

Newton Rigg College

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1997-98**

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL***

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

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

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Contents

Paragraph

Summary

Context

The college and its mission	1
The inspection	6

Curriculum areas

Agriculture	8
Animal care and equine studies	14
Environment and game management	20
Engineering	26

Cross-college provision

Support for students	32
General resources	40
Quality assurance	45
Governance	53
Management	61
Conclusions	69

College statistics

Grade Descriptors

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

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

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

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

Retention and Pass Rates

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

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

Summary

Newton Rigg College

North West Region

Inspected May 1998

Newton Rigg College is the major provider of further education land-based courses for Cumbria. The bulk of the provision is in the FEFC's agriculture programme area. Since incorporation the college has extensively developed its curriculum and there are now courses in all 10 of the FEFC's programme areas. Four curriculum areas were inspected, together with aspects of cross-college provision. The college has been slow to move to self-assessment. The judgements in the self-assessment report were not derived from a thorough and comprehensive process. Insufficient attention was given to students' achievements. The college carried out lesson observations as part of self-assessment but did not use these to inform its judgements in all curriculum areas. Strengths and weaknesses are clearly identified but the evidence to support judgements is often inadequate. Before the inspection, the college carried out a review of the weaknesses in its self-assessment report and found evidence of progress in many areas. Inspectors were broadly in agreement with the findings of the report.

The standard of teaching is generally good and the vocational relevance of much of the learning is a feature of the college's work. Most students' achievements are good. There are wide variations between courses in the number of

students who complete their programmes of study but the overall retention rate has shown a marked improvement. There is effective learning support for full-time students and many of those identified as needing help use the well-equipped learning centre. Many of the specialist and general resources are of a high standard. The college makes good use of the attractive and well-maintained site to earn income and this has been used effectively to fund improvements. There are good arrangements for staff development and these link closely with strategic planning. Governance is good. There is a clear management structure and good financial management and control. The college should address: the lack of attention to individual needs in some lessons; the poor quality of some tutorials; the size of the library; weaknesses in arrangements for quality assurance; the analysis and reporting of students' achievements; monitoring of operating plans; and the ineffective implementation and monitoring of some aspects of cross-college provision.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Agriculture	2	Support for students	2
Animal care and equine studies	2	General resources	1
Environment and game management	2	Quality assurance	3
Engineering	2	Governance	2
		Management	2

The College and its Mission

1 Newton Rigg College was established in 1896 to serve the needs of the farming community in Cumbria. It is situated in a rural setting approximately two miles from Penrith. The college estate includes two farms: a lowland farm of 225 hectares at Newton Rigg and a hill farm 13 miles away at Mungrisdale which has 170 hectares and extensive grazing rights. These are managed to demonstrate good practice and provide opportunities for teaching and learning. The Newton Rigg campus has residential facilities for 300 students. Many part-time courses are block-release courses and students use the college's residential facilities to avoid travelling. The college operates four out-centres for basic courses in agriculture and horticulture.

2 Cumbria is a rural county with the population concentrated in a few urban centres in the north and west. In the rest of the county poor transport and long travelling distances are barriers to participation in education. The majority of businesses are small and a relatively high proportion of them, almost three times the national average, are involved in agriculture. The college is in the Eden district, where the population density is about a third of the average level for the county and where nearly a half of businesses are agricultural. Unemployment is low, at just over 2 per cent.

3 The college traditionally provided courses in agriculture, forestry, and related industries. Since incorporation, however, the range of provision has increased to meet the needs of the local community. There are now courses in equine studies, animal care, environment and game management, engineering, business studies, health and social care and creative studies, and provision extends from foundation to graduate level. These changes have led to an increase in the number of full-time students, from 160 at incorporation to 780 in the current year. Of the full-time students, 282 are studying

in higher education. The college is an associate college of the University of Central Lancashire at Preston and, in 1996, the college board took the decision to seek a merger between the college and the university. The Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) has recommended this proposal to the secretary of state. Subject to the secretary of state's decision, it is expected that the two institutions will merge in August 1998.

4 The academic work of the college is organised within four schools: agriculture and engineering; forestry and woodland management; environmental management; business, horticulture and extended education. The senior management team comprises the acting principal, deputy principal, director of planning and quality assurance, personnel manager and the four heads of schools. The college attracts full-time students on a regional and national basis. About 40 per cent of them are from outside Cumbria. In 1997-98, the college had 4,373 enrolments. In May 1998, the college employed 123 full-time and 72 part-time staff.

5 The mission statement of the college commits it to 'strive for excellence in the provision of high-quality education and training on a sound economic basis, with the main sphere of operation being the rural economy and the land-based industries'. Among the key corporate objectives are: providing opportunities for student progression; achieving excellence in teaching and learning; maintaining partnerships; and establishing and maintaining the college as the county centre for rural affairs. The college is committed to partnership with local and regional agencies in order to promote lifelong learning and economic development.

Context

The Inspection

6 The college was inspected in May 1998. The inspection team had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and information held by other divisions of the FEFC. The college submitted data on students' achievements for 1995 to 1997 which inspectors checked against primary sources such as class registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies. The college was notified, about two months before the inspection, of the sample of its provision which was to be assessed. The inspection was carried out by nine inspectors working for 33 days and an auditor working for four days. Inspectors observed 42 classes and examined samples of students' work. They also studied documents that the college had provided to support its self-assessment report. Meetings were held with governors, managers, college staff and students, and a training and enterprise council (TEC) representative.

7 Of the lessons inspected, 69 per cent were good or outstanding and 2 per cent less than satisfactory. These figures are better than the average figures for colleges in the sector inspected during 1996-97, according to *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1996-97: Chief inspector's annual report*. The average level of attendance in the lessons inspected was 82 per cent which is higher than the 77 per cent average for the sector recorded in the same report. Agriculture classes had

almost full attendance; the lowest attendance rate (75 per cent) was for environment and game management classes. The following table summarises the grades given to the lessons inspected.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
NVQ	0	4	0	0	0	4
Other vocational*	5	20	12	1	0	38
Total	5	24	12	1	0	42

*includes courses at advanced, intermediate and foundation levels

Curriculum Areas

Agriculture

Grade 2

8 Ten lessons were inspected on courses ranging from foundation to advanced level. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report and some of the weaknesses. They identified some weaknesses overlooked by the college and found that some of the strengths were overstated. Many of the weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report had been resolved by the time of the inspection.

Key strengths

- good teaching
- the strong vocational relevance of the learning by students
- students achieving additional qualifications
- good-quality resources, well used to support teaching and learning
- high attendance and retention rates on most courses

Weaknesses

- teachers paying insufficient attention to some students
- poor pass rates on national certificate and national diploma courses

9 The college provides a good range of further education courses in agriculture. There are opportunities for progression to higher education programmes. First diploma courses have been adapted to meet the needs of students with learning difficulties. Most curriculum content is relevant and appropriate to students' needs. Schemes of work and many lesson plans are insufficiently detailed. There are well-managed periods of work experience and well-structured visits to local enterprises.

10 Students experience a broad range of teaching methods and methods of working, and these are well matched to course objectives and the needs of the vocational area. There is frequent and effective reference to practical and commercial applications. Lessons are well structured and the work appropriately paced. Practical teaching is of a high standard, developing the students' understanding and competence. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that attention to the application of health and safety legislation is a high priority, especially in practical lessons. Most introductions to lessons are good. At the start of a few lessons teachers did not check students' understanding or did not explain to students how the work was intended to relate to other elements of the curriculum. A feature of many weaker lessons is that students are inattentive or fail to concentrate on the tasks they are given. In some lessons topics involving mathematical calculation are not effectively handled and students fail to understand the principles. Discussions are often poorly handled; in some cases, a significant number of the students contribute nothing to the discussion.

11 A wide range of assessments is used, well matched to the objectives of the courses. Assessment schedules are prepared for the whole year. Assignments provide good opportunities for students to gain and apply knowledge. Assessment criteria are clear and include key skills. Assignment work is thoroughly researched and well presented, but there is variation in the extent to which students are able to draw meaningful conclusions and apply knowledge. Work is marked and verified accurately. However, teachers sometimes miss opportunities to help students improve their work by providing them with detailed written feedback. Some tutors do not keep full records of tutorial discussions. Generally recording of progress is not sufficiently detailed.

Curriculum Areas

12 Course review is not rigorous enough. There are no targets for pass and retention rates at course level and little evaluation of performance against targets. These weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment report. A high proportion of students complete their studies. The pass rates for national certificate and national diploma courses have been poor over the last two years, though many students complete assessments successfully after the end of their course. Many students achieve additional vocational qualifications which are directly relevant to employment. Attendance is high and there is a good rate of progression to other further education courses, to higher education courses or to employment.

13 Inspectors confirmed the college's claim that staff have good links with industry and are well informed about developments. Teachers use their knowledge of industry effectively in showing students how theory is applied. Wide use is made of the well-managed farms for a variety of students' work. The two farms demonstrate good business and operational standards. They include productive dairy and sheep enterprises. Students undertake many of the planning and practical operations on both farms. There is an extensive range of machinery and well-equipped estate workshops. The college library is well stocked with agricultural books and periodicals.

Examples of students' achievements in agriculture, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Two-year full time	Retention (%)	94	86	97
	Pass rate (%)	87	92	69
One-year full time	Retention (%)	88	89	100
	Pass rate (%)	86	63	41
One/two-year part time	Retention (%)	98	100	87
	Pass rate (%)	81	80	89

Source: college data

Curriculum Areas

Animal Care and Equine Studies

Grade 2

14 Thirteen lessons on full-time intermediate and advanced courses were inspected. Inspectors identified a number of strengths and weaknesses the college had overlooked, particularly the high quality of students' assignments and the lack of practical skill development in some aspects of equine studies.

Key strengths

- the high standard of teaching, including clear links between theory and practice
- the high standard of students' assignment work
- effectively planned and managed assessment
- high retention on one-year courses
- strong links with industry

Weaknesses

- failure to develop some practical skills
- insufficient attention to the needs of all students
- low achievement on one-year courses in 1996-97

15 Animal care and equine studies courses have developed over the last four years. There is a reasonable range of full-time courses to meet the needs of school-leavers and mature students. There are clear routes for progression from intermediate to advanced level, although there is no provision for students who wish to progress to veterinary nursing. Part-time course provision is not fully developed. The low numbers on national diploma courses limits the range of options available to students. Inspection confirmed the college's judgement that there are good links with local industry.

An industrial advisory committee has helped to ensure that the curriculum is relevant. There are good opportunities for students to broaden their experience of industry. There is a planned programme of external speakers and visits to local businesses. Students go on study tours as a part of their programme. Animal care courses include an element of work experience which is used effectively to support the curriculum. It is well managed and valued by students. Opportunities for students to achieve relevant additional vocational awards are missed.

16 The management and organisation of the curriculum is generally sound. Students undertake a broad range of assessments. Assessments are evenly spread and closely related to the needs of the students. Assignments briefs are clear and key skills are recorded carefully. There are sound procedures for setting and marking assignments and there is a thorough internal verification system. Most marked assignments provide constructive feedback for students but there are delays in returning work. Teachers are highly responsive to requests for help and guidance. They provide considerable informal support. The quality of tutorial records is weak on some courses.

17 In most lessons students are effectively introduced to new subject areas. Activities are suitably varied and succeed in keeping students interested. Students are aware of the aims of the session. They are able to set the work in the context of what has gone before and to link theory and practice. In the weaker classes, activities were less varied and teachers failed to ensure that all students understood the work they were doing. Many handouts are well presented and informative but they do not require that students take notes or record information.

18 The self-assessment report did not identify the weaknesses in the development of some practical skills: not all students on equine courses reach an appropriate level of practical competence in riding; yard duties for equine

Curriculum Areas

studies students are insufficiently challenging; and the development of kennel and cattery skills for animal care students is inadequate. There are some good practical facilities, however, and the equine yard and animal care unit are well managed. Some specialist facilities need upgrading, the animal care facilities for housing dogs and cats do not meet industry standards and the storage of hay and straw in the stables does not demonstrate good practice. There are missed opportunities to record stable yard and animal care unit information for use by teachers and students in teaching and assignment work. Inspectors agreed with the college that there is a shortage of texts and other learning resources.

19 Students' assignment work is generally of a high standard, clearly presented and thorough in content. The work also shows that students have acquired well-developed information technology (IT) skills. There is a high retention rate on one-year courses. The low achievement on these courses in 1996-97 was not analysed in the self-assessment report.

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

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
One-year full time	Retention (%)	96	86	93
	Pass rate (%)	93	94	68
Two-year full time	Retention (%)	*	*	80
	Pass rate (%)	*	*	85

Source: college data

*course not running

Curriculum Areas

Environment and Game Management

Grade 2

20 Inspectors observed 10 lessons on full-time intermediate and advanced courses. They concluded that some strengths and weaknesses were not included in the self-assessment report and that insufficient attention was given to students' achievements.

Key strengths

- high vocational relevance
- some good teaching
- high pass and retention rates on some courses
- the wide range of specialist resources

Weaknesses

- inadequate lesson planning
- poor note-taking by some students
- low attendance for some courses

21 The college offers a range of courses which allow for specialist choice and progression from intermediate to advanced level. There are low numbers on some courses. Students have good opportunities to gain additional qualifications which are directly relevant to employment; for example, chainsaw operation. Students are involved in a wide range of additional activities, including work experience, visits and the use of outside speakers, which broaden their understanding of the industry. Work experience is well managed and integrated with other aspects of the course.

22 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that there are good links with industry and voluntary organisations and that these are well used in teaching and learning, and to provide practical facilities and work placements. Local employers are represented

on an advisory committee and the college has taken their advice in making the curriculum more relevant. To make it easier for participants to attend, training in the safe use of chemicals in industry is offered at centres away from the college. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that there are good specialist facilities for practical and assignment work. There is ready access to a wide range of different habitats on and off the college estate, including a 1,600 acre commercial forest and other conservation and environmental project areas.

23 Students are involved in an appropriate range of learning activities and their understanding is developed by frequent reference to vocational applications. In many lessons, they draw on their own experiences and teachers make use of their contributions to develop the topic. Students help each other, share tasks with enthusiasm and work well together in groups. Teachers use their good understanding of industry to provide well-chosen examples of industrial practices during discussions with students. In some lessons, it is not apparent how the work relates to other aspects of the curriculum. Lesson plans do not clearly define outcomes and objectives are often not shared with the students. The quality of students' notes varies substantially and teachers often fail to check them. Many question and answer sessions are poorly managed.

24 Students undertake a broad range of assessments. Particularly effective use is made of assignments. Students develop their understanding by working on realistic problems, and assignment briefs provide clear instructions on what is expected of them. Assignment work is well presented. The college recognises that delay in returning assessed work is a problem on some courses.

25 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that there have been some high levels of achievement. Retention rates on most courses are good and consistently high pass

Curriculum Areas

rates have been achieved on some first diploma courses. There are low pass rates on some diploma courses, a matter not identified in the self-assessment report, though many students successfully completed their assessments after the course had ended. There is inadequate analysis of students' achievements, as a means of improving provision. Overall attendance rates on some courses are low.

Examples of students' achievements in environment and game management, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Two-year full-time national diploma	Retention (%)	100	82	88
	Pass rate (%)	62	68	75
One-year full-time first diploma	Retention (%)	81	50	83
	Pass rate (%)	85	89	73

Source: college data

Curriculum Areas

Engineering

Grade 2

26 Inspectors observed nine lessons on full-time courses. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths in the self-assessment report and some of the weaknesses. By the time of the inspection, action had been taken to remedy a number of the weaknesses identified in the report.

Key strengths

- teaching which is well matched to students' needs
- high retention rates on most courses
- a good range of industrial contacts
- competent and knowledgeable students
- a wide range of agricultural and forestry equipment

Weaknesses

- low pass rates on some courses
- lack of equipment to support heavy vehicle courses

27 Courses meet local and, in some cases, national needs. Full-time and part-time further education courses are provided for craft and technician students in the areas of agricultural, heavy vehicle, and forestry engineering. Some courses, such as forestry engineering, recruit students from a wide geographical area. Health and safety courses are run for local industries. The engineering advisory committee has wide representation and meets regularly to advise on the curriculum. As part of their course, technician students undertake nine weeks' work experience. Most students undertake relevant work, but they are not always monitored closely in their placement.

28 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that technician students experience a good mix of practical and classroom-based

activities. Much of the training for craft students appropriately takes place in the workshops, but they are also required to produce written reports and to develop their numerical skills. Schemes of work are not fully developed; often they consist of no more than a list of topics. Course booklets provide basic details of courses, but could usefully be expanded to provide more information. The range of teaching techniques includes the use of presentation software to help deliver some complex subjects. On some occasions, however, students have to copy notes whilst the teacher is talking. Much of the practical work is realistic. For example, students are required to work on large agricultural machinery such as combine harvesters. Students help to service equipment from outside the college. They also rebuild agricultural machinery which is subsequently added to the college fleet.

29 Technician students undertake a wide range of assignments. There are assignments with a practical basis, such as reporting on the condition of agricultural equipment for a prospective purchaser, as well as assignments relating to mechanical science, electrical science and mathematical problems. Teachers mark assignments with care and provide helpful written advice. Over the last few years, students have organised a trip abroad to visit an agricultural college, manufacturers and dealers.

30 Inspectors confirmed the college's assessment that teachers have good links with the trade. The links enable them to organise student visits and to borrow modern equipment. A wide range of agricultural equipment is available. Forestry equipment is enhanced through off-site service work undertaken by students in nearby forests. Some modern diesel engines have been obtained for the heavy vehicle work but more equipment is needed in this area. A recently-refurbished electronic science laboratory has some good high technology equipment.

Curriculum Areas

31 Students are knowledgeable about the agricultural equipment they work on. They have a good grasp of engineering principles and the relevant terminology. They are generally competent in their use of tools and are also aware of health and safety issues. Over the last three years, retention rates on most courses have been above the average for engineering courses nationally. The one exception, in 1997, arose because a number of students switched from a technician course to a craft course. The self-assessment report understated the weak performance on some courses. Pass rates have been similar to, or below the national average for engineering courses. Some students, however, gained the award after completing their course; for example, national vocational qualification (NVQ) students achieve the craft qualification after subsequent employment in industry.

Examples of students' achievements in engineering, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Two-year full time	Retention (%)	100	93	53
	Pass rate (%)	64	57	50
Two-year part time	Retention (%)	94	100	93
	Pass rate (%)	75	25	93
One-year full time	Retention (%)	95	84	89
	Pass rate (%)	38	69	63

Source: college data

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 2

32 Since the last inspection, the college has made a number of improvements in its support for students. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report but found that some of the weaknesses had been understated.

Key strengths

- strong links with schools
- comprehensive counselling and welfare services
- comprehensive learning support for full-time students
- the wide range of additional activities available to students

Weaknesses

- poor support for some part-time students
- the quality of tutorial support

33 Prospective students are well informed about the college. Published information on courses is comprehensive and of a high standard. Over 8,500 school children visit the college each year. In 1996-97, for example, over 2,000 visitors attended a programme of 'taster' days and open days. College representatives attend an extensive range of careers events and trade shows. Prospective students can receive an advisory interview before applying for a specific course. Links with schools ensure that students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities enjoy a smooth transition from school to college. Students discuss their specific requirements with the learning support officer. Inspectors confirmed the findings of student surveys presented in the self-assessment report that there was a high level of satisfaction with entry procedures.

34 There is a well-planned induction period. It includes an introduction to student services and the tutorial system, and presentations by the fire service and the police. The self-assessment report recognises that information provided for part-time students and those who join courses late is not comprehensive enough. An information leaflet and support from trained academic counsellors are available to students who wish to use the college's accreditation of prior learning procedures, but demand for this service is limited.

35 All full-time students are assessed on entry for numeracy and literacy skills; some tutors also opt to use this assessment for their part-time students. A high proportion of students identified as needing help make use of learning support. In 1997-98, for example, 80 per cent of these students used the well-resourced learning support workshop. Not all part-time students are assessed on entry. The self-assessment report did not identify that very few part-time students assessed as requiring learning support make use of the support available. The learning support tutor produces an individual learning plan and reviews students' progress regularly. Not all course tutors make sufficient use of the information obtained from these reviews, however. Students express a high level of satisfaction with learning support. Learning support may include advice on study skills; for example, guidance on tackling assignments or writing curricula vitae. The college provides effective support for students with dyslexia, hearing and visual impairment, often through its contacts with external agencies. The college does not set attendance targets but information on attendance is provided annually to the strategic planning group.

36 Students speak positively about the accessibility of staff and their willingness to give them individual support, both personal and academic. All full-time students have tutorials and these are used to provide group activities

Cross-college Provision

and individual progress reviews. The self-assessment report understates the weaknesses in tutorial provision. Although a few tutorials work well, with tutors and students using individual action plans to record progress and set targets, for most students they are too infrequent and the recording of progress insufficiently detailed. There is no college-wide tutorial programme for students' social, cultural and personal development, although a few tutors have devised their own programme of activities. Few tutors issue reports to the parents of 16 to 19 year old students or offer opportunities for them to come to college to discuss an individual's progress. The college is considering how to improve its support for part-time students. Staff in student services work with the students' union to promote students' awareness of issues such as mental health and smoking.

37 The college has a service level agreement with Cumbria Careers. The careers service makes a formal presentation to each student group as part of their tutorial programme. Some students receive further careers guidance as part of their course. Specialist workshops run by a careers officer on a 'drop-in' basis throughout the year include advice on writing curricula vitae and interview techniques. Sessions at which individuals are offered guidance on how to conduct themselves at interview are increasingly used by students; in 1996-97, 120 students took part. Employment opportunities are regularly displayed. The college does not centrally monitor students' applications to higher education.

38 Counselling and welfare services are comprehensive. Four qualified counsellors are supported by the college chaplain and the college nurse. Although there are no childcare facilities on site, links with local providers assist students in finding places for their children.

39 The college enhances funds provided by the FEFC to support students experiencing financial hardship. It also awards overseas

travel scholarships. A large proportion of the students who apply for help receive it. Two full-time wardens provide additional support for residential students, liaising effectively with the students' union, its clubs and societies. Students can take part in a wide range of recreational and sporting activities held during the week and at weekends.

General Resources

Grade 1

40 Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths identified in the college's self-assessment report but concluded that one of the weaknesses, the size of the library, was understated.

Key strengths

- a well-maintained site in an attractive location
- successful use of facilities to generate additional non-FEFC income
- staff access to computers on the college network
- well-designed and refurbished reception and student social areas
- good access throughout much of the site for wheelchair users
- good IT facilities for students

Weaknesses

- the inadequate size of the library

41 The college makes good use of its location near the northern part of the Lake District to encourage outside organisations to use its facilities when they are not required by students. It has used the money raised to fund the attractive refurbishment of the site. The new reception area provides a welcoming entry to the main building. Conference facilities are good and accommodation is maintained to a

Cross-college Provision

high standard. The campus services unit is located in attractive accommodation; there is a suite of interview rooms to ensure privacy, an information desk and displays of helpful leaflets. The college has a good range of teaching accommodation. As the self-assessment report notes, careful timetabling ensures that rooms are well matched to the size of the teaching group. Room utilisation is closely monitored. Detailed computer-generated reports are provided for managers and these indicate a high level of utilisation of general teaching accommodation.

42 Since the last inspection the college has increased the amount of residential accommodation for students. One of the blocks has been adapted to cater for students with restricted mobility. The college has made imaginative use of some of the older farm buildings to improve social and recreational facilities for students. The college students' union and its administrative support are housed in a refurbished grain store and gin case. The area also provides a popular base for students' social and recreational activity. The redesigned refectory is comfortable and attractive. It provides for students, staff and college clients.

43 The college library is centrally located in an attractively refurbished suite of rooms. In addition to the main reading room, there is a periodicals room, a television and video playing room, and a silent study area. The library houses a good range of specialist reference materials and a developing range of non-book material such as video cassettes, slides and CD-ROMs. Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that in some subject areas such as animal care and equine studies there is a shortage of specialist books and CD-ROMs. Four computers offer students free access to the internet. The library is heavily used by students. It is open 12 hours each week day and on Saturday mornings. The professionally-qualified librarian maintains close links with subject areas and this helps to ensure that

library acquisitions are the most appropriate ones. A library working group of staff and students make suggestions for improvement. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the library is small for the number of students, but felt it was understated as a weakness. The college has plans to develop a new learning resource centre.

44 Students have good access to IT facilities. Most of the 73 computers available for students' use are located in a suite of five computer rooms, in an imaginatively refurbished block which formerly housed calf and sheep pens. The computers are networked to give students access to a standard package of software applications. One of the rooms is available as an open access facility for students, which allows them to book time on computers in advance. The use of this facility is carefully monitored and staff are available throughout the day to supervise and to provide support for students. Inspectors supported the college's view that staff make good use of the electronic mail facilities for internal communication. All full-time teaching staff have access to a networked computer in their offices although facilities for some part-time staff are more limited.

Quality Assurance

Grade 3

45 Although inspectors agreed with the strengths identified by the college in its self-assessment report and noted that clear improvements have been made since the last inspection, they concluded that the college had overlooked a number of significant weaknesses.

Key strengths

- significant improvements resulting from the implementation of quality assurance procedures

Cross-college Provision

- staff development arrangements which support strategic objectives
- a well-regarded appraisal system

Weaknesses

- the lack of rigour and coherence in quality assurance arrangements
- an insufficiently comprehensive and demanding self-assessment process
- aspects of the quality system at curriculum level which are undemanding

46 In their determination to avoid creating a bureaucratic paper-based system managers have yet to strike the right balance in the demands they make of the quality assurance system. Although it has a number of strong features, the developing system is not yet robust enough to provide the means of achieving the excellence for which the college is striving. At the time of the last inspection, the main focus of quality assurance was the course review. Although quality procedures now cover all sections of the college, the self-assessment report did not note that these are generally not well documented and that there is an over-reliance on informal contacts. Most staff understand their own role in quality assurance, but few grasp how it fits into whole-college procedures. The recently-established quality support group is developing good working practices. Instances of non-compliance are noted and action is taken where necessary.

47 The college recognises the uneven quality of programme area self-assessments. The culture of critical evaluation which the college is trying to promote is at an early stage of development at the programme level. The analysis of students' achievements is often superficial. There is no tradition of analysing students' achievements or of setting targets for retention and achievement. Some course managers still do not recognise the value of such practice. Senior management has only recently

adopted performance indicators for recruitment and students' achievements. There is improved practice in the collecting of students' views. A well-thought-out survey seeks students' opinions on enrolment and induction, and in January each year they are asked to reflect on their experience of their first study module. Staff are required to consider students' collected views at progress review meetings in the autumn and spring terms. They are generally responsive to the issues raised and quick to remedy causes of dissatisfaction. Since the last inspection, the proportion of higher grades for lessons observed has risen by almost 10 per cent.

48 The long-established advisory groups, which include representatives of industry, play a useful part in assuring the quality of courses. There are many examples of improvements to courses resulting from their recommendations. Staff are quick to act on issues raised by external verifiers. Effective internal verification has led to improvements, for example, in the setting and grading of assignments.

49 Quality assurance procedures for cross-college functions are not adequately covered in the self-assessment report. They are generally not strong enough to promote continuous improvement. Inadequate documentation has resulted in some weaknesses not being picked up in time for the appropriate action to be taken.

50 The college has been slow to move to a self-assessment process. The report prepared for inspectors in 1997 was the college's first. Staff were not required to specify standards and targets for cross-college aspects of work. As a result reports were bland; they lacked detailed analysis and were not always supported by evidence. There are good procedures for dealing with weaknesses identified through self-assessment. All the weaknesses identified have been addressed and, in many cases, remedied. There are clear arrangements to link self-assessment and strategic planning when a full cycle of self-assessment has been completed.

Cross-college Provision

51 There are effective arrangements for staff development and staff development is clearly linked to strategic planning. Staff appreciate the training that has been provided to help them deal with issues arising from the projected merger, in particular the induction to the university and the sessions on managing change and stress.

52 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that it has a clear appraisal policy which aims to enhance the quality of students' experience by maximising staff performance, potential and professional growth. It is appropriately focused on operational objectives and management issues. Appraisal is well regarded by staff, who see the process as supportive and efficient.

Governance

Grade 2

53 Inspectors confirmed most of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report. They concluded that one weakness was omitted and two strengths were overstated.

Key strengths

- board members' good understanding of the work of the college
- very good attendance at board meetings
- an effective committee structure to utilise the expertise of governors
- confidence and trust between governors and managers

Weaknesses

- the lack of formal training for governors
- failure to monitor progress against the college's strategic plan on a regular basis

54 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the

governance of the college is good. The board substantially conducts its business in accordance with the instrument and articles of government. It also substantially fulfils its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC.

55 Governors demonstrate a pride in the college and in its achievements. Most have been associated with the college for many years. The board of 20 has two vacancies which they have chosen not to fill, pending the proposed merger with the University of Central Lancashire. Board members have good local knowledge and experience of the industry sectors which the college serves. Only one new governor has joined the board in the last three years and the board recognises in its self-assessment that they might have benefited from a higher turnover of members to bring in new blood. The appointment of new governors to reflect specialist areas which the college has more recently developed has been postponed. Average attendance at board meetings has been high at around 90 per cent in the year to March 1998. Board members have received little formal training for their role, a weakness not identified in the self-assessment report.

56 The board has strongly supported the senior management in its efforts to develop and diversify the college's curriculum and to implement the programme of efficiency gains. They have placed a great deal of trust in senior managers whom the board has allowed to take the lead in planning the strategic development of the college. The board lacks a structured approach for monitoring progress against the strategic plan.

57 The clerking arrangements for the board are effective. Minutes and papers for the board are circulated in good time for meetings. They are placed in the college library and are available to the public on request. Inspectors agreed with the board's own assessment that the absence of executive summaries to reports is a weakness. The board has no standing orders

Cross-college Provision

to specify procedures for the operation of the board and its committees. There is an up-to-date register of interests for governors and senior staff with financial responsibility, and a code of conduct for governors. There is no policy on 'whistleblowing'.

58 The board undertook a self-assessment of its activities for the first time in 1997. A detailed analysis of its performance was prepared by the clerk and supplemented by responses to a questionnaire from board members. In view of the anticipated dissolution of the board, the board has not followed up the issues arising.

59 The board has five committees: audit, remuneration, finance and general purposes, property, estates and services, and personnel. The board has benefited from governors who, as members of these committees, have willingly put their experience and expertise at the disposal of the college. Committee members are well informed about the issues facing them and committee chairs take the lead in reporting concisely to the full board. The clerk to the corporation clerks all meetings of the corporation and its committees and also has the responsibility for the college's finance function. The clerk is supported by a minuting clerk and this helps to provide a proper separation of duties when financial business is considered. The personnel committee worked closely with managers in the development of the college's appraisal system and in the revision of its personnel procedures. Although the chair undertook an appraisal of the former principal, the full board has not agreed the criteria against which senior staff are to be appraised. Remuneration committee proceedings have not been reported to the corporation.

60 The board receives reports on the achievements of students at its autumn meeting. Results are presented in a format which allows board members to compare them with previous performance. The board regularly receives the minutes of the college academic board and

approved the first college self-assessment report in 1997. In the view of inspectors, it was too early for the college to claim as a strength in the self-assessment report that these arrangements constituted a structured assessment of the quality of college provision.

Management

Grade 2

61 The college self-assessment report assesses the effectiveness of management clearly and objectively. The inspection team agreed broadly with the college's judgements, although some additional strengths and weaknesses were identified.

Key strengths

- a clear and effective management structure
- productive links with external organisations
- the contribution of market research to strategic planning
- good use of management information
- internal communications
- good financial management and control

Weaknesses

- the failure to monitor some policies and procedures
- little use of targets and performance indicators for management purposes
- no systematic monitoring of school operational plans

62 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that the management is good and there is effective leadership. Staff generally understand the management structure and are clear about their responsibilities within it. The senior management team is responsible for the strategic management of the college. A smaller

Cross-college Provision

director, consisting of the acting principal, deputy principal and director of planning and quality assurance, meets weekly to discuss operational issues. Staff are well deployed. Budgets are held by the senior management team and are used to ensure that the curriculum is properly implemented. Communications within the college are good. Staff are kept well informed about college matters and national issues by regular staff meetings and briefings. A 'merger' newsletter updates staff regularly on progress and related issues.

63 The self-assessment report did not acknowledge the little use made of benchmarking to inform decision-making at cross-college, school and course level. Heads of school present data on students' achievements to the academic board but are not required to provide a commentary and accompanying action plan to address areas of weakness. Course teams are only set targets for enrolment.

64 The strategic plan reflects the college's mission and its educational character. Staff are committed to the values, aims and objectives of the institution. Inspectors agreed with the college that it adopts a consultative and comprehensive approach to strategic planning. A strategic planning group meets monthly to consider issues that may have an impact on the operating plan and strategic objectives. Performance indicators for each of the nine key objectives are not clearly identified. The operational plans of the four schools are not cross-referenced to the college's strategic objectives. Progress made in achieving targets is not systematically monitored. These weaknesses were not identified in the college's self-assessment report. Marketing is good. The college's marketing staff have a clear understanding of their role. Market research is extensive and thorough and informs the strategic planning process.

65 Inspectors agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report that the college has good links with a number of external

organisations. It has developed productive partnerships with local and regional businesses, the TEC, and Cumbria Careers Limited. The college has links with organisations in Europe, the United States of America and Canada to support students' learning and staff development.

66 Staff make good use of the management information system. It is able to provide timely internal management reports and the outputs are used well to analyse recruitment patterns and to monitor data on attendance, retention and withdrawals. Senior managers use the information to deploy resources efficiently. Staff have confidence in the accuracy of the management information.

67 The college has a comprehensive equal opportunities policy which has been updated to include a disability statement. There is evidence of activities which support equality of opportunity. All full-time staff have received training, but there are no references to the policy in the staff induction information pack. There are gaps in the monitoring of the policy. Heads of school are not required to produce an annual report on equal opportunities and no reports are received by the academic board or corporation board on its implementation. The governors do not receive an annual report on the implementation of the health and safety policy. There is no annual review by the academic board of student support and tutorial provision. These weaknesses were overlooked in the college self-assessment report.

68 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is good. The college has a finance department of an appropriate size and the accounting system is adequate for its needs. Management accounts are produced twice a month, although not always within the two weeks deadline. The college directorate considers the management accounts; their understanding of them could be improved by the addition of supporting commentary. Monthly

Cross-college Provision

budget reports are provided promptly to budget holders. Financial regulations and procedures are in place. The college's current financial forecast was prepared on a prudent basis, though the college still has sizeable reserves. The college's internal auditors have concluded that the college's internal controls are reliable.

Conclusions

69 The self-assessment report and subsequent review of weaknesses provided a valuable starting point for planning the inspection. The quality assurance arrangements do not effectively cover all aspects of the college's work and this was reflected in the report, which was the first the college had produced. The report is not comprehensive and, in some cases, the evidence does not fully support the judgements. In many cases, the inspectors found important weaknesses not identified in the report. For most of the curriculum areas the inspectors placed more emphasis on students' achievements than the college had done. Inspectors agreed with all but one of the curriculum area grades and two of the grades for cross-college provision.

70 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 (April 1998)

<i>Age</i>	<i>%</i>
Under 16	1
16-18 years	24
19-24 years	23
25+ years	45
Not known	7
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (April 1998)

<i>Level of study</i>	<i>%</i>
Foundation	16
Intermediate	49
Advanced	13
Higher education	9
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	13
Total	100

Source: college data

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

<i>Programme area</i>	<i>Full time</i>	<i>Part time</i>	<i>Total provision %</i>
Science	54	319	9
Agriculture	614	1,659	52
Construction	0	58	1
Engineering	36	508	12
Business	39	782	19
Hotel and catering	11	20	1
Health and community care	21	32	1
Art and design	0	103	2
Humanities	0	86	2
Basic education	5	26	1
Total	780	3,593	100

Source: college data

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (April 1998)

	<i>Perm- anent</i>	<i>Fixed term</i>	<i>Casual</i>	<i>Total</i>
Direct learning contact	52	1	0	53
Supporting direct learning contact	21	0	0	21
Other support	76	1	0	77
Total	149	2	0	151

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Income	£5,849,000	£5,822,000	£6,160,000
Average level of funding (ALF)			
Out-turn to 1995-96; funded 1996-97	£17.46	£19.58	£19.21*
Payroll as a proportion of income	46%	52%	47%
Achievement of funding target	119%	90%	104%
Diversity of income	52%	60%	54%
Operating surplus	£326,000	-£215,000	-£192,000

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

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

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

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

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

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

*not yet finalised

Performance data for students aged 16 to 18

Qualifications		1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Advanced vocational	Number in final year	97	30	126
	Percentage achieving qualification	91%	77%	94%
	Position in tables	top third	middle third	top 10%
Intermediate vocational	Number in final year	*	84	248
	Percentage achieving qualification	*	87%	90%
	Position in tables	*	top 10%	top 10%

Source: DfEE

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

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

*1994-95 intermediate vocational results not available

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