

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

Hartpury College

June 1997

**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 every four years. The inspectorate also assesses and reports nationally on the curriculum and gives advice to the FEFC's quality assessment committee.

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

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GRADE DESCRIPTORS

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

By June 1996, some 329 college inspections had been completed. The grade profiles for aspects of cross-college provision and programme areas for the 329 colleges are shown in the following table.

College grade profiles 1993-96

Activity	Inspection grades				
	1	2	3	4	5
Programme area	9%	59%	29%	3%	<1%
Cross-college provision	14%	50%	31%	5%	<1%
Overall	12%	54%	30%	4%	<1%

FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 34/97

HARTPURY COLLEGE
SOUTH WEST REGION

Inspected May 1996-March 1997

Summary

Hartpury College in Gloucestershire provides a wide range of courses which reflects the changing nature of land-based industries. There has been a rapid growth in student numbers in recent years. The college has supportive governors and close links with employers. A high proportion of students complete their courses and examination results are generally good. Recruitment and guidance procedures are effective. Residential students are well supported. The standard of teaching in practical classes is high. There is a rigorous appraisal scheme for teachers. Much of the accommodation is good. The college should: improve the quality of teaching in some theory classes; improve provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities; provide more support for students who have difficulties with literacy and numeracy; ensure greater consistency in the management of sections; address the inconsistencies in the quality of tutorial support for students; continue to develop its quality assurance procedures; increase the proportion of staff with teaching qualifications; ensure effective monitoring of equal opportunities policy and practice; increase the level of information technology facilities for students; and improve access to accommodation for people with restricted mobility.

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	2
Quality assurance	2
Resources: staffing	2
equipment/learning resources	2
accommodation	1

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Animal care	2	Outdoor recreation	
Equine studies	2	and leisure	1
Agriculture, horticulture and countryside management	3		

INTRODUCTION

1 Hartpury College was inspected between May 1996 and March 1997. A team of 11 inspectors spent 45 days in the college. Inspectors visited 77 classes, examined college documentation and students' work, and held discussions with governors, parents, staff and students. Inspectors attended governors' meetings and met representatives of local employers, the careers service, the local community, and Gloucestershire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC).

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 Hartpury College was established in 1947 to serve the education and training needs of local agricultural and horticultural industries in Gloucestershire. The main campus is on a 200 hectare estate, five miles north of Gloucester. There is a smaller base, 12 miles to the west, in a Victorian country house at Blaisdon, on the edge of the Royal Forest of Dean.

3 Thirty-four per cent of all full-time students come from Gloucestershire. Other students come from across the country and a few are from overseas. In November 1996 there were 1,718 enrolments of which 914 were full time. Four hundred of the full-time students are resident on the college's site at Hartpury. Two hundred and thirty-four full-time and 16 part-time students are on higher education courses. Student numbers by age, by level of study, and by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figures 1, 2, and 3.

4 The college directorate includes the principal, the deputy principal and the directors of resources, business and finance, and training and international enterprise, respectively. The director of training and international enterprise manages the Blaisdon site. There are five section heads who have either academic or cross-college responsibilities. Together with the directorate, the TEC unit manager, the learning resources centre manager and the financial accountant they form the senior management group. Teaching and technical support staff are assigned to a section and are managed by a section head. Administrative staff report to the director of business and finance or to the principal. Farm staff report to the farm manager. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4.

5 The college works with schools across Gloucestershire. Staff attend careers conventions and give talks about careers in land-based industries. Students from two local secondary schools visit the college to gain practical experience and to cover some aspects of the national curriculum related to agriculture and horticulture. Students from three local special schools visit the college for half a day each week to study rural topics and work on the estate. The college is an associate college of Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education and it has recently agreed to become an associate faculty of the University of the West of England. The nearest

further education sector colleges are Royal Forest of Dean College (22 miles to the west), Gloucestershire College of Arts and Technology (with sites at Gloucester and Cheltenham, 4 miles to the south and 10 miles to the west respectively), and Stroud College of Further Education (15 miles to the south). The Royal Agricultural College at Cirencester is 24 miles to the south west.

6 The college is committed by its mission statement 'to make available relevant, high-quality education and training for the land-based industries of Gloucestershire and beyond; to increase participation in education and training; to ensure accessibility of all college services; and to ensure the economic viability of the college and its programmes'.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

7 The college has met its central strategic aim which is to increase its numbers of full-time students. In the last five years, the number of full-time students has grown from 78 to 914. The range of courses offered has been diversified in response to changes in the industries served by the college. Courses are offered in agriculture, horticulture, equine studies, animal care, outdoor recreation and leisure and countryside studies. There is a small full-time rural foundation course for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. A few students take general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) courses in biology, environmental science, mathematics and English, usually combining these subjects with study for British Horse Society qualifications.

8 In agriculture, horticulture, equine studies and countryside studies there are good opportunities for students to progress from first diploma to the higher national diploma. In animal care, there are first diploma and national diploma programmes, and courses leading to qualifications awarded by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons for veterinary nurses. There is a particularly good range of courses in equine studies. The college is one of the few colleges in the United Kingdom, approved by the British Horse Society to run courses leading to British Horse Society qualifications at instructor level. The equine studies section also offers a degree course in equine science.

9 Increasingly, the college is generating income from sources other than the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). A programme of conferences and short full-cost courses is offered at Blaisdon Hall. The college also runs day-release and block-release courses leading to national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at levels 1 to 3. There is a range of vocational full-time courses which also lead to NVQs. Over 60 short courses take place each term. They cover an extensive range of topics including dog grooming and dry stone walling. The college plans to extend its substantial provision for part-time students at the Hartpury campus.

10 The college plays an active role in the local community. Students have maintained and improved local footpaths. A variety of local groups,

such as conservation groups and gardening and produce societies, use the college facilities. In co-operation with local schools, the college runs a play scheme for local school children which gives them access to the college's facilities during the summer.

11 College marketing is clearly focused and effective. A tracking system identifies which marketing activities have proved to be good value for money. Prospectuses and other marketing materials are attractive and informative. The college has marketed itself well to school-leavers. Up to five three-day residential 'taster' courses, covering eight vocational disciplines, are organised each year. They attract year 11 school pupils from a wide geographical area, and 60 per cent of those who attend them subsequently enrol on college courses. Between 40 and 50 families attend careers events each month on Saturday mornings. College staff attend over 30 careers conventions in schools each year. The college has made sustained efforts to extend its curriculum links with schools. It works with two schools on a regular basis, but has only limited access to other secondary schools.

12 Links with employers are particularly strong. In equine studies, there are regular visits from specialists who demonstrate specific skills to the students. The outdoor recreation and leisure section has a successful relationship with a large outdoor activities company and this brings various benefits to students, including work experience in France for those on the national diploma course. There are seven vocational panels, each comprising industrial representatives who have particular vocational specialisms. Panel members have been involved in discussing course content, work experience and new course developments. The college's effective liaison with industrialists has been a key factor in its successful expansion of provision.

13 There is a wide range of higher education provision. In addition to its degree course in equine studies, the college plans to offer two other additional honours degree courses with the University of the West of England in 1997-98, and a master of science course in equine science in 1998-99.

14 The college has productive working links with the TEC and is involved in a range of initiatives. There are 36 trainees on modern apprenticeships in agriculture and horticulture and there are plans to offer modern apprenticeships in work involving horses and animal care. Working with two other agricultural colleges, the college has successfully bid for £80,000 from the government's competitiveness fund to launch an initiative for improving the development of rural information networks.

15 The college has a policy on equal opportunities and staff are aware of its importance. There is, however, no clear procedure for its implementation, review and evaluation. The college has recognised that there are imbalances between the male and female students on some of its courses and it is reviewing its publicity material in an attempt to change this.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

16 The board of governors has played an important role in supporting the college through a difficult period in its development. There are 10 members, including the principal. Eight are independent members and one is nominated by the TEC. At the time of the inspection there was one vacancy. There are no women members. The majority of board members have direct experience of land-based industries and associated businesses. Members work well together. The corporation supports the principal and senior staff but also offers them constructive criticism, when necessary. The principal is appraised by the chairman of the corporation against agreed objectives. There is a register of members' interests. Attendance at corporation meetings averages 80 per cent. The board began a review of its working methods and practices in February 1996, but there has been limited progress on this. There is an appropriate range of subcommittees. Special committees have been established to obtain the views of staff and students. The college has a comprehensive health and safety policy which is monitored effectively. Governors are not directly involved in the monitoring.

17 Staff understand the management structure, express commitment to the college's mission and show support for senior management. The directorate meets weekly. Papers are clearly presented and minutes are carefully recorded. The senior management group meets fortnightly. Section heads who have academic responsibilities meet regularly with members of the directorate with whom they form the academic studies group. This ensures that there is effective communication between managers.

18 Individual courses, in particular outdoor recreation and leisure, and equine courses, are generally well managed. However, there is significant variation in the way sections are managed. Some section heads hold regular meetings with their staff; others brief staff informally or hold meetings when they consider they are required. Staff who teach on the rural foundation course are not included in the main management structure and they feel that communication with them is sometimes poor. Generally, there is scope for the college to ensure greater consistency in the information available to staff, by establishing more formal systems of internal communication.

19 The directorate and the chairman of the corporation initiate the college's strategic planning process. The senior management group then considers the plan and the corporation discusses and approves it. The current strategic plan identifies key aspects of the college's future development and sets appropriate targets. Staff understand the main aims of the strategic plan. The college has extended the planning process this year in order that more staff may be involved in it. All staff are encouraged to contribute to the plan through their section meetings. Section plans are not produced in a consistent format. The quality of the operational statements produced by sections to support the plan varies in quality.

20 The college has substantially exceeded its funding unit targets for the last two years and expects to exceed them in 1996-97. The college's average level of funding for 1996-97 is £17.33 per unit. The median for agricultural and horticultural colleges is £22.86 per unit and for all general further education and tertiary colleges it is £17.97 per unit. The college's income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1996 are shown in figures 5 and 6.

21 The college has a good understanding of the costs involved in its various activities. Established procedures enable senior managers to monitor the costs of individual students on each course. Monthly reports on the college's financial position are sent to all corporation members and the directorate. Funds for consumable items and some capital items are devolved through a bidding process to section heads. Budget holders keep their own records, which are monitored by the finance team.

22 The college maintains thorough records on its students, using the management information system. These include information on students' achievements, retention rates and destinations. Staff have increasing confidence in the accuracy of data from the information system, and there is a growing use of it for various purposes, such as the monitoring of retention rates.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

23 Recruitment is managed efficiently by a central college office. Prospective students, often accompanied by their parents, visit the college for half a day to see the facilities and to be interviewed. Students generally receive sound initial guidance from staff. Staff know the courses well and have a good understanding of the demands of employers. The college has set targets for the time it takes to respond to applications from prospective students and it is generally meeting these targets. Implementation of procedures for the accreditation of students' prior learning means that some students are exempted from parts of their course.

24 Enrolment is handled smoothly and efficiently. Any delays are minor. The induction of new students is well planned. Students generally feel clear about the arrangements for their course and they are made familiar with the college and its facilities. They receive a course handbook which gives them more detail of how their course is organised, including details of how they will be assessed. Some induction sessions, in which teachers attempted to present too much information, were dull and failed to engage students' interest.

25 Most students receive effective tutorial support. All full-time students are assigned a programme tutor, with whom they have regular meetings, either individually or in groups. Brief records of these meetings are agreed with the students and retained on file. There is a daily tutorial hour, from 09.00 to 10.00 hours. However, some students who use college transport do not arrive until 09.30 hours. Consequently they miss part of their sessions. There is some inconsistency in the quality of tutorial support

which full-time students receive. Part-time students do not receive the same level of tutorial support as full-time students. There is scope for the college to provide further guidance for tutors and to allow more opportunities for them to share good tutorial practice.

26 Written reports on students' progress are provided three times each year to all full-time students and to the parents of students under 18. Students over 18 receive reports on their progress and, with the students' permission, parents can receive a copy of the report. Tutors contact parents to discuss any problems experienced by younger students and a record is kept of any action agreed. The comments on a few reports are too generalised to give parents a full picture of students' progress.

27 Students receive comprehensive information and advice about careers from their tutors. Tutors are well informed about their own industry and many have extensive contacts within it. A careers officer is available in the resources centre for a day and a half each week. Students who had received guidance interviews said that they had found them useful, but many students were not sufficiently aware of the careers advice available to them. An adult guidance worker was appointed in December 1996.

28 Some students do not receive enough help in improving their literacy and numeracy or in learning to study effectively. All full-time and many part-time students take a literacy and numeracy test at the start of their course to determine whether they need any additional support for their learning. The current test has been designed within the college and is administered and marked by tutors. It is limited in scope and is to be replaced by a standardised test in September 1997. A further diagnostic assessment is arranged for students who are considered to have particular difficulties. Most of the additional help that students need is supplied by their tutors but the quality of this varies widely.

29 Staff make considerable efforts to ensure that the small number of students with disabilities succeed on their courses. Students who are thought to be dyslexic can be assessed by an educational psychologist who makes recommendations on ways in which they might be helped. Students with hearing impairments, physical difficulties or learning difficulties who are in residential accommodation, are placed in rooms near to those of the wardens. The college hosted the world championships for disabled riders and made suitable arrangements for competitors and their supporters. There is a college disability statement in draft form. However, it does not specify the facilities which the college has for students with disabilities, identify those areas of the college which it would be difficult for these students to use, or name staff whom students should contact if they need help.

30 The 400 resident students are well supported by the warden service. The senior warden is assisted by six assistant staff wardens and seven student wardens. Student wardens are mature students; they provide valuable support, particularly for younger students who are away from

home for the first time. Residential students can choose different types of accommodation, including single and shared rooms, self-catering or full board. A student services section, managed by the senior warden, provides a friendly and efficient service dealing with matters relating to accommodation, mail and bookings for sports equipment. A counselling service was set up in November 1996 and this is subject to carefully-designed procedures. All resident students are registered with a local medical practice. A nurse is on the college site for about two hours a day during term time and there are regular clinics and health advice sessions.

31 Attendance and punctuality are carefully monitored and prompt action is taken to address absences. If a student's attendance falls below 95 per cent, disciplinary procedures are instigated. Residential students who do not attend a class are visited by staff from the student services section; day students are telephoned by their tutor.

32 A sense of community exists within the college, particularly as a result of the work of the wardens. An annual programme of major events such as balls, dinners, equestrian events and sporting activities is supplemented by a weekly programme of entertainment. Considerable efforts are made to ensure that non-resident students can take part in social events. The students' union helps to organise social activities. A young farmers' club has been established. A small Christian union meets regularly, with support from a local minister. There is a college enrichment programme which consists mainly of sporting activities on Wednesday afternoons. Some students from the rural foundation course and from outdoor recreation and leisure courses have timetables which restrict their participation in the Wednesday afternoon sports programme.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

33 In 52 per cent of the sessions inspected, strengths clearly outweighed weaknesses. This compares with an average of 63 per cent for all colleges inspected during 1995-96, according to the *Chief Inspector's Annual Report 1995-96*. Weaknesses outweighed strengths in 19 per cent of sessions. The overall profile of observation grades was adversely affected by weak teaching on the rural foundation course and on some advanced programmes. The overall average attendance rate of students in the lessons observed was 82 per cent. The following table summarises the inspection grades awarded for the lessons inspected.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade 1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GNVQ	2	2	0	0	0	4
NVQ	1	1	3	0	0	5
Other vocational	13	20	13	8	1	55
Other	0	1	6	5	1	13
Total	16	24	22	13	2	77

34 Students are provided with detailed course handbooks which include the objectives of their course and the assessment methods to be used. Schemes of work vary from useful and detailed specifications of teaching methods, resources and assessment procedures to lists of topics which are of little value. Most session plans give details of the learning activities to be carried out. A minority of plans, however, are superficial and contain insufficient information about how the session will be managed. In some sessions, teachers made little use of suitable handouts and worksheets when these would have been appropriate. Occasionally charts displayed to the class were hard to read. Opportunities were missed for students to have the experience of working together in small groups. Written briefs for assignments were generally clear. In the best examples, there was a clear explanation of the criteria against which students' assignments were to be judged. A few poorer assignment briefs were too theoretical and the work set too remote from practical applications. Teachers' comments on written work are generally detailed and help students to improve their work. Some students receive insufficient written feedback on their progress in the early weeks of their course.

35 It is college policy that the key skills of communication, problem solving and information technology should be covered on all courses. Teachers monitor and assess the development of key skills regularly during tutorial periods. Students are strongly encouraged to use information technology skills in their assignment work and they are given good opportunities to improve their proficiency in these skills. On some courses, however, numerical skills are not well integrated with assignment work.

36 Teaching on animal care courses is generally effective. Almost 70 per cent of the lessons observed had strengths which clearly outweighed weaknesses. Schemes of work are appropriate and comprehensive. Students have a clear understanding of what is expected of them and of how they will be assessed. Most sessions are well planned and managed and relate closely to practical aspects of animal care. Teachers check students' understanding through careful questioning. In a few instances, however, practical demonstrations failed to hold the students' attention. All students undertake work experience regularly. Veterinary nursing students have long-term work experience placements with veterinary practices. Staff in the animal care section have good relationships with the industry which enable them to secure suitable work placements for students. Reports on students' performance during work experience are completed by the work experience provider. Students write evaluative reports on what they have learnt during their work experience. Students gain useful practical experience in the wildlife rehabilitation centre but do not carry out enough practical work in college.

37 Practical aspects of equine studies are generally well taught. Students receive clear instruction in riding and in stable management. Teachers set students demanding work and challenge them to show improvement in their performance. Theoretical aspects of the courses are taught less

effectively. Teachers often lecture to the class for a whole session. In some instances, the lecturing is effective but, in other instances, it fails to keep students' attention. Written briefs for assignments clearly explain what is expected of students. Few assignments, however, required the students to make use of the high-quality equine facilities to carry out investigative work.

38 The quality of teaching on agriculture, countryside and horticulture courses varies considerably. Strengths outweighed weaknesses in 53 per cent of the sessions observed. In the best sessions, the work included exercises undertaken by students as individuals, in groups, or by the class as a whole, during which the teacher provided effective support and guidance, especially for the weaker students. In one first diploma lesson, the teacher followed up a visit to the college's fishing lake with a stimulating classroom session in which students were carefully questioned about what they had learned. However, in many lessons teachers took insufficient account of the varying needs of individual students. Less attentive students were not sufficiently involved in the learning activities and the more able students were insufficiently challenged by them. In one session, the teacher failed to take account of the wide range of experience which students brought to the session. As a result, some students lost interest while others did not understand the topic.

39 Courses in outdoor recreation and leisure are well prepared and taught. Seventy-nine per cent of classes had strengths which outweighed weaknesses. Clear aims and objectives are made explicit in well-presented documentation. Students respond well to the high expectations which staff have for their behaviour and performance. Students' progress is monitored regularly during individual and group tutorial sessions. Targets for each student are agreed and recorded in tutorial records. Teachers set a wide range of assignments which help to develop students' descriptive, investigative, analytical and practical skills. Marking is generally thorough and written feedback is supplemented by one-to-one discussion in tutorials. In lessons, teachers provide work at an appropriate level and use handouts and visual aids effectively. Some national diploma classes have over 50 students in them but, generally, they are still taught effectively. Teachers make good use of a variety of methods, including lectures, group work, video presentations with planned follow-up activities and presentations by students. Work experience is a major element of the courses and involves the college in a partnership with a leisure company. Some work experience takes place in France and, in preparation for this, students receive lessons in French, carry out some training with the employer for whom they will be working, work towards NVQs in water sports, and undergo an induction programme run by their employer. This preparation for their work experience is a key feature of each student's course.

40 There is some weak teaching on the two-year rural foundation course for students with moderate learning difficulties. Only 8 per cent of sessions

observed had strengths which outweighed weaknesses. Some learning was effective. For example, in one session two students worked well together erecting Yorkshire boarding; their work was neat and thorough and they were carrying out their task competently. In general, however, learning activities are too diverse to form coherent learning programmes. Sessions are not linked to previous learning and they do not have overall goals. Sometimes, the purpose of lessons is not clear. For example, in one lesson, students spent the whole time copying the names of breeds of animals from the board. Students' records describe the activities they have performed but they seldom record learning achievements. Insufficient use is made of expertise from outside the college in assessing the needs of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and in providing them with support.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

41 Students generally achieve good standards in their assignments and do well in their examinations. In 1996, of the 130 students aged 16 to 18 who started their final year of study on advanced vocational programmes, 98 per cent achieved the qualification for which they were aiming. In the same year, 92 students aged 16 to 18 started the final year of their intermediate vocational programmes and 92 per cent of them successfully gained the qualification for which they were aiming. These results place the college in the top 10 per cent of colleges in the further education sector on both these performance measures, according to data published by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE).

42 Most students have a positive attitude to their studies and acquire practical skills at the level required for their chosen areas of work. For example, students studying game and fish management carry out estate duties regularly, including feeding and preparation, checking snares, registering the numbers of birds on the drives and the feed they consume, and checking habitat management. Relevant work experience helps students throughout the college to be successful on their courses. Many students find that placements are a stepping stone to employment at the end of their courses.

43 Many students achieve qualifications which are additional to the main award for which they are aiming. These additional studies complement their main course, enrich their overall learning experience, and help them to acquire more commercial expertise. For example, students on the national diploma course in outdoor recreation and leisure gain accreditation in canoeing and sailing, and can study for an NVQ at level 2 in sports and recreation. Students on equine studies courses may study for British Horse Society qualifications, riding and road safety certificates, and units of NVQs. Students on horticulture and countryside management courses may also gain NVQs in addition to their first or national diplomas.

44 Most students acquire proficiency in key skills, including information technology, and this is reflected in their coursework. A few students have weaknesses in literacy and numeracy that adversely affect their performance in some aspects of their courses. Much of students' written assignment work is carefully structured and well presented. However, there were examples of excessive copying of notes from standard texts.

45 Animal care students work well in groups and have a clear understanding of the tasks set and the work which they need to cover. They have a good awareness of the principles of, and procedures for, safety and hygiene in handling animals. Students who complete their programmes generally achieve the award for which they are aiming. The success rate for students who were enrolled for a course on 1 November and who subsequently achieved the national diploma in animal care has increased from 56 per cent in 1994, to 65 per cent in 1995 and 76 per cent in 1996. For the first diploma, the success rates for the three years were 75 per cent, 88 per cent and 83 per cent, respectively. From the first diploma, students generally progress to the one-year national certificate. Over the two years 1995-96 the retention rate on the national certificate course was 76 per cent. In 1995, 69 per cent of students passed the national certificate and, in 1996, 71 per cent. In 1996, 75 per cent of those enrolled for Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons' nursing diploma qualified, compared with 33 per cent in 1995. Over the last three years retention rates for first diploma students have averaged 94 per cent and for national diploma students the average has been 72 per cent. There has been a 100 per cent retention rate in veterinary nursing over the past two years. All students have relevant work experience which is matched to their career aims. A few have less well-developed practical skills in carrying out animal husbandry tasks.

46 On most equine studies courses over the last three years, retention rates have been high and students' achievements have been good. The success rate for students who completed first diploma courses in equine studies was 91 per cent in 1994, 67 per cent in 1995 and 86 per cent in 1996. Retention rates averaged 90 per cent over the period. The retention rate on the national certificate in management of horses averaged 90 per cent and the success rates for the last three years were 92 per cent, 67 per cent and 86 per cent. Of students who enrolled for the national diploma in equine business management, 74 per cent were successful in 1994, 68 per cent in 1995 and 76 per cent in 1996. The retention rate over the three years averaged 77 per cent. Over the last two years since the course was introduced, all students who completed the national diploma course in stud breeding and stable management were successful. However, this was only 52 per cent and 56 per cent, respectively of those who originally enrolled. The reason is that only half the students who enrolled returned to finish the course after their year on work placement. Many of them left to take up employment.

47 Success rates for the students who enrolled for courses on agriculture, countryside and horticulture were adversely affected by some low retention rates in 1996. However, there have also been some good results over the last three years. Success rates for students who enrolled on first diploma courses in agriculture were 80 per cent in 1994 and 1995, and 100 per cent in 1996. Retention rates averaged 87 per cent over the three years. Success rates for the first diploma in countryside were 56 per cent, 75 per cent and 71 per cent, respectively, and retention rates averaged 91 per cent. For first diploma students in horticulture, retention rates averaged 75 per cent over the three years, but all students who completed the course passed each year. There has been a slight downward trend in the success rates of students enrolled for national diplomas in agriculture over the past three years, from 90 per cent in 1994, to 75 per cent in 1995 and 73 per cent in 1996. Retention rates have averaged 84 per cent over the period. In 1996, all students who completed the national certificates in agriculture and in horticulture gained their awards. The success rate for those who enrolled on the national certificate in agriculture course has fluctuated from 64 per cent in 1994, to 100 per cent in 1995 and 69 per cent in 1996. Retention rates averaged 83 per cent. In horticulture, the success rate for national certificate students rose from 57 per cent in 1994, and 58 per cent in 1995 to 100 per cent in 1996. Retention rates over the period averaged 97 per cent. There have been low retention and success rates on national certificate courses in countryside related skills. The success rate for the students originally enrolled was 38 per cent in 1994 and 50 per cent in 1996. Retention rates averaged 68 per cent for each of the two years when the courses took place. These courses mainly attract training for work students who often leave to take up employment. Some gain NVQs instead of national certificates.

48 Students' retention and success rates have generally been high on general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) intermediate leisure and tourism and national diploma courses in outdoor recreation and leisure. The success rates for students who enrolled on GNVQ courses were 86 per cent in 1994, 83 per cent in 1995, and 89 per cent in 1996, and retention rates averaged 90 per cent. These results exceed the national average by a wide margin. Pass rates for students who enrolled on the national diploma course have been good, at 75 per cent in 1994, 66 per cent in 1995 and 78 per cent in 1996. All those who completed the course have gained the qualification over the past two years. Retention rates on this national diploma course have averaged 78 per cent. There was a low of 66 per cent in 1995. Those who leave the course usually do so for financial reasons, or in order to take up employment.

49 Students on the rural foundation course study for certificates awarded by the National Proficiency Test Council, and for NVQs. They enjoy their studies and some gain qualifications. Few students, however, have progressed from this course to other courses in the college, or have gone into work. Of eight students who completed the course last year, seven

stayed on for a third year of the course and one gained employment, after further training. The course aims to enable students to find, and keep, a job with a sympathetic employer. As there is no continuing tracking of these students' destinations after they have left, the college does not know to what extent this long-term aim is fulfilled.

50 The college holds full records of students' leaving destinations. Students are generally successful in progressing to further or higher education, or to employment related to their courses. In 1996, college surveys showed that 16 per cent of students who completed their courses went on to full-time employment, 15 per cent went on to higher education at the college or other higher education establishments and universities, 26 per cent continued their further education and 8 per cent went on to work-based training. Ten per cent were still looking for work and the remainder were either working, travelling and working, or developing their own businesses. Overall, 90 per cent of students who completed courses in 1995 were engaged in education, training or employment, by the middle of 1996.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

51 The college has developed some robust quality assurance procedures which have resulted in improvements to provision. The arrangements for reviewing the quality of courses and for moderating assessment are well documented and centrally administered. Most teachers and managers have a high level of awareness about quality assurance. It is less well marked among support staff. The quality assurance system does not yet embrace those support services which are not directly associated with teaching and learning.

52 Course reviews are carried out termly and many are of high quality. These reviews are standardised across the college and are centrally administered. Detailed questionnaires are completed by students. The analysis of completed questionnaires is used as a basis for discussion between course teams, student representatives and managers. Each review follows a standard agenda which addresses different aspects of the students' experience. Minutes of meetings of review teams and copies of associated action plans are circulated widely throughout the college. Students were able to identify improvements which had resulted from the review process. For example, the rural foundation course, previously outside the system of reviews, is now included within it. However, there are some weaknesses in the review process. Reviews are based mainly on students' perceptions and there is insufficient reflection on the quality of teaching and learning by course teams. Some action plans are not sufficiently precise and do not include targets against which their implementation and achievement can be monitored.

53 In September 1996, the college introduced an effective system for the moderating of assessment standards and the marking of test papers and assignments. Known as the Hartpur assessment and learning system, it

has been welcomed and supported by staff. All test papers and assignment briefs are moderated before use. Students' scripts and reports are sampled to check that moderating standards are consistent. Moderation is undertaken weekly by a group drawn from staff across the college. By taking part in this moderating process, staff also engage in a useful form of staff development. As a result of this moderation, there has been a general improvement in the standard of assessment material and the quality of marking and feedback to students. With few exceptions, students' work is marked and returned to them within an agreed timescale.

54 The processes for establishing standards and setting targets, and for monitoring progress towards achieving them, are developing. Targets for enrolments, retention rates and students' achievements are centrally set and monitored. There is a single, uniform, achievement target for all programmes throughout the college, regardless of the nature of the course. The development of individual course targets by course teams is at an early stage. Other targets which cover assessment, the quality of marking of students' work, students' progression and students' satisfaction with their courses have been agreed.

55 The academic board receives section reports, examination results, student enrolment numbers and retention rates. Section reports vary in quality. Some provide statistical data but no evaluative comment. A report from the college's learning resources centre was of particularly high quality: a range of relevant performance indicators has been established; performance data have been collected from a variety of sources; and analysis of the information has led to clear judgements about the quality of the current provision, and to the preparation of a detailed action plan to improve it further. Reports to the board, which cover the work of the moderation group and the operation of the course review system, are generally evaluative and useful.

56 Although there is much effective quality assurance activity, the college does not have an overall policy statement for quality assurance. The main college committees all discuss similar issues in relation to the quality of provision. Channels for formally notifying staff of committee discussions about quality are not clearly established, although staff receive feedback informally.

57 A cross-college system for internal verification of courses is being developed. Internal verifiers meet monthly to discuss procedures and to develop standard practices. The college has yet to formalise a policy on internal verification. An improved programme of training for assessors and internal verifiers, as identified in the strategic plan, is being implemented. External moderator and verifier reports are dealt with effectively by section heads.

58 The college's charter includes a range of standards on topics specified in the *Charter for Further Education*, published by the DfEE. The charter is published as a separate document and in a students' handbook. Some aspects of the charter such as student admissions, induction and course

provision are effectively monitored through the course review system. The complaints procedures are not understood by some students. Teaching staff and students are aware of the charter. Some support staff, however, are not fully aware of the implication for their role of the commitments which the college makes in its charter.

59 There is a constructive annual appraisal scheme for full-time teachers. This includes classroom observation of all full-time teachers by the principal. Other elements of the scheme include a self-assessment of competence by each teacher, a line manager's report and reviews conducted by the vice-principal and principal. Students' views on teaching performance, expressed in their responses to questionnaires, are taken into account in the appraisal process. Staff welcome the opportunity to discuss their teaching techniques. Staff development is recommended for teachers who have had weaknesses in their performance identified. After such staff development, these teachers are reappraised. At the time of the inspection, there was no appraisal of support staff. The appraisal scheme for support staff is under review and a modified scheme is to be introduced.

60 All teaching and support staff participate in an annual staff-development review. A staff-development plan for the college has been produced and its main aims are included in the strategic plan. Staff-development activities are approved in the light of individual training plans and the strategic aims of the college. The staff-development programme is evaluated and an annual report on staff development is published. In February 1996, the college gained the Investor in People award. Induction procedures for all full-time teachers and support staff are sound and valued by staff. The induction of part-time teachers, however, is less effective.

61 The college has a collaborative arrangement with a leisure company to provide training for staff of the company, based upon a scheme approved by the Open College Network. The college has entered into a formal contract with the company based on the model contract recommended by the FEFC. College staff visit all centres to monitor the provision and to carry out internal verification. Quality assurance procedures have been modified to suit this provision. There have been no reports on the quality of this provision submitted to the academic board.

62 The college has produced a self-assessment report which is written under the headings of Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. Managers did not involve all sections of the college in the preparation of this report, although they consulted some staff. The report has a brief but informative introduction about the work of the college. Conclusions drawn about the strengths and weaknesses of the college are not supported by reference to evidence. The report contains too many factual statements and too few judgements.

RESOURCES

Staffing

63 Teaching staff are enthusiastic about their work. Most have relevant qualifications and commercial experience. They maintain an awareness of current industrial developments through their close relationships with the various sectors of the land-based industry. Most full-time teachers usually have appropriate technical qualifications. Few of the full-time staff involved in outdoor recreation and leisure work have specific qualifications but they liaise closely with part-time staff who have such qualifications and with a major leisure business. Part-time staff carry out approximately 20 per cent of the teaching. At the time of the inspection, 29 of the 65 teaching staff were part time. In addition to the full-time and part-time staff, visiting specialists contribute valuable specialist expertise, particularly to courses in equine studies, animal care and outdoor recreation and leisure.

64 Just under half the teachers have a degree or an equivalent qualification. Only 49 per cent of full-time staff and 39 per cent of part-time staff have teaching qualifications. Teachers on equine courses have, between them, a good range of instructional qualifications which are well regarded in the industry. Thirty-nine per cent of the teachers hold training and development lead body assessor awards. All curriculum areas have some staff with assessor awards. In most teaching sections, there is a teacher with qualifications in internal verification and the accreditation of prior learning. A programme of staff development and training has been agreed and is being implemented to enable more staff to obtain assessor and verifier awards.

65 Technical and administrative staff at the college are enthusiastic in the performance of their duties. They liaise closely with teaching staff and they are effectively deployed. There are good links between the farm staff and teachers. There are not enough technical support staff in agriculture, horticulture and countryside management. As a result, teachers in these subjects spend a considerable amount of time carrying out tasks which would normally be performed by technicians, including the preparation of classrooms for practical sessions. Personnel management is generally effective. There is a computerised system for personnel records. Analysis of the data in the system has yet to be carried out.

Equipment/learning resources

66 The college farm and estate provide a valuable teaching and learning resource for agriculture, horticulture and countryside courses. The farm is used extensively for a range of activities, including practical work, work experience, assignments and case studies. Information on the farm's commercial activities as they relate to the dairy herd, pig herd and arable enterprises are widely used in teaching. Local farms complement the resources provided at the college.

67 There are well-equipped animal care and equine facilities which have an appropriate range of animals, tools and equipment. The equine unit is very well equipped; there is a complete range of tack as well as appropriate teaching aids; and the range of horses available for riders of differing abilities is good. The quality of equipment for use by students on the rural foundation course is, however, variable. Several rooms lack basic facilities. Some equipment, for example an outdated tractor and unsuitable processing machinery, is inappropriate for vocational preparation.

68 The resources centre and library at the Hartpury campus are well stocked with material to support specialist courses, including books, journals, videos and compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) databases. Good links between the library and teaching staff ensure that additional texts and other resources are provided to meet course requirements. Some books on agriculture and horticulture are out of date and need replacing. The learning resources centre at Hartpury has 42 computers which are available to students at any time when the centre is open. Most of these computers are recent models and they have appropriate software including 30 multi-media packages and 30 CD-ROM titles. No record is kept of the use of information technology equipment in the resources centre.

69 The college has improved its range of modern information technology equipment in recent years but students still find it hard to gain access to an unoccupied workstation at busy times. The computer teaching suite, which has 21 computers, can be opened for students to use on a drop-in basis when it is not being used for lessons. Some students were not aware of the possibility of working in the suite when the workstations in the resources centre were all occupied. The ratio of computers to full-time equivalent students is approximately 1:13. The recent relocation from the Blaisdon campus of 160 students, but only 10 computers, has increased the demand for computing facilities at the main campus. Some of the workstation spaces are small and, when all the machines are in use, the centre becomes overcrowded. There has been no development of information technology facilities in some of the college's units, such as the equine studies unit. Students in these units have not had the opportunity to use commercial software and computerised records in their work. An information technology users' group has been established and this has helped the college to make substantial progress towards a fully developed policy on information technology. Last year, the college spent approximately £20,000 on new information technology equipment to support students' learning.

Accommodation

70 The main campus is centred around Hartpury House which is a Grade II listed building. This provides a suitable and attractive environment in which to work. There are well-kept formal gardens, parkland, woodlands, a trout lake, orchards and a swimming pool. Residential accommodation is available for up to 420 students; most is of a high standard and is well

maintained. Most general teaching accommodation is of a good standard. It is pleasantly decorated and has displays of learning materials. A few older rooms are not well maintained. Since 1993, the college has undertaken an extensive building programme to improve existing buildings and build new ones. The new buildings, completed in 1995, include residential accommodation providing 232 high-quality study bedrooms with en-suite facilities, a new refectory, students' lounge, assembly hall, and an indoor sports hall. The college has developed considerable commercial activity as a result of the good standard of these facilities.

71 The college purchased the Blaisdon Hall estate in September 1996 with financial assistance from the Gloucestershire TEC's competitiveness fund. The estate comprises a Victorian mansion with impressive public rooms, parkland, woodland and a large, separate, purpose-built teaching block. The site is currently used as a base for short courses and conferences, administrative offices and the rural foundation course.

72 Much specialist accommodation is of a high standard. Practical equine facilities are excellent. The equestrian centre has 120 modern stables, a purpose-built stud unit, storage facilities, two outdoor all-weather arenas of high quality and cross-country courses. Full use is made of the two large, modern indoor riding schools, one of which has seating for over 200 spectators. The accommodation is admirably suited to its purposes and is well maintained. It matches the best found in the industry. Some classrooms have recently been converted into laboratories and they provide good spaces for science teaching. Practical workshops and machinery areas are of good quality. A wide range of outdoor recreation and leisure activities is available to students nearby in the Royal Forest of Dean. Students also use excellent water sports facilities at Langorse Lake in the Brecon Beacons National Park. The animal care unit is mostly of a good standard and is well maintained. Some areas, however, may only be reached through classrooms where lessons are taking place. The mammal and reptile houses are small for some of the classes which use them.

73 The college has made some provision for wheelchair users in its newer buildings and it has tried to accommodate their needs where possible. However, access to students' recreational facilities, including the refectory and lounge, is difficult for students with restricted mobility. The reference section of the resources centre and the finance office in the main administrative building are not accessible to wheelchair users.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

74 The main strengths of the college are:

- the wide range of courses which reflects the changing nature of land-based industries
- a rapid increase in student numbers in recent years
- supportive governors

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- close liaison with employers
 - high completion rates
 - good examination results
 - a high standard of teaching in practical classes
 - effective recruitment and guidance procedures
 - strong support for residential students
 - a rigorous teachers' appraisal scheme
 - the high standard of most of the accommodation.

75 In order to improve the quality of its provision, the college should:

- improve the quality of teaching in some theory lessons
- improve provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- provide more support for students who have difficulties with literacy and numeracy
- ensure greater consistency in the management of sections
- address inconsistencies in the quality of tutorial support received by students
- continue to develop its quality assurance procedures
- ensure effective monitoring of equal opportunities policy and practice
- increase the proportion of staff with teaching qualifications
- increase the level of information technology facilities for students
- improve access to accommodation for people with restricted mobility.

FIGURES

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- 1 Percentage student numbers by age (as at November 1996)

 - 2 Percentage student numbers by level of study (as at November 1996)

 - 3 Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at November 1996)

 - 4 Staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (as at November 1996)

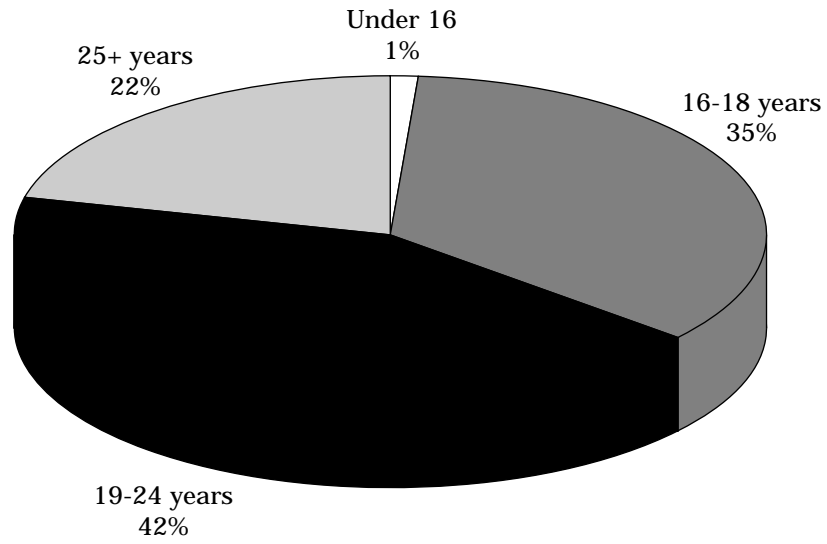
 - 5 Income (for 12 months to July 1996)

 - 6 Expenditure (for 12 months to July 1996)

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

Figure 1

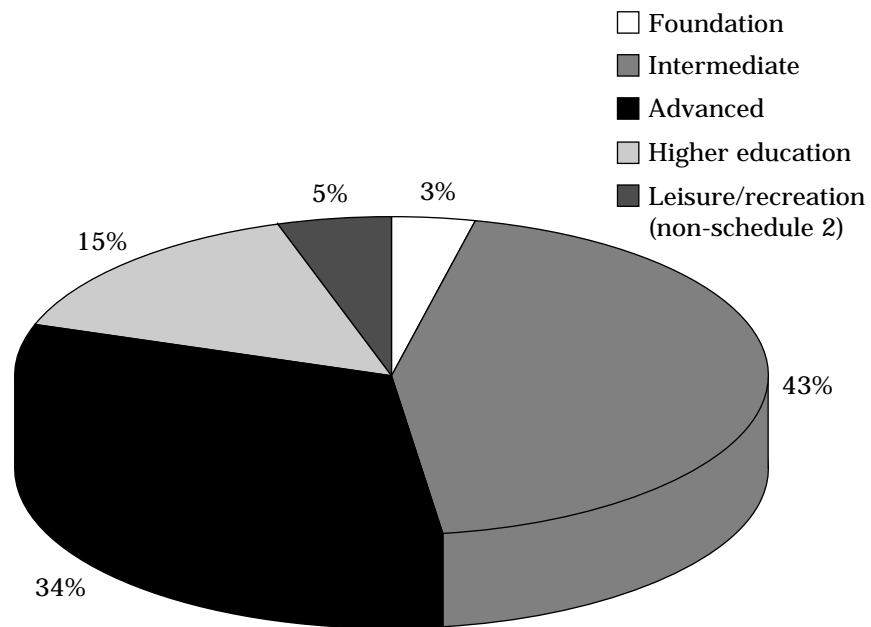
Hartpury College: percentage student numbers by age (as at November 1996)



Student numbers: 1,718

Figure 2

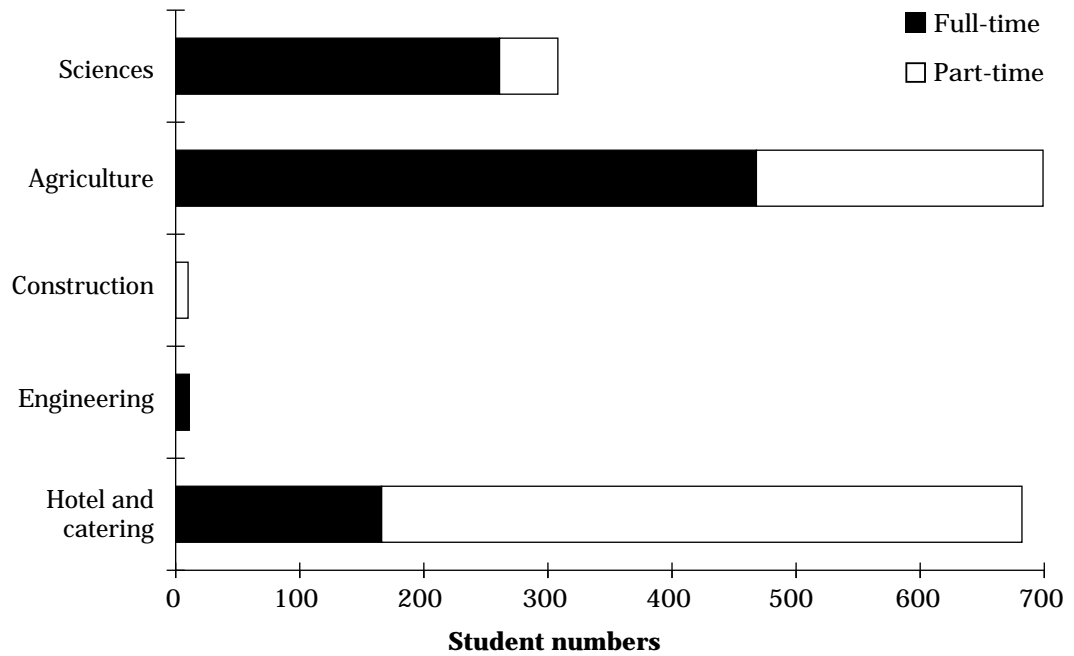
Hartpury College: percentage student numbers by level of study (as at November 1996)



Student numbers: 1,718

Figure 3

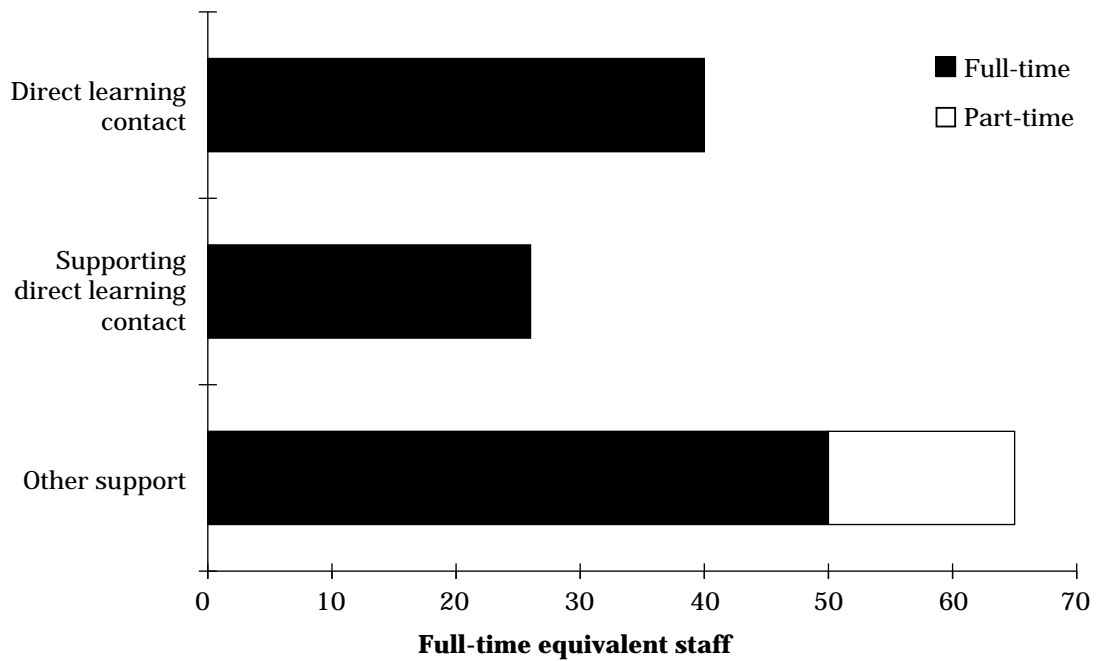
Hartpury College: student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at November 1996)



Student numbers: 1,718

Figure 4

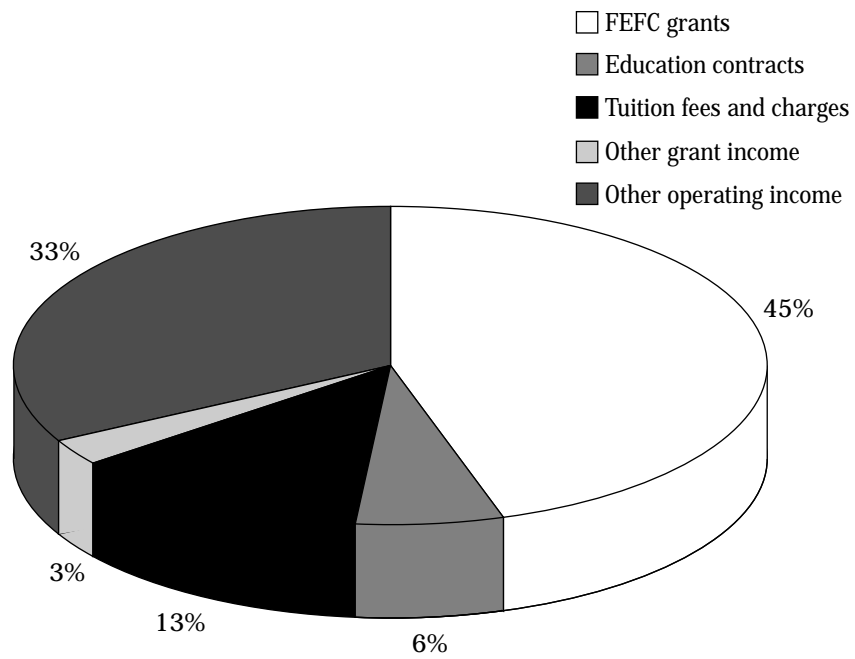
Hartpury College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (as at November 1996)



Full-time equivalent staff: 131

Figure 5

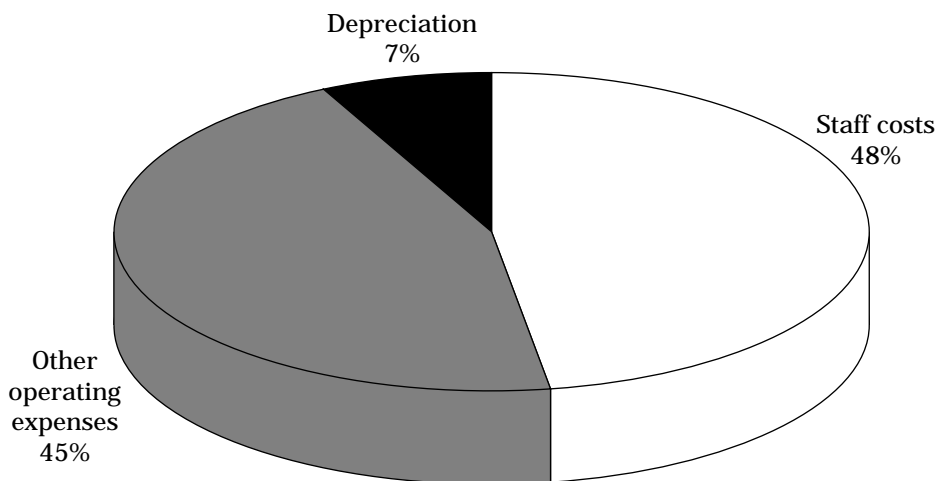
Hartpury College: income (for 12 months to July 1996)



Income: £5,504,059

Figure 6

Hartpury College: expenditure (for 12 months to July 1996)



Expenditure: £5,126,507

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