998
Income	£3,823,000	£3,570,000	£3,626,000
Average level of funding (ALF) Out-turn to 1997; funded 1998	£20.73	£18.66	£17.29*
Payroll as a proportion of income	62%	70%	58%
Achievement of funding target	110%	122%	104%
Diversity of income	46%	44%	47%
Operating surplus	-£311,000	-£553,000	£404,000

*Sources: Income – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), 98/43 (1997), college (1998)*

*ALF – Performance Indicators 1996-97 (1996 and 1997), Funding Allocations 1997-98 (1998)*

*Payroll – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), 98/43 (1997), college (1998)*

*Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1996-97 (1996 and 1997), college (1998)*

*Diversity of income – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), 98/43 (1997), college (1998)*

*Operating surplus – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), 98/43 (1997), college (1998)*

*\*provisional data*

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