

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

Walford College, Shropshire

April 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 46/97

WALFORD COLLEGE, SHROPSHIRE
WEST MIDLANDS REGION
Inspected March 1996-January 1997

Summary

Walford College offers courses in land-based industries. It has successfully extended the range of its provision. The college has developed productive links with the local community and many organisations. Governors are supportive and take a close interest in the college's work. The management structure is currently under review. Students are well motivated and attend classes regularly. Staff are committed and enthusiastic. A variety of appropriate teaching methods is used but some of the teaching is poor. The profile of lesson grades is well below average for agriculture and horticulture colleges. Appropriate attention is paid to health and safety matters. There is good provision of specialist facilities and equipment. The estate is well used as a teaching and learning resource. There are no policies for some important aspects of cross-college provision. The college needs to improve: the quality of some of the teaching; its quality assurance systems; the planning of courses; the management of staff workloads; the implementation of cross-college initiatives; and the drafting of policies to ensure they have clear aims and objectives.

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

Aspects of cross-college provision	Grade
Responsiveness and range of provision	2
Governance and management	3
Students' recruitment, guidance and support	3
Quality assurance	4
Resources: staffing	3
equipment/learning resources	2
accommodation	1

Curriculum area	Grade
Agriculture	2
Equine studies	3
Horticulture and countryside studies	3

INTRODUCTION

1 Walford College, Shropshire was inspected between March 1996 and January 1997. Eight inspectors spent a total of 43 days in the college, they visited 41 lessons, examined students' work and held discussions with corporation members, students, managers, teachers and support staff. Inspectors met with local employers, parents, members of the community and representatives of local schools and the Shropshire Chamber of Commerce Training and Enterprise. They also attended college meetings and scrutinised documentation about the college and its courses.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 Walford College, Shropshire was established by Shropshire County Council in 1949 to train young people in agriculture and in sound methods of craftsmanship. It remains the college's aim that its students should acquire sound technical knowledge and good practical skills. In the 1950s, the college pioneered the use of small, local outcentres for the provision of part-time training and education. More recently, the number of such centres has been reduced in response to changing employment trends in the agricultural industry.

3 The college's main site is situated close to the village of Baschurch, seven miles north west of Shrewsbury. The estate comprises 240 hectares. There are three outcentres: the horticulture unit at Radbrook in Shrewsbury and the day-release facilities at Ludlow and Market Drayton.

4 Within Shropshire, there are two large general education colleges at Shrewsbury and Telford, respectively, a tertiary college in Oswestry and three sixth form colleges in Telford, Ludlow and Shrewsbury, respectively. The nearest agricultural colleges are at Reaseheath, Cheshire, 35 miles to the north and at Rodbaston, some 40 miles to the east in Staffordshire. Further to the south and south east are the Hereford and Worcester agricultural colleges. Harper Adams College, a major higher education institution for agriculture and related courses, is situated 22 miles away at Newport.

5 At the time of inspection, 723 students were enrolled at the college. Of these, 221 were on full-time courses and 502 were on part-time courses. In addition, there were 325 students on short courses during 1995-96, compared with 408 in the previous year. Of all the college's students, 41 per cent were aged 16 to 18 years, 20 per cent were aged between 19 and 24 and 39 per cent were aged 25 or over. Student numbers by age, by level of study and by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figures 1, 2 and 3, respectively. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4.

6 The college's mission is to be a leading provider of high-quality education and training for agriculture and land-related industries. The college aims to offer a broad and varied curriculum which furthers the academic, vocational and personal development of its students, and to be

an exemplar of the best practice in teaching and learning, campus administration, and farming and estate management.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

7 In response to changes in the rural economy, Walford College, Shropshire has improved its range of courses over recent years to cover all the main land-based industries. Agriculture, agricultural engineering, horticulture and countryside courses are well established although the agricultural engineering provision is small. The most important recent developments have been in equine studies and animal care.

8 Over the last three years, the college has increased its numbers of full-time students by almost a third and it has met its targets for Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) funded units in 1994-95 and 1995-96. The college has also set its own enrolment targets for courses. Enrolments in most areas of the college's work have, however, not matched these targets. For example, enrolments on animal care courses exceeded expectations whereas those on countryside studies and equine studies courses have declined. Some courses have had to be cancelled because of low demand for them. The development of modular provision has been slow. There is scope for the college to explore the feasibility of combining small groups in order to avoid having to close courses with low enrolments.

9 Students visit local enterprises and take part in study tours in the United Kingdom and abroad. In most subjects, apart from equine studies, students are able to gain practical qualifications in practical skills which supplement their main qualifications and improve their employment prospects. The range of sporting, social and special interest activities for students is particularly good. Students take part in college open days and other events, including attendance at shows and meeting prospective students. Monitoring and recording of the experiences and skills gained by the students outside their main programme of studies are underdeveloped.

10 The outcentres meet the needs of the day-release students who live far from the college where appropriate. Full-time students are provided with transport to the college or accommodation is found for them. The college is aware of the need to attract more mature students. Recently, there have been a number of successful initiatives to meet the needs of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. For example, the college responded well to a local special school's request for help. A group of pupils interested in plants and animals now attends the college for half a day each week and makes use of the specialist facilities. Through its links with outside agencies, the college has identified a need to expand its provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The college also recognises that the expansion of such provision will require a co-ordinated approach from all staff across the college.

11 Most course leaflets are attractively presented. Some are, however, insufficiently clear about the opportunities for progression from particular courses. The college maintains a high profile in the locality. It features in articles in the press, staff attend local shows and the college is often open to the public. The college open day in the spring attracts over 4,000 paying visitors. School teachers are very complimentary about the help and support they receive from the college. Local employers, however, are not well informed about what the college can offer. Some employers are critical of the lack of information they receive on course content and structure. In course planning and review, insufficient use is made of information on students' destinations. There is insufficient evaluation of the effectiveness of the various promotional and recruitment activities.

12 There is a limited but very effective range of short courses for those working on farms. These courses are not currently linked, in terms of planning and curriculum development, with the part-time courses. The college's ability to respond to the needs of industry has recently been strengthened by the appointment of a marketing manager.

13 The college is working with Wolverhampton University on the development of courses, such as those in countryside studies and in equine studies. It also collaborates with two other colleges to provide courses leading to the national diploma in agricultural engineering. Curricular links with schools are weak. Relationships with Shropshire Chamber of Commerce Training and Enterprise are good. This training and enterprise organisation considers the college to be responsive and receptive to new initiatives. The college is a large and successful managing agent. It is in partnership with several organisations, including the Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food and Shropshire Chamber of Commerce Training and Enterprise, on five European Community funded training projects. It hosts and promotes an employer-led training group and the county's proficiency tests committee. Local business groups and community organisations make use of the college campus.

14 The college is committed to ensuring equal opportunities for all its staff and students. However, procedures and responsibilities for implementing the equal opportunities policy are not clear. Information about the age, gender and ethnic origin of students is gathered but it is not used effectively in the way prescribed in the college's policy on equal opportunities. The ratios between males and females on some courses do not mirror those between male and female employees in the relevant land-based industries. New publicity material has been designed which is free from the gender stereotyping found in some of the old material. Some managers have a low level of awareness of equal opportunities issues.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

15 The college has a committed and supportive corporation of 13 members, which includes the principal. At the time of the inspection there was one vacancy. There are seven independent members, one of

whom is the nominee of Shropshire Chamber of Commerce Training and Enterprise. Two members are women. Seven members are farmers; one is a former agricultural college principal and one a former county education officer with expertise on students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Members have knowledge and expertise on agriculture, land use and conservation, which are used to the college's benefit. The corporation has a clear understanding of the distinction between governance and management.

16 Attendance at meetings of the corporation and its committees is mostly good. There are six committees for finance and general purposes, audit, search, remuneration, the farm and discipline, respectively. Terms of reference for the search committee have been adopted recently and those of the other committees are being reviewed. The corporation has paid particular attention to the financing, auditing and management of the estate. The corporation's review of students' achievements is limited to statistical information and does not include evaluation and judgement. Corporation members have received training. They have adopted a code of conduct and have completed a register of interests. The corporation has decided to review its own performance. The clerk to the corporation is the chief administrative officer of the college. He has a comprehensive job description and is clear about his responsibility to offer independent advice to the corporation.

17 The academic board is not effective. It does not address quality issues and has received few reports on policy matters.

18 Teachers, support staff and corporation members have all contributed to the college's strategic plan. Each of the six key strategic objectives is supported by an assessment of factors critical to its achievement. However, the plan does not deal adequately with human resource issues or quality assurance. It contains little risk analysis. There are too few targets against which the college can measure success. Department and curriculum area plans are not well developed and there is no annual cycle of departmental planning. Senior managers and governors recognise the need to strengthen strategic planning, to develop measurable targets, and appropriate performance indicators, and to undertake a more thorough analysis of the opportunities and threats facing the college's development.

19 College policies are not underpinned by clear aims and objectives, apart from those relating to equal opportunities and health and safety. There is a lack of policies on cross-college provision and issues, such as tutorials or environmental awareness. Appropriate attention is paid to health and safety matters. There is a comprehensive health and safety manual and regular safety audits are carried out. The college has won a national safety award from the British Safety Council in each of the last three years.

20 A review of the college's management structure is currently taking place. The senior management team comprises the principal, the vice-

principal, the director of marketing, the chief administrative officer, the accounts administrator and the four heads of department. The team meets once a fortnight as a management steering group which has responsibility for assisting the principal in policy formulation, strategic planning and other major management issues. The finance monitoring group, which does not include heads of department, meets monthly to monitor expenditure against targets and to consider financial management reports. Both groups record their decisions and action points.

21 The responsibility for cross-college quality assurance has not been clearly assigned. The job descriptions of heads of department do not mention quality assurance. There has been insufficient delegation of responsibility to heads of department. For example, they are not responsible for monitoring the recruitment of students or for evaluating students' retention rates and achievements. Departmental meetings have only recently been introduced and the minutes of these do not always clearly specify who has the responsibility for carrying out action which has been agreed. The administration of courses by course teams is generally effective.

22 Although the principal issues a regular newsletter and holds a meeting for all staff once each term, some staff are unaware of important initiatives such as recent developments in marketing. At their weekly meeting, tutors exchange information and share common problems but they do not disseminate good practice among themselves. Support staff meet regularly and keep themselves informed about developments in the college. A weekly list of events in the college is produced. There is a useful display board which carries photographs of teaching and support staff.

23 The corporation and senior managers maintain proper oversight of the college's commercial activities and particularly those of the farm. The farm makes a profit and provides a good model of commercial practice. The college's average level of funding in 1995-96 was £26.08. The median for colleges of agriculture was £23.57. The college's income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1996 are shown in figures 5 and 6.

24 There has been some analysis of unit costs for full-time courses. Communication between senior managers and course leaders about income-generating activities is poor. Full-time students' destinations are monitored thoroughly but information on them is not used effectively in course planning and curriculum review.

25 The management information system provides effective data on financial monitoring and helpful information about student records. The college completes its returns to the FEFC on time. The management information system is not networked and very few managers have on-line access to it. In a number of areas, there is wasteful duplication of information in manual and computerised form.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

26 The college provides impartial information to potential students. A variety of recruitment methods are used including visits to schools and careers conventions, advice and 'taster' sessions and advertisements in local newspapers. There are links with the Shropshire Careers Service and regular use of posters in public libraries, supermarkets and community centres. The processing of applications and arrangements for interviews are well managed. There are clear procedures for following up enquiries and tracking the progress of applications. Staff make potential students and their parents feel welcome. Some interviews are well prepared, thorough and effective and supported by good documentation. In other interviews, however, tutors are too prescriptive and they direct students towards certain courses without fully exploring possible alternatives to them. Potential students are not asked to bring their records of achievement to interview, although many do so.

27 Several teachers are qualified to assess and accredit the knowledge, skill and experience which students may have acquired before coming to college. Accreditation of students' prior learning takes place in some subject areas, such as land use and animal care but there has been little development of this accreditation in other areas.

28 The organisation of students' induction is good. There are standardised and comprehensive timetables of induction activities which include opportunities for students to receive detailed information about their course and college services. A particularly effective introduction is given to the library and the learning support service. Appropriate emphasis is placed on the college charter, health and safety and the guidelines on welfare and discipline. Students are given tours of the campus and estate in order that they may familiarise themselves with the location of general and specialist facilities. Tutors take part in these tours which provide them with an opportunity to get to know their students. There is little difference between the induction arrangements for first-year and second-year students.

29 There are regular timetabled tutorials but the tutors' work is not co-ordinated or monitored. Some tutorials are used effectively and provide students with the opportunity to make action plans and set targets for their work and achievements. Other tutorials are not so well managed, however, and tutors fail to identify the individual needs of students. The content of tutorials is left to individual tutors' discretion. Relationships between tutors and students are good and tutors provide students with considerable help and support outside tutorial periods.

30 The student services manager, the wardens and the tutors provide personal counselling. However, they do not hold counselling qualifications and do not receive professional supervision. They refer students to outside agencies if they are unable to deal with the problem themselves.

31 There is good learning support to help students develop key skills. All full-time and most part-time students complete the Basic Skills Agency assessment. Learning materials are adapted to meet the needs of students. For example, tape cassettes and lesson notes in large print are available for students who are partially sighted. Attendance at support sessions is monitored and it is good. Detailed written documentation is kept on all students receiving support and there are termly reports on their progress. There is good liaison between the learning support staff and course tutors.

32 No one at the college has overall responsibility for careers education and guidance. Members of the local careers service do not visit the college to provide careers advice. The library contains useful information on land-based further and higher education courses and careers. There are also helpful materials on careers and courses outside agriculture. A number of visiting speakers give talks on careers. Some groups of students visit higher education institutes. Tutors give some advice and guidance on careers at their own discretion.

33 Students' attendance is monitored. When a student is absent, staff try to contact the student concerned on the same day or, where appropriate, his or her employer or parent. All non-attendance is logged. The registration system does not, however, record the absence of students who leave after registering in the morning.

34 The Walford fund and the access funds are used to assist students with financial difficulties. The chief administrative officer is responsible for the funds. Each application for financial assistance is considered by the principal and the chief administrative officer. There is a thorough examination of the student's financial position before an applicant receives support. Posters informing students about these funds are displayed at the beginning of the academic year.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

35 Of the sessions inspected 44 per cent had strengths which outweighed the weaknesses. Twelve per cent had weaknesses which outweighed strengths. These percentages compare with 63 per cent and 8 per cent, respectively, for all colleges inspected in 1995-96, according to figures published in the *Chief Inspector's Annual Report 1995-96*. The grades awarded to the teaching sessions inspected are shown in the following table.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade 1	2	3	4	5	Totals
NVQ level 2	0	2	1	0	0	3
Other vocational	3	9	13	4	0	29
Other	1	3	4	1	0	9
Total	4	14	18	5	0	41

36 Practical lessons are generally better than lessons which deal with theory. Most schemes of work and lesson plans are insufficiently detailed. There are informative course handbooks although they contain insufficient detail about the tutorial support available to students.

37 The structure of the objectives for, and the documentation relating to, work experience are clear. Employers receive written guidance and a verbal briefing on their role. They contribute effectively to the assessment of students' performance. The college estate, farm and equine unit are well used to provide students with a good understanding of land-based industries. Many students on advanced courses are provided with opportunities to develop their supervisory skills through taking responsibility for helping and guiding less experienced students.

38 The documentation used to record and monitor assessment is good. Teachers inform students about assessment schedules. The range and balance of assessments are appropriate to the aims of the courses. Students welcome the frequent tests set by teachers as a way of keeping themselves informed about areas of weakness. Some assignment briefs lack clarity. Similarly, the written feedback which students receive on their assignment work is sometimes insufficiently clear. Assessments are carried out with a greater degree of rigour following the introduction of an internal verification system.

39 On agriculture courses, students benefit from effective demonstrations of farming skills and careful supervision of their work. In a few lessons, insufficient account was taken of students' prior practical experience. Effective use is made of assignments and case studies. Third-year national diploma students undertake several case studies based on local farms. The farmers are involved in assessing the students' oral presentations. The scale and complexity of the studies build up through the year, enabling the students to develop management skills progressively. Insufficient attention has been given to reviewing the curriculum following a reduction in the number of hours during which courses are taught each week.

40 In horticulture and countryside courses, links between theory and practice are clear, and practical lessons are well structured. There is an appropriate emphasis on health and safety. Many theory lessons lack variety in the way they are presented and a minority of students loses interest in them. Insufficient attention is given to developing the information technology skills of first-year students.

41 In equine studies the quality of theory lessons is variable. In the best lessons, teachers identified students' needs correctly and helped students to extend their knowledge. In other lessons, there was insufficient challenge for the more able students. Students are carefully supervised during practical lessons and they are shown how to improve their performance. However, in some instances, teachers failed to organise the lesson well and the students were not fully engaged in productive activity.

Many assignments on first diploma courses are too theoretical and insufficiently practical.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

42 Most students have a satisfactory level of appropriate understanding and knowledge, are interested in their courses, and participate willingly in class discussions. A minority is not always attentive. Students work together well and support each other. On the horticulture courses, there is some productive interaction between mature and younger students working together in groups. Most agriculture students have a high level of awareness of current farming practice. The attendance rates for most classes inspected were good, but there were low attendance rates on some equine and countryside courses.

43 Most of the assignment work of students on agriculture courses is of a high standard and it is well researched. Students use diagrams and photographs effectively in order to illustrate their work. Many case studies for the national certificate in farm management and the national diploma in agriculture provide useful appraisals of farm enterprises. The appraisals include recommendations on ways of improving the enterprises. Some written work by students on the national certificate of horticulture course is of a particularly high standard. Common weaknesses in assignments by students on national diploma courses include poorly-structured reports which lack a clear introduction and clear conclusions. Most students' notes are well organised but a few lack sufficient detail for the students' reference and revision purposes.

44 Students enjoy practical work and carry it out safely. Most achieve reasonable progress and always produce work of an acceptable standard. In addition to gaining their main qualification most students, apart from those in equine studies, also gain supplementary qualifications in specific practical skills. Some students can use information technology skills well within vocational contexts. For the most part, however, students' skills in information technology are insufficiently developed.

45 The college's published information on students' achievements for last year shows that most full-time students obtain the qualifications for which they are studying. Of the 120 full-time students enrolled at the beginning of the year on intermediate and advanced level courses, and courses leading to a national vocational qualification (NVQ) at level 3, 85 per cent were successful in obtaining the qualification they sought. All the 35 students on national diploma courses gained the award, but some withdrew before the final year. On some courses withdrawal rates are high. Of the 51 students who enrolled on the first diploma course at the beginning of the academic year, 75 per cent achieved the award; this success rate is well below the average success rate for students in the college.

46 Completion and success rates on most agriculture courses are good. Over the last two years, the lowest success rates, at just above 70 per cent, have been on certificate courses. Of the 23 full-time students enrolled at the start of year on horticulture and countryside courses, 82 per cent achieved the award. However, only four of the seven students on the first diploma course achieved the award. The overall success rates of part-time students have been low on both horticulture and countryside courses. Success rates of students on equine studies courses have varied over the last three years. The college has carried out insufficient enquiry into the reasons for the variations in these success rates.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

47 The college's system of quality assurance lacks rigour. The college's strategic plan contains little reference to quality assurance. There is no college policy on quality assurance; it is not clear who carries responsibility for quality assurance. The reports which corporation members receive on the college's performance are limited in their scope. In November 1996, governors held a training day at which they considered some issues relating to quality.

48 The college sets some standards for the quality of service it provides. Most standards are specified in the college's charter. Others are listed in the notes of guidance to staff on induction, tutorials, assessment and course review. Performance is not monitored against the standards which have been set. There are no formal procedures to handle complaints from students or those who use the college's services. The college's modern apprenticeship programme works to the standards specified by the Shropshire Chamber of Commerce Training and Enterprise. A recent audit by Shropshire Chamber of Commerce Training and Enterprise indicates that the college conforms to these standards.

49 The main elements in the quality assurance arrangements are the course reviews. These reviews do not systematically evaluate enrolment trends, retention rates or students' achievements and progression. They do not sufficiently address key issues such as the effectiveness of course planning, the quality of students' learning experiences and the efficacy of student support. Reports to the academic board fail to identify the action necessary to deal with weaknesses. Questionnaires for students about the quality of the college's provision are not well designed. The students' responses to these questionnaires do not yield sufficient information to help course teams to plan improvements effectively. The college has recognised some of the weaknesses in its course reviews and has begun a system of reviews at departmental level.

50 There is a range of staff-development activities, including programmes leading to accreditation for the training and development lead body, technical updating and the development of first aid and information technology skills. Staff-development needs are identified

through the process of annual appraisal for staff. Weaknesses in this process have led to insufficient identification of priorities for staff development. There has been insufficient staff-development training in teaching skills and in management skills. Staff development is not covered by the college's strategic targets. The college is aiming to achieve the Investor in People award in the spring of 1997.

51 The college has produced a self-assessment report based on the headings in the Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. The report is descriptive rather than evaluative and it fails to identify a number of important weaknesses. No evidence is provided to support the judgements made in the report.

RESOURCES

Staffing

52 College staff are enthusiastic and committed and they maintain close links with the land-based industries. Most teachers have relevant vocational qualifications, industrial experience and appropriate training and development qualifications awarded by industry lead bodies. Just over half have teaching qualifications.

53 There is no monitoring or review of teachers' workloads and teachers' work is not always effectively managed. Most teachers spend a considerable amount of time on tasks, such as the preparation of equipment for lessons, which could be performed by technicians. Similarly, managers do administrative work which could be carried out by support staff.

54 Farm and stable staff provide the college with good support. There is effective co-operation between teachers, instructors and support staff in equine studies. In some areas there is a shortage of technicians. Technical support for information technology lessons is adequate. There is a lack of technical support for the provision and development of audio-visual aids. There is insufficient administrative support at the outcentres, especially at key times such as during enrolment periods.

Equipment/learning resources

55 In most curriculum areas there is an appropriate range of specialist tools and equipment. In some instances, however, there are insufficient items of equipment for the number of students in the class. Farm records have been computerised effectively but the absence of a computerised yard management system limits the extent to which the records can be used as an aid in the teaching of equine studies. In animal care there is a limited range of small animals, birds and fish. Cat and dog grooming and care facilities are inadequate.

56 The library is open to students whenever the college is open and at weekends. It is, however, staffed only on weekdays between 09.45 to

15.30 when most students are in class. There is no computerisation of the library stock and students are requested to sign books and materials out. The loss of library stock is high. Informal links between library staff and teachers are good. The range and quantity of texts to support most courses, apart from those in animal care, are good. The library resources at the Radbrook Centre are poor.

57 The number of modern computers for use by students is satisfactory. There are sufficient up-to-date software packages and databases. The number of printers is adequate. Four laptop computers are available for students to borrow. A computer in the student support unit has a speech recognition and a read-back facility. There is a shortage of computers for use by staff. Computer facilities at the Radbrook Centre are inadequate.

58 All classrooms are well equipped with overhead projectors, whiteboards and screens. Students have limited access to video tapes. Appropriate materials are provided to support the teaching of literacy and numeracy in the learning support unit. The college does not have a learning resources strategy. There has been no development or co-ordination of resources to help an increasing number of students to work effectively on their own.

Accommodation

59 The college estate has been well developed to reflect changes in the curriculum and the changing needs of students. It is a valuable resource that is used to demonstrate the practical and commercial aspects of farming. Through links with local farms and industries, students can broaden their experience of agriculture and they can also cover topics which cannot be dealt with on the college estate. The main farm assets are a 130 dairy cow herd, 160 breeding pigs, 200 sheep for lamb production and a small beef enterprise. Livestock are housed in appropriate buildings. The pig housing is in need of modernisation. The farm has an anaerobic digester, funded by a European Union project. It provides students with a working example of an integrated farm waste management scheme which produces electricity and compost for use on the farm. There are good direction signs on the farm. The high speed of traffic on the public road between the college and the farm and equine unit makes the crossing of this road hazardous.

60 There is a wide range of habitats on the estate. The 22 hectares of woodland are used to demonstrate good practice in conservation. Students and visitors make good use of the area. The conservation management plan requires updating. Students process the timber from the estate in the modern workshops. The college is developing the equine facilities to meet changes in the curriculum. The stabling and tack, feed and equipment rooms are good. Both the large indoor school and outside arena are well used for teaching and by outside groups. The animal care unit is housed in a carefully converted agriculture building. The unit provides good

facilities but lacks some accommodation which is needed if all the requirements of the syllabus are to be met. The Radbrook Centre provides a useful range of horticulture facilities and these relate well to commercial practice.

61 Classrooms on the main campus are of a good standard. There are specialist teaching units on the farm for estate management, building and laboratory work. The effective use of display material and students' work in classrooms makes them attractive. The accommodation is clean and tidy. The buildings and grounds are well kept. There is a visitor centre which is accessible to, and has toilets for, people with disabilities. There is a viewing platform in the milking parlour for visitors and students. Access to some parts of the campus is difficult for those with restricted mobility. There is satisfactory residential accommodation for 92 students. The college dining room and the food are of a high standard. All students have access in the evening to good social facilities. There is a useful range of sports facilities, including playing fields, tennis courts, a large indoor sports hall and changing rooms.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

62 The college strengths are:

- the partnerships which it has developed with outside organisations
- the good learning support services
- the commitment and enthusiasm of the staff
- the good provision of specialist facilities, equipment and tools
- the effective development of the estate as a learning resource.

63 The college's weaknesses are:

- its poor quality assurance arrangements
- the poor quality of some of the teaching
- the inadequate planning and development of policies
- the ineffective implementation of cross-college initiatives
- the failure to manage staff workloads effectively.

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)

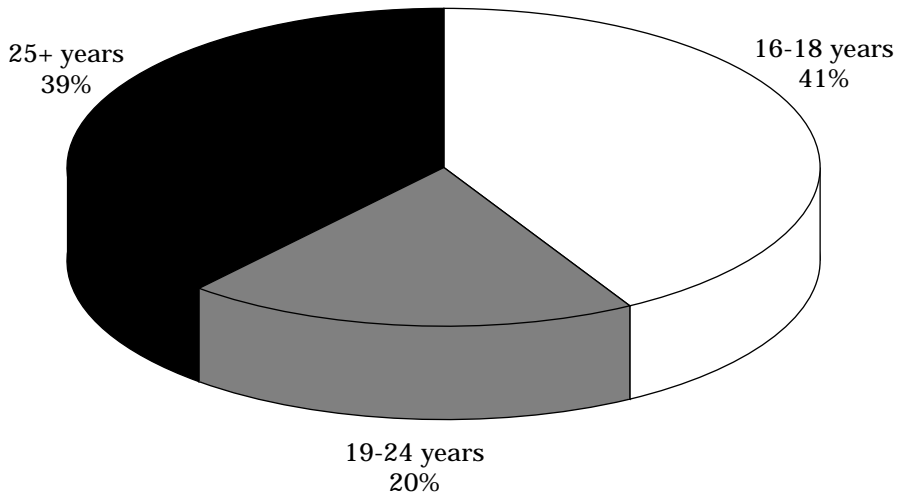
 - 5 Income (for 12 months to July 1996)

 - 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

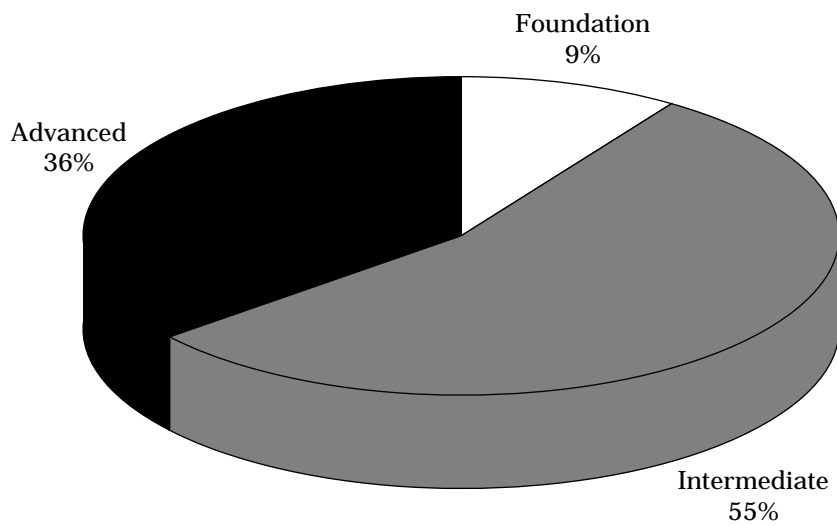
Walford College, Shropshire: percentage student numbers by age (as at November 1996)



Student numbers: 723

Figure 2

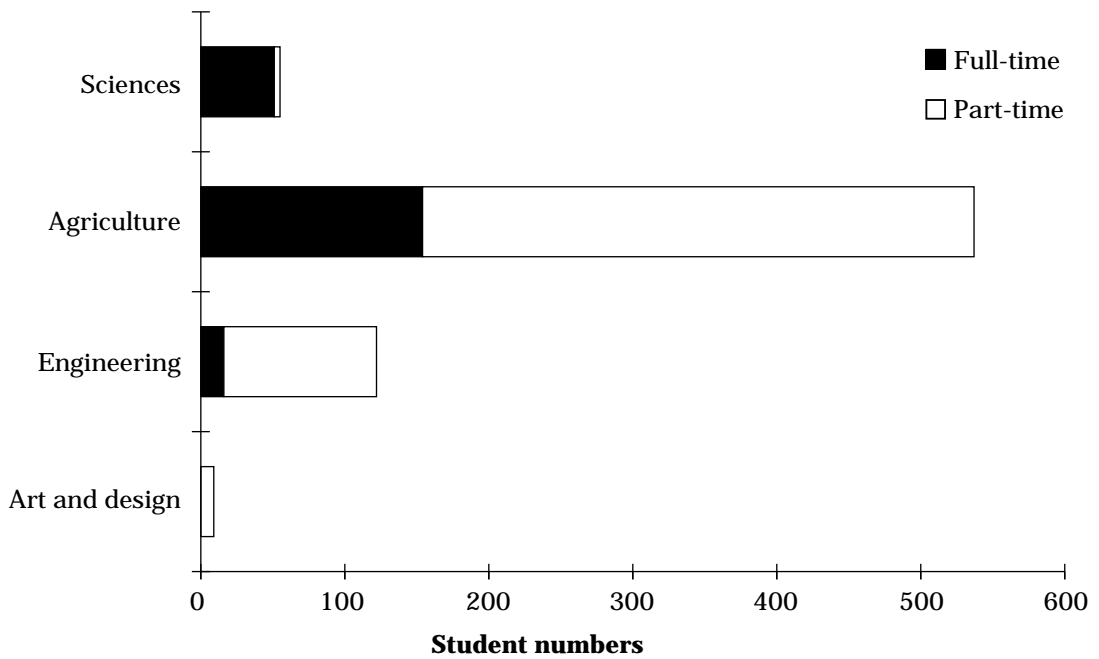
Walford College, Shropshire: percentage student numbers by level of study (as at November 1996)



Student numbers: 723

Figure 3

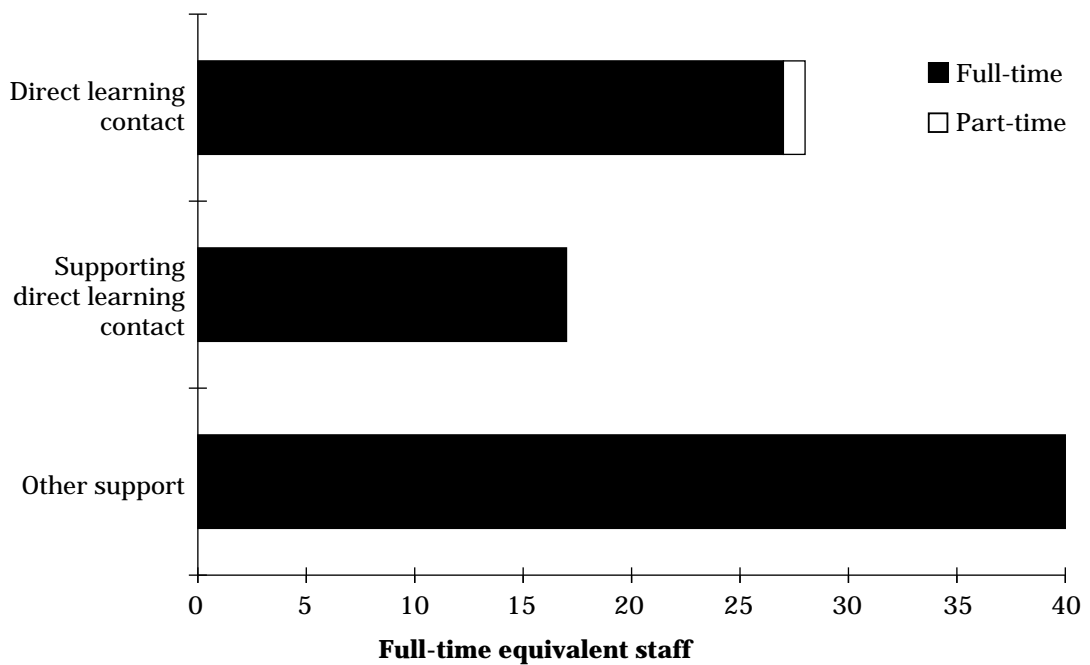
Walford College, Shropshire: student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at November 1996)



Student numbers: 723

Figure 4

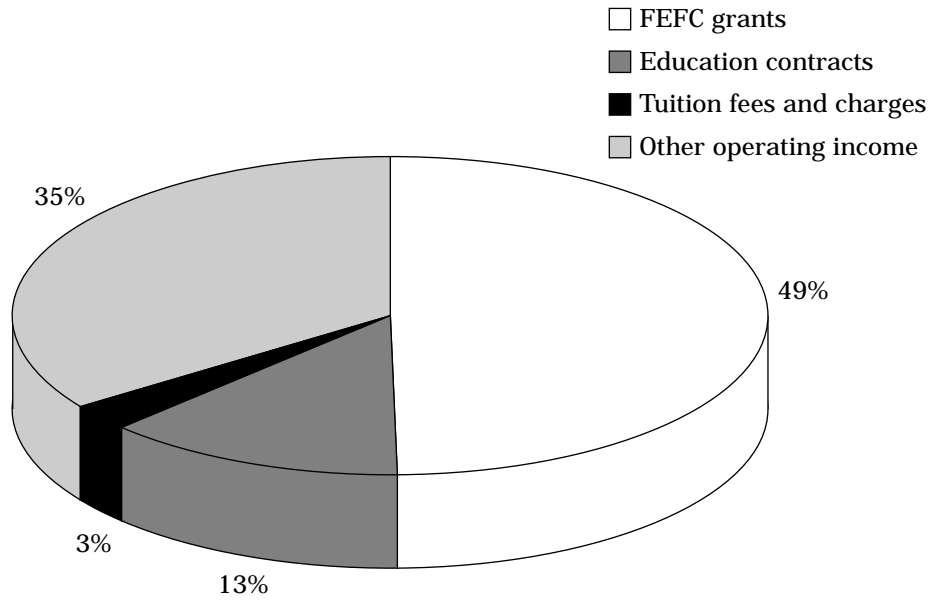
Walford College, Shropshire: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (as as at November 1996)



Full-time equivalent staff: 85

Figure 5

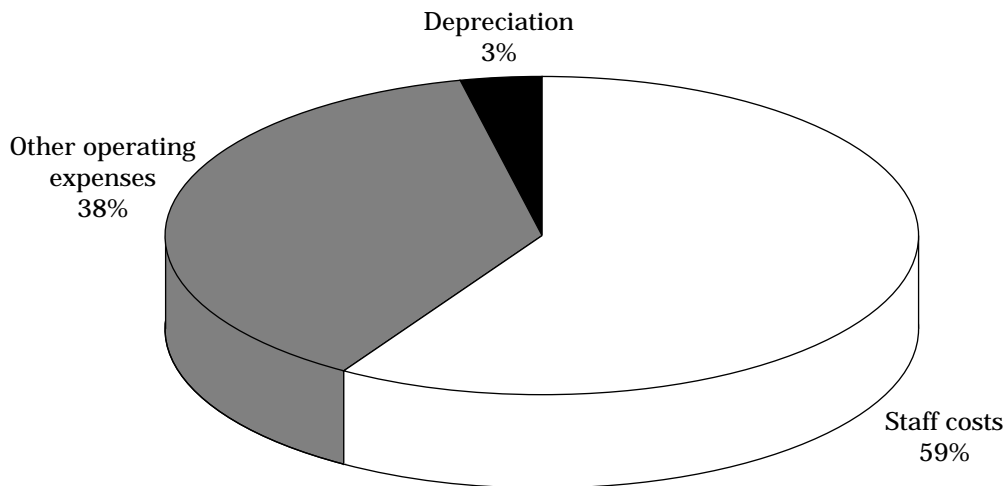
Walford College, Shropshire: income (for 12 months to July 1996)



Income: £2,883,000

Figure 6

Walford College, Shropshire: expenditure (for 12 months to July 1996)



Expenditure: £2,922,000

Published by the
Further Education Funding Council
April 1997