

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

Newton Rigg College

March 1994

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

THE FURTHER EDUCATION FUNDING COUNCIL

The Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) has a statutory duty to ensure that there are satisfactory arrangements to assess the quality of provision in the further education sector. It discharges the duty in part through its inspectorate, which inspects and reports on each college in the sector every four years. The Council's inspectorate also assesses and reports on a national basis on specific curriculum areas and advises the Council's quality assessment committee.

College inspections involve both full-time inspectors and registered part-time inspectors who have specialist knowledge and experience in the areas they inspect. Inspection teams normally include at least one member from outside the world of education and a nominated member of staff from the college being inspected.

GRADE DESCRIPTORS

The procedures for assessing quality are described in the Council Circular 93/28. In the course of inspecting colleges, inspectors assess the strengths and weaknesses of each aspect of provision they inspect. Their assessments are set out in the reports. They also summarise their judgements on the balance between strengths and weaknesses using a five-point scale. 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.*

*Cheylesmore House
Quinton Road
Coventry CV1 2WT
Telephone 0203 863000
Fax 0203 863100*

FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 22/94

NEWTON RIGG COLLEGE, CUMBRIA

NORTH WEST REGION

Inspected January 1994

Summary

Newton Rigg College is the main provider of further education for agriculture and other land-based industries in Cumbria. The college also attracts students from all over the country. It has strong links with land-based industries and the local rural community. Senior managers with the support of the governors are successfully leading the college through a period of rapid expansion. Strategic planning is thorough. It involves staff at all levels although detailed operational targets have yet to be fully developed. There are many strengths in the teaching. Students show a high level of commitment to their studies and a high proportion complete their courses and achieve their target qualifications. Staff are well qualified, have a sound knowledge of the industry and are supportive and responsive to the needs of students. The system for quality assurance is at an early stage of development. Much of the accommodation and the specialist facilities are of good quality. Recent growth and the introduction of new courses have brought new groups of students in to the college. Aspects of enrolment procedures, the tutorial system, the recording of student progress and staff development require attention if the needs of these students are to be met.

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

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Agriculture	2	Business & administration	2
Science	2	Engineering	2
Information technology	2		

CONTENTS

	Paragraph
Summary	
Introduction	1
The college and its aims	3
Responsiveness and range of provision	9
Governance and management	20
Students' recruitment, guidance and support	29
Teaching and the promotion of learning	38
Students' achievements	50
Quality assurance	54
Resources	57
Conclusions and issues	67
Figures	

INTRODUCTION

1 Newton Rigg College was inspected in two stages during January 1994. Forty-two inspector days were used for the inspection of specialist subject areas. Subsequently, a team of five inspectors spent a further 25 inspector days in the college from 17 to 21 January. In all, inspectors visited 95 classes, examined samples of students' written work and held discussions with staff, students, college governors, an officer of the Cumbria Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), representatives from five local secondary schools, employers, former students, a careers officer, representatives of partner higher education institutions and an officer of the local agricultural training board.

2 The inspection was carried out according to the framework and guidelines described in Council Circular 93/28. The framework describes a four-year inspection cycle. When this cycle becomes fully established, colleges will have the opportunity to respond to the findings of earlier inspection visits before their quadrennial inspection and the subsequent published report. As the inspection of Newton Rigg College occurred early in the cycle, the opportunity for such a response was not available.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

3 Established in 1896, Newton Rigg College in Cumbria is one of the oldest county colleges of agriculture in the country. It operates from one site in north east Cumbria, close to the market town of Penrith, on the edge of the Eden Valley. Much of the accommodation has been recently converted from old sandstone farm buildings. The six hectare site includes landscaped gardens, sports fields and a horticultural unit. There is residential accommodation for 165 students. The college uses five outreach centres in the south and north of the county, the furthest some 60 miles away. The college has two farms, a lowland dairy farm near Penrith and a hill farm in the National Park at Mungrisdale. These farms typify commercial practice in the area.

4 At the time of the inspection 1,681 students were enrolled at the college. Of these, 613 were full-time students, 640 part-time vocational students and 428 were students in non-vocational adult classes. Enrolments by age group are shown in figure 1. The enrolments include 30 students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, of whom 17 were following discrete programmes and 13 receiving additional support on mainstream courses. Full-time enrolments have more than trebled in the last four years. Twenty-four per cent of full-time students (9 per cent of the total enrolments) are pursuing higher education programmes. There was a full-time equivalent staff of 56 teachers and 54 support staff (figure 2).

5 The college's main provision relates to rural economy and land-based industries: agriculture (farming), horticulture, forestry and woodland management, agricultural engineering and environmental land

management. Recently, the college has also offered general further education courses in engineering and business.

6 Many of the college's full-time programmes, particularly forestry, recruit nationally. At the time of the inspection 56 per cent of the full-time students came from outside Cumbria. For the part-time programmes and foundation level courses the college's main catchment areas are within the county. Cumbria, the second largest English county, has a small population: agriculture continues to be the mainstay of a rural economy, despite a decline in employment in the sector of some 8 per cent over the last 10 years. The maintenance of financially-viable provision for students in remote, rural areas, is a major challenge for the college.

7 As a provider of land-based programmes the college has no significant competitor in Cumbria. The college is in competition, however, with other agricultural colleges nationally. The failure of some students to obtain discretionary awards is having an effect on recruitment. The college estimates that 86 students accepted offers this year but did not enrol because of grant problems. General further education courses in engineering and business are offered by two nearby colleges at Carlisle and Kendal, 20 miles and 30 miles, respectively, from Newton Rigg.

8 The mission of the college is to provide high quality education on a sound economic basis, and to achieve this through a range of courses which offers wide choice and opportunities for students to progress from basic skill acquisition to higher education. The aims of the college over the next five years include expanding recruitment, generating a financial surplus, extending the academic base, developing key partnerships and establishing the college as the centre for county rural affairs.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

9 The work of the college is organised in four schools: forestry and woodland management; environmental land management; agriculture and engineering; business, horticulture and extended studies. The range of specialisms provided by the college has expanded significantly over the last three years. New courses, such as countryside skills and gamekeeping, many of them leading to Business Technology Education Council (BTEC) first diplomas, have been introduced as a result of the college's analysis of local needs. The diversification has significantly changed the balance of provision. For example, the number of full-time students studying agriculture (farming) as a proportion of the total has dropped from 48 per cent in 1989 to 16 per cent this year. Full-time forestry students amount to 36 per cent of the total full-time numbers which reflects the college's position as one of only four centres in England providing full-time courses in forestry. Enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figure 3.

10 The college offers introductory and foundation level courses in most of the land-based vocational areas. First diplomas are used effectively to provide opportunities for non-traditional groups, such as unemployed

students and women returners. Insufficient consideration has been given to meeting the needs of those students who have an interest in agriculture but do not necessarily want to work on a farm, and for the minority of students undecided about which specialism within the land-based industries to enter. More opportunities for students to move between first diploma programmes in the early stages of their courses would be helpful. In the college's traditional specialisms, with the exception of horticulture, there are opportunities for students to progress to more advanced courses including, in the case of forestry, higher education. For those specialisms introduced over the last three years, the college has yet to establish clear routes for student progression. There is a relatively limited portfolio of engineering courses but provision is soundly based on local needs. The low number of students recruited to the national diploma in business studies makes it necessary for first and second year students to be taught together and this limits students' choice of options. Enrolments by level of course are shown in figure 4.

11 Part-time programmes for those employed in the land-based industries are designed effectively to meet local needs. However, the number of students enrolling for agriculture and horticulture has shown a marked decline over the last three years and some of the courses are vulnerable. So far, the college has managed to maintain its range of provision by adjusting and mixing modes of attendance. Out-centres cater for some day-release teaching although the transporting of staff and students makes this provision expensive. The demand nationally for part-time forestry courses has declined and higher level programmes only are currently on offer. Although the college has provided courses for professional up-dating in forestry few of these have attracted viable numbers.

12 Close collaboration with a range of external groups has resulted in the provision of a wide variety of short courses. Many of these are innovative and seek to penetrate new markets. Customers are highly complimentary about the flexible timing and location of these courses and about the care which the college takes in their design.

13 The college has a positive image in the local community and across the county generally. Productive links have been established over a number of years with local industry and with other employers in the public and private sectors. In the case of forestry, the links are national and international. The college receives considerable support from industry including advice on course development. Staff of the college are members of trade and professional groups and many of these groups hold meetings at the college. The college makes extensive use of local commercial units for teaching, and employers are involved in some of this work. Employers value the college's initiative and adaptability in developing productive links with industry.

14 Liaison with local schools and other schools across the county is highly effective. Technical and Vocational Education Extension funding

helps to finance joint activities. Pupils of all ages visit the college to participate in taster days and more extended courses, some of them residential. The college has taken a prominent role in developing learning materials for schools, and the college's farms are used effectively to support this work. The college also co-operates with higher education institutions to provide in-service training courses for teachers from across the country. There are other productive links with higher education institutions, especially the University of Central Lancashire and the Open University, which has located its Cumbria centre at the college.

15 There is effective liaison with the TEC at strategic and operational levels. The college co-operates with the TEC in providing discrete courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, information technology (IT) courses for adults and the development of accreditation of prior learning.

16 Senior staff are aware of, and sensitive to, the external factors influencing the college's work. National policies for further education have had a considerable impact on strategic planning, particularly the drive to increase student numbers and improve efficiency. Staff generally show a ready awareness of national issues.

17 The college has clear and well-considered strategies for marketing and promoting courses. Market research and promotion each operate to key targets, and there are criteria to measure degrees of success or failure. Activities are analysed for their cost effectiveness. There are a wide range of promotional strategies based on the outcomes of market surveys. Good use has been made of professional services in designing printed and video presentations. The college's own analysis reveals that the cost of television and radio advertising has been recouped by additional enrolments from a broader range of clients. In 1992, the college was runner up in a national corporate image competition.

18 There is a comprehensive policy on equal opportunities and suitable arrangements are being developed for monitoring its implementation. In recent years, the college has succeeded in attracting a greater proportion of women. They now form the majority of students on business studies courses and the training for work programmes. An externally-funded initiative, designed to help women to gain IT skills, has been particularly successful. Support for women on part-time courses is being developed to help them progress to full-time courses. The college has responded to requests from female students by improving college facilities and providing better security measures for residential blocks.

19 Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have been successfully integrated on to mainstream courses with additional help from the learning support unit. The unit is concerned to ensure that students on discrete courses who subsequently progress to mainstream college courses are in a position to take advantage of appropriate opportunities outside the college. There is close co-operation with the

careers service in ensuring that students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are aware of the full range of opportunities open to them.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

20 The corporation and its subcommittees operate effectively. The governors are strongly supportive of the college and are committed to the mission which they were involved in developing. They are closely involved in the strategic management of the college and collaborate effectively with senior managers. They appreciate the senior management team's open style of reporting. The corporation board receives academic board minutes together with regular updates on aspects of college performance. The board's four subcommittees each provide a clear focus for decision making and allow individual governors to offer support and guidance relevant to their individual expertise. Of the 20 board members, 11 are experienced in business areas directly relevant to the college's work. The others are the principal, two members of staff and one college student, the chief executive of the TEC, the vice-rector of the University of Central Lancashire, the Forestry Commission's principal officer for education and training, a local headmaster and a retired principal education officer. Although some governors had attended training sessions before incorporation, most felt that little had been gained from the time invested.

21 The strategic plan sets out clearly the college's development priorities for the medium term. The senior management team is fully involved in the strategic planning process. All staff are given the opportunity to be involved in a detailed analysis of the college's strengths and weaknesses at an early stage in the development of the plan. Many of the proposed course developments are supported by a comprehensive needs analysis. Operating statements and specific targets for the college's main areas of work are in the process of development.

22 The senior management team comprises the principal, vice-principal, director of finance and two assistant directors for academic affairs and resources. There are four heads of school with responsibility for the college's academic programmes. Members of the management team provide sound leadership. They have a clear sense of purpose and share a commitment to the college's mission and strategic goals. The college is being successfully led through a period of rapid change in a management style which is innovative and entrepreneurial but also supportive of staff. Former students and other clients of the college speak with enthusiasm about the benefits resulting from the changes which have taken place over the last few years.

23 The management structure of the college was reorganised in December 1993. The new structure is based on a clear identification of the institution's requirements to implement the strategic plan. Resource planning, accountability and staff deployment have a clear focus. The significant weakness in the older structure, the conflict between departmental priorities and cross-college objectives, has been addressed.

Resources are allocated to budget holders following a bidding process, which most staff perceive as open and fair. However, links between resource allocation and strategic plans are not yet sufficiently explicit.

24 At senior levels, management roles and responsibilities are clearly defined. However course managers continue to have dual responsibilities for managing courses and implementing the college's overall policies. Few have received sufficient support on how to manage these briefs. There are inconsistencies in the way they carry out their duties and their performance is not monitored. The college is addressing these issues as part of the next stage in its management reorganisation.

25 Course planning is insufficiently structured. There is too much reliance upon individual initiative to ensure coherence of curriculum delivery. In the absence of a managed calendar of meetings, course teams experience difficulty in meeting as regularly as they would like.

26 The implementation of a clear strategy for increasing the efficiency of course delivery is at an early stage. Some initial cost analysis of courses has succeeded in raising staff awareness and in prompting reviews of practice. In agriculture, for example, teaching groups have been combined. Central control of stores, information technology equipment, minibus access, central deployment of technical support staff have improved efficiency. Overall, however, unit costing is underdeveloped. Current intentions to reduce staffing costs in the medium term do not have clear targets and timescales.

27 Arrangements for timetabling teaching rooms have been centralised. This has improved the use of general teaching rooms, although inefficiencies still exist in the use of specialist accommodation. The college conducts assessments of room utilisation but the resulting data do not yet inform decisions on the deployment of resources. The refurbishment programme, supported by profits from the conference centre and leasing of accommodation to holiday companies has been well planned and managed.

28 The college's management information system provides reports to budget holders on revenue and resources. It also produces a range of course-based performance indicators, including enrolments, completion rates, examination results and student destinations. The centralised computer register system adequately monitors staff hours but it fails to provide the data on student attendance which would assist course managers and personal tutors.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

29 Over the last two years, detailed pre-enrolment procedures, covering reception, the processing of inquiries and admissions, have been introduced. Students who already have a strong vocational commitment receive good guidance on specific courses. For those who are less certain about the direction of their studies, the emphasis on course selection at an early stage is often unhelpful. Since the college is now marketing its

broader range of programmes to a wider clientele it is attracting increasing numbers of students who need more general advice. The system depends on course managers providing effective guidance. Many, however, do not appear to be fully aware of this responsibility. Mature students are complimentary about the considerable advice and guidance received prior to enrolment but there is generally insufficient monitoring and control of the pre-enrolment guidance process.

30 The college has developed a policy on accreditation of prior learning (APL) and cross-college arrangements are being established to support the implementation of assessment by programme teams. Although there are a few examples of APL in practice, most course managers are waiting for the cross-college arrangements to become fully established. In most programme areas, teaching staff are involved in developing National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) assessments. As a result, they are well placed to develop APL systems.

31 There is no system for the initial identification and assessment of students' needs for learning support. Although students are actively encouraged to declare their learning needs there is too much reliance on student self-referral. Learning needs in numeracy and literacy are often not identified early enough in students' programmes.

32 The two-week student induction programme had well-documented objectives. There was an effective balance between general and subject based inductions. However, students' involvement was limited and there was insufficient attention to individual needs. Students were critical of the amount of undirected time. Following the evaluation, the college intends to review the programme with the intention of changing it for the next academic year.

33 The close and productive working relationships between teachers and students and the opportunities for work in small groups provide effective informal support for students. Most students are complimentary about tutors' accessibility and their willingness to respond to students' concerns. Residential students appreciate the opportunities they have to discuss personal problems and other issues with college wardens and are generally positive about their residential experience.

34 Each student is allocated a personal tutor. Whilst full-time students generally know who to contact for personal tutoring some part-time students are less sure. The significant differences in the way personal tutors carry out their duties affect the quality of students' experiences. Some students gain little benefit from the formal tutorial arrangements. In the best practice, students receive regular feedback on their assessed performance; personal tutors share with them the course team's views on their academic progress; and students are given an opportunity to raise concerns. In contrast, some tutorials are poorly structured; there is too much reliance on students' own assessments of their needs; and students are given little or no feedback on their performance. Some students see

little benefit in one-to-one tutorials. There is inadequate central guidance on the structuring and purposes of tutorials and no procedures for monitoring the outcomes.

35 Records of students' progress on the assessed elements of their programme are kept by course managers. Complete records on an individual student's overall performance are rarely maintained. In a few cases only is the potential of the BTEC students' record of common skills exploited. Many students do not complete the record and tutors do not always monitor it. The lack of a complete record of individual students' performance significantly reduces the tutors' ability to identify and monitor learning needs. In contrast, students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities use individual action plans which specify learning targets and the support which is required to achieve the targets. Records of achievement are well maintained and portfolios of work developed by the students are shown to external agencies and parents.

36 The student services unit, established 18 months ago, is developing effectively. Its work load has increased significantly and extra staff have been employed. From mid-October 1993, there have been over 1,140 student enquiries of the service. The unit has developed productive links with the students' association.

37 Full-time students have been issued with a copy of a college charter. Along with the student handbooks, issued at induction, the charter provides a clear statement of students' rights and responsibilities. The Charter for Further Education has been presented to the corporation but the college has yet to agree its strategy for incorporating the national framework. A charter being developed for part-time students is not yet in place.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

38 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
NVQ		1	11	7	3	0	22
Other		12	34	22	5	0	73
Totals		13	45	29	8	0	95

39 The strengths of the work clearly outweighed the weaknesses in over 60 per cent of the sessions which were inspected. Teachers employ a range of teaching methods, including practicals, tutorials, assignments, class work exercises and lectures, many of which give the students some responsibility for their own learning. Students experience a good variety of learning activities often within individual classes. On most programmes, the students' range of experience is extended by participation in local commercial enterprises.

40 Almost all lessons are well-prepared and course-based documentation is used to good effect. On discrete courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, most lessons have clear aims and challenging learning activities which are differentiated according to the age and ability of the students. In agriculture, good organisation of equipment and transport maximises the time spent on off-site practical work. Some teachers fail to make plain when and to what extent students in class are expected to take notes. The quality of some students' notes was poor. Often the notes taken were an inaccurate reflection of the content of the lesson. There is no policy either across the college or within courses for guiding students on how to take notes. In a minority of cases, excessive class time was taken up in the copying of notes.

41 Teachers have a sound knowledge of industry. A notable feature of nearly all lessons is the continual reference to the industrial relevance of the work. In national diploma courses in forestry and engineering, effective use is often made of the students' previous experience when introducing new topics. For agriculture students, physical and financial data from the college farm is used extensively by the teachers to illustrate topics.

42 Practical work is organised so that students have a sound grounding in relevant techniques, followed by opportunities to practise. In agriculture and engineering the conduct of teachers in practical sessions provided good models for the students. Teachers' practical demonstrations are skilful, invariably highlighting key tasks. Supervision of students' initial practice is careful. In engineering, the use of workshop manuals to support the teaching also helps to inform students about the design and maintenance of complex machines. For agriculture practicals with farm livestock, teachers demonstrate agreed handling techniques.

43 Teachers are enthusiastic and are able to stimulate students' interest. With very few exceptions, staff and students enjoy good working relationships. In particular, students respect teachers' sound knowledge of industry and their practical expertise. Some teachers, for example in horticulture and engineering, use effective techniques to challenge the minority of students who appear to lack commitment.

44 There are good opportunities for students to develop personal skills such as communication, problem-solving and independent working. However, the extent to which these skills are systematically developed and assessed varies considerably. The best practice observed was in the use of IT by agriculture and forestry students. In a few cases, students with learning difficulties were not able fully to understand the course documentation because of the reading level required.

45 Assignments usually include detailed written briefs which provide a realistic commercial context, a clear indication of expected outcomes and specific assessment criteria. In agriculture and horticulture, examples are drawn from the college's own units. In forestry, examples are drawn from commercial facilities visited by the students. Students are generally given

insufficient feedback on their performance in assignments and particularly on assignments set early in the course. There is too little detail in tutors' comments to help the students improve their performance.

46 In a minority of classes, the teaching methodologies take insufficient account of the students' individual learning needs. This is most marked in classes where the levels or years of study are mixed, or where there is a small minority of first diploma or part-time students who lack commitment. Other weaknesses include the lack of variety in learning activities, restricted opportunities for active participation by students, and discussions which teachers allow to be dominated by the more able. Some teachers are insufficiently informed about the learning needs of individual students.

47 Most courses have clear, documented aims and objectives, and indicate the content and the competencies which students are expected to achieve. An exception is the national certificate in agriculture where the objectives are not always clear or sufficiently detailed. A thorough review of the course has started prior to resubmission.

48 The technical content of courses is balanced and relates well to the needs of the student and the relevant sector of the industry. For most courses, technical content has been regularly adjusted to reflect changes in the industry. The curriculum of the national diploma in forestry has been modified in response to changes in employment opportunities: non-commercial (amenity) aspects have been given greater emphasis, business studies and science content has been applied with greater relevance, and the IT element increased. The extent to which teachers know about elements of the curriculum other than the ones they teach varies considerably. Often teachers are insufficiently informed about the content and programming of other courses.

49 The range and balance of assessments are generally well matched to course aims. Effective use is made of a wide range of in-course assessments. The college's 14 point grading scale provides a good basis for agreement on standards. For most of the practical assessments, arrangements are in place to ensure methods are consistent and standards agreed. Agriculture teams meet to agree practical techniques and standards, and there is double marking of some assessments. Insufficient attention has been given to moderation of the marking of written work. On occasions, there are significant differences in the assessments of assignments by teachers in the same area. Some poor assignments in agriculture and horticulture receive inappropriately high marks.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

50 Students generally achieve satisfactory standards in their class work and assignments although some students' progress is restricted by weak literacy and numeracy skills. Students' assignment work in forestry and engineering show a high level of understanding, but some agriculture

students on national diploma courses fail to use information effectively to reach their conclusions.

51 In the academic year 1992-93, just over 90 per cent of full-time students completed their studies. The lowest rates of completion were around 75 per cent on some BTEC first diploma courses. A high proportion of students on full-time courses achieved their target qualifications. In 1993, approximately 91 per cent gained their target qualification for BTEC courses. Over 50 per cent gained merits or distinctions.

52 A good proportion of students on part-time programmes also complete their studies and achieve their target qualifications. For those enrolled on part-time youth training scheme programmes in the academic year 1992-93, approximately 90 per cent completed the year and just over 70 per cent passed. In four of the seven programmes, all students passed; in engineering and horticulture less than 60 per cent were successful. The results in engineering were low compared with previous results and the college has introduced more regular assessments to monitor students' progress. Non-completion rates for the first year of agriculture youth training programmes are high. Some of the students leave to join full-time courses; some leave for personal reasons; but a significant proportion leave for reasons to do with the course.

53 Destination statistics for November 1993 show a high proportion of students progressing to more advanced education programmes or to employment. In 1993, almost 90 per cent of full-time students, and 92 per cent of students on youth training programmes, progressed to full-time education or entered employment.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

54 The college's policy on quality assurance is still being developed. Standardised record-keeping and more effective documentation should provide a base for improving the quality of administrative systems, academic monitoring and review, and student support. Most staff are aware of quality assurance policies and support their implementation. They are less well informed about operational arrangements. Course managers have a pivotal role in delivering elements of the strategy but individual managers are not always clear about their responsibilities.

55 The proposed arrangements for course evaluation are based on the requirements of validating bodies and on the quality system of the college's associate higher education institution. Course reports submitted to the advisory committees are not comprehensive and some of the evaluation is superficial. The weakness of these reports significantly reduces the effectiveness of the advisory committees and hinders the potentially valuable contributions of industrial representatives. Students' views on courses are systematically gathered and evaluated and course teams have been responsive to issues raised.

56 Staff at all levels are encouraged and supported in developing academic and other skills in order to meet the curricular, business and

administrative needs of the college. Over the past three years, the staff development programme has allowed almost all teachers to obtain a teaching qualification. Many teachers have gained further vocational qualifications and others have studied for higher academic qualifications. Some support staff are also studying for vocational or further professional qualifications. Overall, the programme has been successful in improving the qualifications of staff and in raising their awareness of potential areas for development. It has yet to be related systematically to the college's strategic plan.

RESOURCES

57 Teachers' qualifications and experience are well matched to the work they undertake. All teachers have relevant work experience. Most have close links with industry which ensure that they have good knowledge of recent developments and current issues. In engineering, forestry and agriculture the teachers frequently visit local enterprises as part of their teaching duties. The academic qualifications of some engineering staff are insufficient to support the higher level work which the college is planning. Some staff require further guidance on working with lower ability students and on operating effectively as personal tutors. Some teachers of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have relatively little experience of this type of work.

58 The numbers of technicians are generally adequate for the work undertaken other than in engineering and information technology where the level of support is insufficient for the developments which are taking place. A more flexible deployment of technical staff has already improved efficiency across the college. The level of administrative support is adequate and new appointments are being made to meet increases in demand.

59 The campus is attractive and welcoming and the college grounds are well maintained. A sensitive refurbishment programme in recent years has resulted in high standards of decor in most buildings. The reception area and other public places are clean and have a pleasant appearance. The college has good quality conference facilities. General teaching rooms are well furnished and provide a pleasant working environment. The quality of students' residential accommodation is satisfactory. The rooms are adequately furnished. The dining room and students' communal areas provide a relaxing environment. There is a good range of sports facilities.

60 The college is well provided with specialist accommodation. There is a comprehensive range of horticulture buildings and other specialist facilities. Extensive use is made of the college grounds by students from several of the programme areas, particularly horticulture and forestry. Workshops are of adequate size and provide a realistic working environment although some are in need of refurbishment. The covered machinery building provides good opportunities for students to practise operating large machines, particularly when the weather and/or ground

conditions are unsuitable. The undulating driving track allows the students to develop their driving skills in situations typical of local conditions. The laboratory is of adequate size and reasonable quality. The specialist computer rooms are of excellent quality and provide a good learning environment.

61 Both college farms are run commercially and provide realistic working environments for practical classes and industrially-relevant contexts for assignment exercises. The farms are heavily used by students but the college does not maintain adequate records of use. Consequently, it is not in a position to analyse accurately the additional costs resulting from the educational use of the farms. Teachers on agriculture courses are able to make frequent and effective reference to the farms' physical and financial data at a level of detail not normally available from commercial farms. However, while teachers and farm workers have comprehensive knowledge of the farms' operation, students find it difficult to access this information for themselves. More use could be made of display materials to convey information relating to the farms and students could be given greater insight into the rationale behind management decisions. The farm guides do not include information on the farms' non-commercial activities.

62 The farms have been adapted well to support the new courses introduced over the last four years. Many developments on the hill farm have been planned to exploit its location in an environmentally sensitive area. There is, for example, a wild flower meadow, developed as a site of special scientific interest. The hill farm now offers many opportunities for students to study environmentally-sensitive management of a commercial farm. In contrast, the lowland farm lacks an overall conservation policy which is a weakness in term of developing its full potential.

63 In addition to its own farms and grounds, the college makes extensive use of local farms and forests as well as other commercial units. The willingness of organisations to co-operate with the college is an important factor in the success of practical teaching and assessment. It is particularly important for non-repeatable tasks involving large numbers: castration, foot-trimming, tree-planting and hedge-laying. Off-site facilities are extending the students' range of experience, an important aspect of provision in an increasingly diverse industry.

64 To serve the needs of part-time students who live great distances from the college there are five extra-mural centres, four for agriculture and one for horticulture. The agriculture classes are held in a variety of venues. The one inspected provides a reasonable learning environment. There are no specialist facilities at these centres although use is made of local farms. The students extend their learning experiences through block release attendance at the college. The horticulture centre's facilities are adequate for introductory level work.

65 In all programme areas, the specialist equipment is of at least a satisfactory standard. Often it is good. There is sufficient equipment for

students to carry out the majority of practical tasks, some of which has been donated by local companies. There are effective ranges of hand tools and machinery for the specialist areas. Some of the machines are rather old but still provide opportunities for student practice, including repair and maintenance. Students are given appropriate experience of expensive, more specialist machines, by visiting off-site facilities. High-quality computer hardware and software is available. The equipment is easily accessible and heavily used.

66 The library has been completely refurbished recently and it provides a good learning environment. There are extensive reference facilities. The supply of books and non-text material is generally adequate although students report shortages of books on occasions when specific assignment work is in progress. A programme of updating is not yet complete. As yet, a systematic review of user requirements, involving academic staff, has not been carried out. The library provides good support for students engaged in project work.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

67 The college is making good progress towards achieving its mission of providing high-quality education on a sound economic basis. Particular strengths of the provision inspected are:

- the strong support of the governing body
- the effective management of change over the last three years
- excellent links with industry and the rural community
- effective links with local schools
- the quality of marketing and promotional work
- the high standards of much of the teaching
- the high proportion of students achieving their target qualifications
- the well-qualified teachers who have relevant experience and a good grasp of issues relating to land-based industry
- good quality accommodation and specialist learning facilities
- the commitment of most students.

68 The college should address the following areas if it is to maintain and improve the quality of its provision and the standards of achievement of its students:

- tutorial arrangements for students
- the recording of individual student's progress
- arrangements for quality assurance
- the evaluation of courses
- the roles of course managers
- the establishment of operating statements and targets
- staff development activity which is related to the college's strategic plan.

FIGURES

1 Percentage enrolments by age (at December 1993)

2 Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1993-94)

3 Enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1993-94)

4 Percentage enrolments by level of course (1993-94)

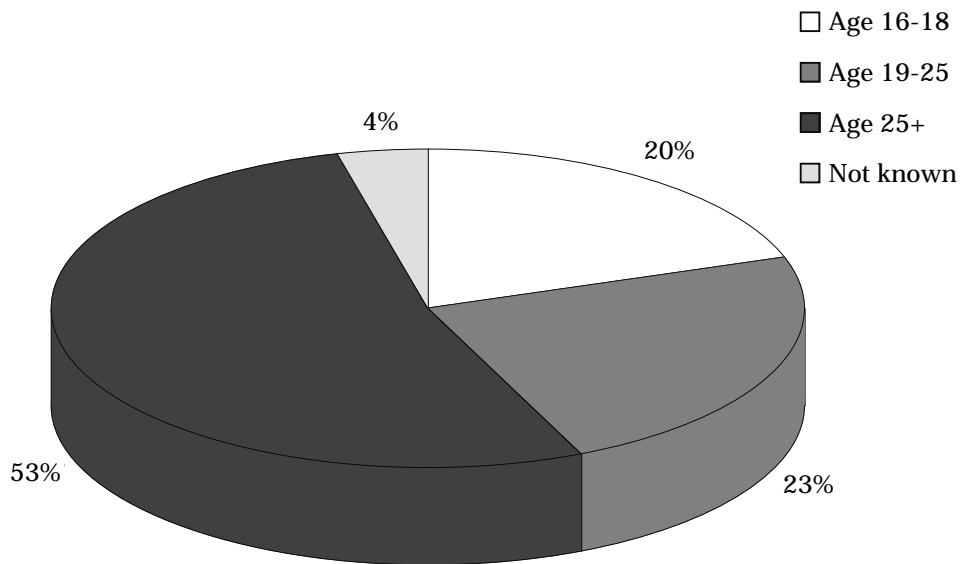
5 Estimated income (16 months to July 1994)

5 Estimated expenditure (16 months to July 1994)

Note: the information contained in the figures was provided by the college to the inspection team.

Figure 1

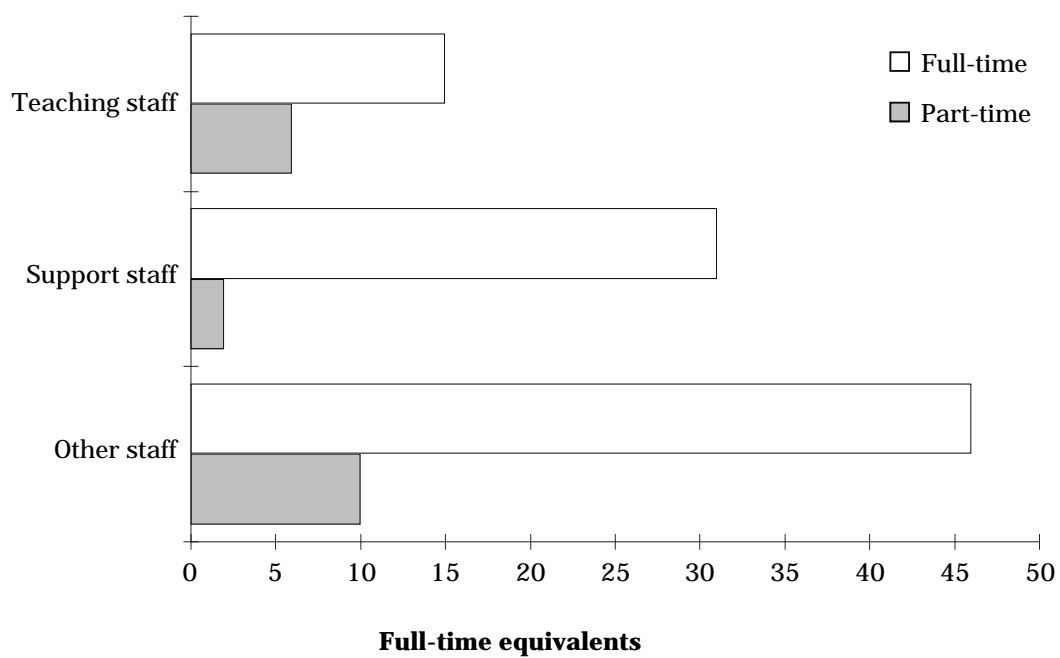
Newton Rigg College: percentage enrolments by age (at December 1993)



Enrolments: 1,681

Figure 2

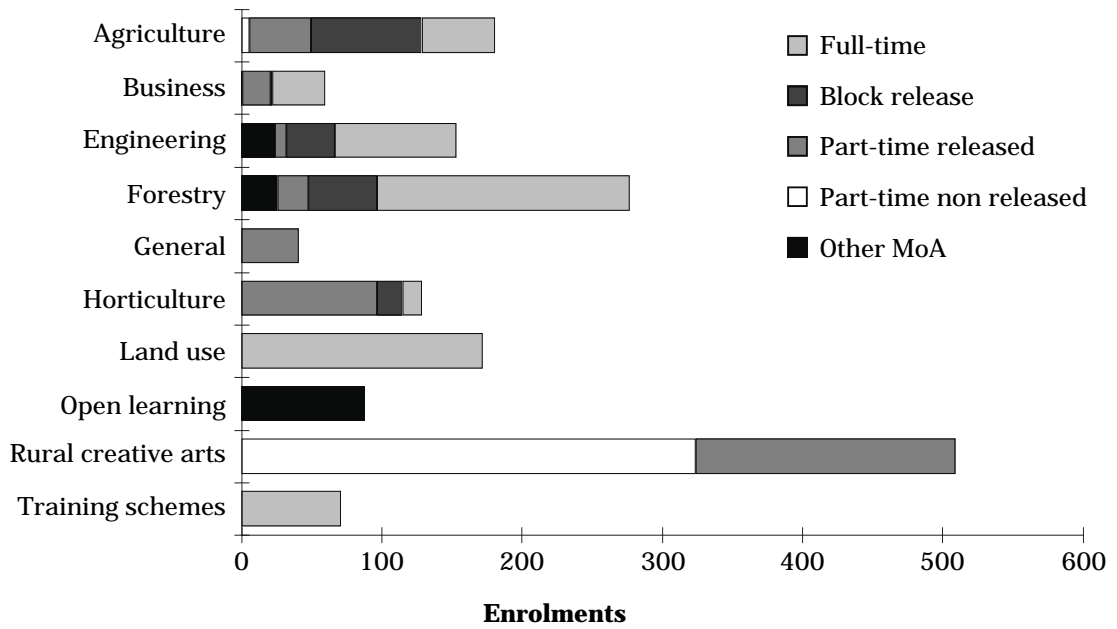
Newton Rigg College: staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1993-94)



Full-time equivalent staff: 110

Figure 3

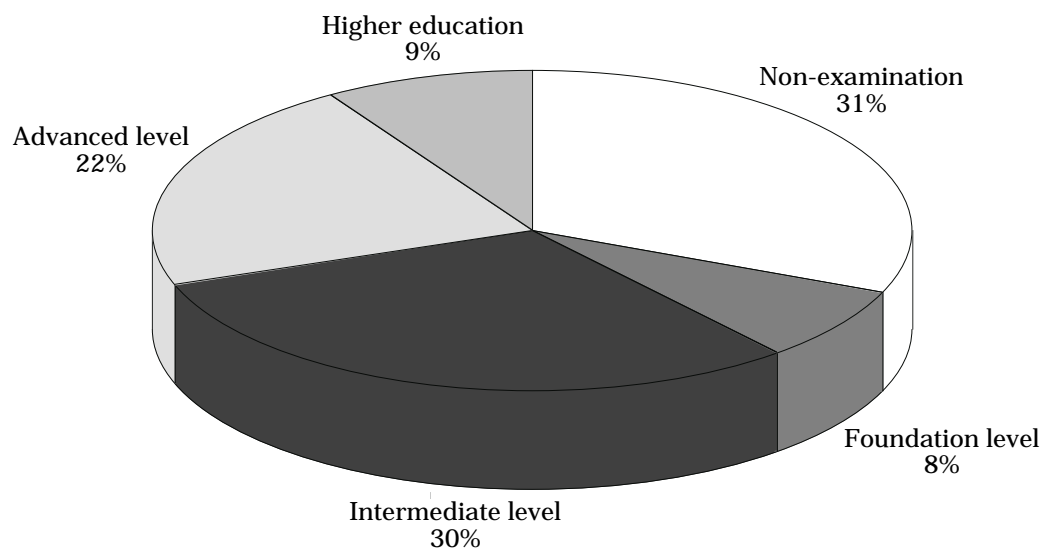
Newton Rigg College: enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1993-94)



Enrolments: 1,681

Figure 4

Newton Rigg College: percentage enrolments by level of course (1993-94)



Enrolments: 1,681

Figure 5

Newton Rigg College: estimated income (16 months to July 1994)

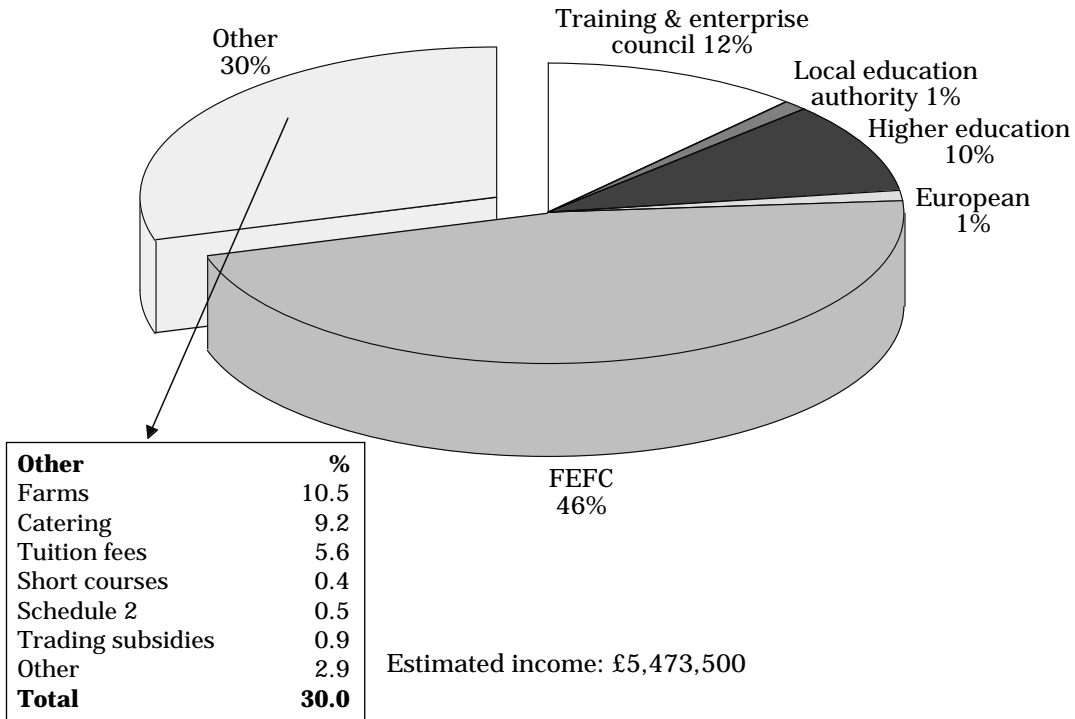
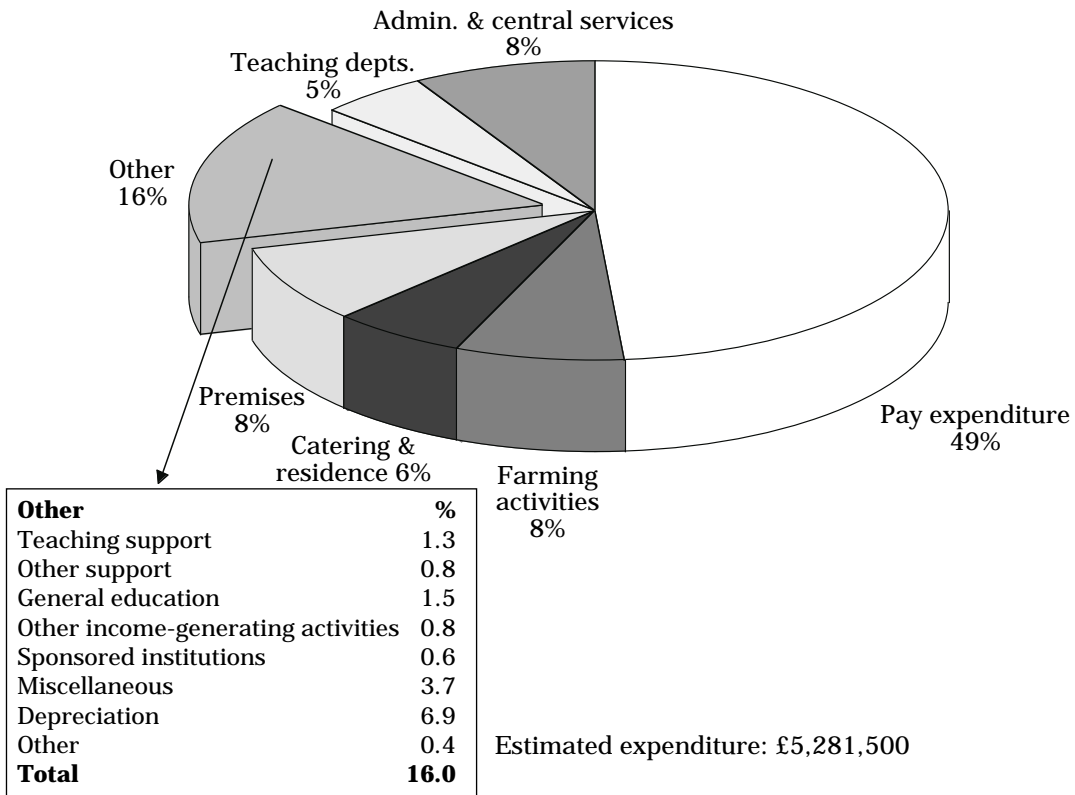


Figure 6

Newton Rigg College: estimated expenditure (16 months to July 1994)



Published by the
Further Education Funding Council
March 1994