



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE



Office for Standards
in Education

Berkshire College of Agriculture

CONTENTS

[Basic information about the college](#)

[Part A: Summary](#)

[Information about the college](#)

[How effective is the college?](#)

[Quality of provision in curriculum and occupational areas](#)

[How well is the college led and managed?](#)

[To what extent is the college educationally and socially inclusive?](#)

[How well are students and trainees guided and supported?](#)

[Students' views of the college](#)

[Other information](#)

[Part B: The college as a whole](#)

[Summary of grades awarded to teaching and learning by inspectors](#)

[Achievement and standards](#)

[Quality of education and training](#)

[Leadership and management](#)

[Part C: Curriculum and occupational areas](#)

[Animal care](#)

[Equine studies](#)

[Horticulture, countryside and floristry](#)

[Sports studies](#)

[Early years and care](#)

[Part D: College data](#)

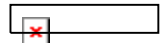
[Table 1: Enrolments by level of study and age 2002/03](#)

[Table 2: Enrolments by curriculum area and age 2002/03](#)

[Table 3: Retention and achievement](#)

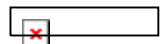
[Table 4: Quality of teaching observed during the inspection by level](#)

Basic information about the college

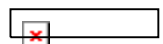


Name of college:	Berkshire College of Agriculture
Type of college:	Specialist land-based further education college
Principal:	Peter Thorn
Address of college:	Hall Place Burchetts Green Maidenhead Berkshire SL6 6QR
Telephone number:	01628 824 444
Fax number:	01628 824 695
Chair of governors:	John Wilder
Unique reference number:	130606
Name of reporting inspector:	Alastair Taylor ALI
Dates of inspection:	29 September - 3 October 2003

Part A: Summary

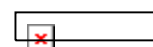


Information about the college



Berkshire College of Agriculture is a specialist land-based further education (FE) college serving the rural and urban areas of Berkshire, Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and West London. In 2002/03, the college enrolled 3,150 students on FE courses. Of these, 19% were students aged 16 to 18. Some 16% were on full-time courses with the remainder on part-time and short courses. The college enrolled 504 full-time and 322 part-time students in September 2003. The college enrolls approximately 2,000 part-time students each year. There are 53 work-based learners, mostly following modern apprenticeships. Vocational courses are offered for young people aged 14 to 16. While maintaining a strong core of land-based work in horticulture, countryside, floristry, animal care and equine studies, the college has extended into specialist areas of education and training, including programmes in sports studies and early years and care, with construction training commencing in 2003. The college manages a small number of commercial activities to support students' learning and training. A major investment programme is underway with a new learning resource centre and improvements to the animal care unit. Residential accommodation is provided for some students. The college is a member of a strategic partnership with Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College, providing progression from vocational programmes to higher education (HE). The college recruits approximately 165 HE students to either full-time or part-time programmes. The college works in partnership with local authorities and community groups to provide a comprehensive annual non-vocational programme and community activities. Overall, the area served by the college is amongst the least deprived in the country, although there are some areas with significantly high levels of deprivation. The high costs of living in the area, and particularly the high housing costs, present the college with difficulties in relation to staff recruitment and selection.

How effective is the college?



Inspectors judged that the provision of the college is good in horticulture, countryside and floristry and in sports studies. It is satisfactory in animal care, equine studies and early years care. Provision for work-based learners in horticulture, countryside and floristry is unsatisfactory. The college's key strengths and areas that should be improved are listed below.

Key strengths

- teaching at levels 1 and 2

- support and guidance for students

- strategies to widen participation in learning

- use of the estate to develop students' occupational skills

- productive working relationships between staff and students

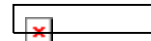
- staff training and development
- students' motivation and attendance
- strategic planning
- partnership and collaboration activities.

What should be improved

- pass rates in some areas
- provision of courses at level 1 and below
- awareness of equality and diversity in staff and students
- achievement for work-based learners
- practical teaching in animal care and equine studies
- arrangements to assure the quality of teaching and learning
- monitoring of performance indicators and targets
- arrangements to teach key skills.

Further aspects of provision requiring improvement are identified in the sections on individual subjects and courses in the full report.

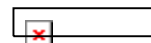
Quality of provision in curriculum and occupational areas



The table below shows overall judgements about provision in subjects and courses that were inspected. Judgements are based primarily on the quality of teaching, training and learning and how well students achieve. Not all subjects and courses were inspected. Inspectors make overall judgements on curriculum areas and on the effectiveness of leadership and management in the range: Outstanding (grade 1), Good (2), Satisfactory (3), Unsatisfactory (4), Very Poor (5).

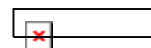
Area	Overall judgements about provision, and comment
Animal care	Satisfactory. Retention and pass rates are high on veterinary nursing and first diploma in animal care courses and pass rates are high on the national diploma in animal care. Key skills pass rates are low. Students are well motivated with good attendance. There are productive and effective links with the veterinary industry and effective integration of work experience.
Equine studies	Satisfactory. Retention and pass rates on full-time courses are high, although pass rates on part-time British Horse Society (BHS) courses and key skills are low. The equine resources and equipment are of a high standard. The curriculum is well-managed and there is strong support for students through an effective tutorial system. Much of the practical teaching is insufficiently challenging.
Horticulture, countryside and floristry	Good. Retention rates are high in 2003. Teaching is effective, with good participation by students, clear progression routes and effective use of a wide range of resources. There is very good support, training and development for staff and initial assessment is used well to plan teaching. Key skills pass rates are low and work-based training achievement is poor.
Sports studies	Good. Pass rates are high. Retention rates are low on some courses and pass rates for key skills are poor. The curriculum is well managed. Stimulating and inspiring teaching motivates students to work at a high standard. Sports facilities are good and there is effective collaboration with other agencies.
Early years and care	Satisfactory. Retention and pass rates on level 2 courses are good. The National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) assessment centre is effective and work-based assessment is good. Teaching is satisfactory except for level 3, where it is undemanding. Students progress from level 1 to level 3 in early years but there is a limited range of other courses and poor arrangements for improving adult recruitment.

How well is the college led and managed?



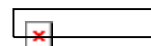
Leadership and management are satisfactory. Steady progress has been made in addressing issues identified in the previous inspection report. Governors and senior managers set a clear strategic direction linked to improvements in students' experience. Communications throughout the college and with partner organisations are good. The college has introduced new quality assurance procedures which have led to improvements since the last inspection. The quality of teaching has improved. However, quality assurance procedures and staff development have had little effect in improving pass rates, which have mostly remained below national averages for the last four years. Curriculum management is mostly good but there are weaknesses in the management and implementation of key skills, information and communications technology (ICT) and work-based provision. Initiatives to raise staff and students' awareness on equal opportunities issues have had little success. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report but considered that some curriculum areas lacked clear judgements. Financial management is satisfactory. The college is aware of the need to grow, increase class size and improve pass rates in order to offer better value for money.

To what extent is the college educationally and socially inclusive?



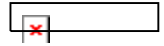
The college's response to educational and social inclusion is satisfactory. A number of successful initiatives have been introduced. More courses have been offered for people who are under-represented in FE. Community-based provision is established at 10 venues and is designed to attract under-represented groups. Students requiring additional learning support are well diagnosed and receive good support to help them improve their literacy and numeracy. Courses in literacy and numeracy are starting to be offered on employers' premises. Approximately 115 young people from 5 local schools attend vocational courses at the college. At 3% of enrolments, the proportion of people from minority ethnic backgrounds is similar to the rural areas of Berkshire and South Oxfordshire but significantly lower than the urban areas of Reading, Windsor and Maidenhead. There is limited access across the campus for people with disabilities. The college has been slow to respond to the requirements of the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Act (SEND) and the Race Relations (Amendment) Act. Policies relating to equality of opportunity have been revised and meet the requirements of relevant legislation. There is incomplete monitoring of student recruitment, retention rates and achievement in relation to equality of opportunity.

How well are students and trainees guided and supported?



Guidance and personal support for full-time and part-time students are good. Effective personal support helps students to settle into college life quickly and make good progress. Students attend tutorials regularly. These are well planned although targets for improvement are not always set. Initial advice and information about courses are comprehensive and help students to choose their courses effectively. Induction is satisfactory and includes effective team-building activities. The diagnosis of individual learning needs is prompt and the results are used to plan teaching strategies and assessment. Students requiring additional learning support are identified early and receive good study skills support. Student contracts and tutorial records work well to record course outcomes and actions arising from tutorials. Insufficient use is made of specific learning targets as part of individual learning plans. Good careers guidance is readily available and includes specialist advice on land-based careers and support for progression including HE.

Students' views of the college



Students' views about the college were taken into account and a summary of their main comments is presented below.

What students like about the college

- friendly and knowledgeable staff

- that they are treated like adults

- the environment and location

- 24-hour access to computers

- the teaching facilities

- specialist resources

- very good social life.

What they feel could be improved

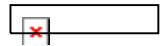
- the proportion and range of practical activities

- course timetabling and room allocations

- prices and quality of food in the refectory

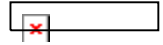
- the number of computers
- transport arrangements to and from the college.

Other information

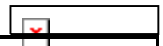


The college inspection report will normally be published 12 working weeks after the formal feedback of the inspection findings to the college. Once published, the college has two months in which to prepare its post-inspection action plan and submit it to the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The college's action plan must show what action the college will take to bring about improvements in response to issues raised in the report. The governors should agree it before it is submitted to the local LSC. The local LSC should send to Ofsted only action plans from colleges that have been judged inadequate or have been awarded a grade 4 or 5 for curriculum provision, work-based learning and/or leadership and management.

Part B: The college as a whole



Summary of grades awarded to teaching and learning by inspectors

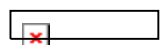


Aspect & learner type	Graded good or better (Grades 1 to 3) %	Graded satisfactory (Grade 4) %	Graded less than satisfactory (Grades 5 to 7) %
Teaching 16-18	61	30	9
19+ and WBL*	69	25	6
Learning 16-18	49	40	11
19+ and WBL*	62	38	0

Key: The range of grades includes: Excellent (Grade 1), Very Good (Grade 2), Good (Grade 3), Satisfactory (Grade 4), Unsatisfactory (Grade 5), Poor (Grade 6) and Very Poor (Grade 7).

**work-based learning*

Achievement and standards



1. Data on retention and pass rates in the academic years ending 2000, 2001 and 2002 are drawn from the individualised student records (ISR) provided through the LSC. For the academic year ending 2003, inspectors used additional data and information from the college to help them make judgements.

2. Overall retention rates during the last four years have been above the national average for specialist land-based colleges. A significant fall in retention at level 1 in 2001 has been arrested and 2002 rates show a good recovery, with an improving trend in 2003. Retention rates are better for students aged 16 to 18 than for adult students. On level 2 courses, retention rates vary from year to year. On level 3 courses, a recent decline has been reversed and rates are now closer to the national average. In 2001, the college faced difficulties as a result of the restrictions put in place to deal with the national foot and mouth disease epidemic which had an adverse effect on recruitment and retention. Overall, pass rates have shown a marked improvement in 2003. Pass rates are high on level 2 and level 3 full-time courses in animal care, equine studies, sports and early years and satisfactory in horticulture, countryside and floristry. On specialist courses, such as veterinary nursing, pass rates are high. On courses with an external examination, such as the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) certificate and diploma, some students choose not to sit the externally set examination and pass rates are low. Few work-based learners undertaking modern apprenticeships complete the full framework.

3. Attendance in the 78 lessons observed during the inspection was 86% overall. This is good, when compared with the average attendance for specialist land-based colleges inspected in 2001/02. Attendance is well above the average in three areas: 91% in equine; 89% in horticulture; 90% in animal care. Sports, leisure and tourism and early years and care are both slightly better than the national average for all colleges. The college's own analysis of attendance shows mostly good levels of attendance for 2002 and 2003. However, both students and teachers are not always punctual for lessons in animal care and horticulture.

4. In all subjects, and particularly in sports and in horticulture, countryside and floristry, students are well motivated, participate fully and achieve good levels of practical skills. Assessment is well designed and helps to develop students' personal and learning skills.

5. However, in animal care and equine studies, students' practical aptitude development is hindered by insufficiently challenging practical duties and large group sizes. Work-based learners develop good work skills and practical aptitude at their place of employment and many hold positions of responsibility. Most placements offer industrial standard facilities and a supportive environment for students undertaking work experience.

6. Key skills pass rates are poor. In 2002/03, all students aged 16 to 18 were encouraged to follow key skills and a total of 747 key skills awards at level 1, 2 and 3 in application of number, communication and information technology (IT) were started. Less than half were entered with the examination board for key skills awards. Including those students who are exempted from the formal key skills test owing to their General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) results, 57% of those who were entered passed the key skills award. The majority of students are entered for key skills at level 2 and approximately two-thirds pass. For key skills in IT, there are 100% pass rates at levels 1 and 3. Pass rates for communication key skills and at level 1 are lower. A significant number of students fail to attend the external key skills test. Achievement of key skills for work-based learners is poor and as a result, few have achieved their full modern apprenticeship. In basic skills, students have individual learning plans which effectively identify areas for development, but there have been no achievements of national qualifications.

16 to 18 year olds

7. Retention rates for students aged 16 to 18 at levels 1 and 2 are consistently high. A fall in retention at level 1 in 2001 has been reversed and 2002 rates show a good recovery, with an improving trend in 2003. Most students aged 16 to 18 are studying at level 2 and, although retention rates vary from year to year, they have been consistently above the national average for specialist

colleges for the four years to 2003. For students aged 16 to 18 following level 3 courses, retention rates declined from above the national average to just below in 2002. This has significantly improved in 2003. Retention rates for work-based learners are mostly satisfactory.

8. Pass rates at level 1 for students aged 16 to 18 have been lower than the national average for the past four years. The very low pass rate in 2001 improved significantly in 2002 and 2003, although it remains below the national average for specialist colleges. At level 2, pass rates for students aged 16 to 18 were well above the national average in 2000. Pass rates declined in 2001 but have since recovered and are now closer to the national average. At level 3, pass rates were above national averages in 2000 and 2001; they fell in 2002 to below the national average and in 2003 recovered slightly. Some work-based learners achieve their NVQ but, for most, progress is slow. The standard of work in portfolios is satisfactory. Few work-based learners go on to achieve keys skills and the modern apprenticeship framework.

9. The prior attainment of students aged 16 to 18 is generally modest, with approximately 20% entering with level 1 qualifications and 50% with qualifications at level 2 in 2002. Of the 69 school leavers joining first diplomas in animal care, equine studies and horticulture in 2003, 5 had left school with 5 or more GCSEs at grade C or better. Many students join a course at the next highest level to their previous course, although others enrol on courses at the same level but in a different vocational area. The colleges' information on progression shows that in all areas of learning, a significant number of first diploma students progress to a national diploma or equivalent level of course at the college.

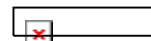
Adult learners

10. Overall, retention rates for adult students for the four years to 2003 is slightly higher than for students aged 16 to 18. At level 3, retention rates are generally well above the national average and steadily improving. A large number of students are recruited on short courses and, for these, retention rates have very high.

11. For adult students at level 2, pass rates are close to the national average and have steadily improved over the last three years. Level 2 pass rates for adult students were lower in 2003, although some students are continuing their learning and are likely to achieve their qualification later. For these students, progress has been slow. In other cases, such as garden design and the Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education (CACHE) diploma, awarding bodies have yet to award certificates. Pass rates at level 3 for adult students were better than the national average in 2000 and 2001. They declined in 2002, although figures for 2003 show that this decline has been reversed. There is much variation in pass rates for students following short courses and the overall rate is below the national average. Many adult students attend only to gain theory and experience, and choose not to sit externally set examinations. A high number of adult students following sports coaching awards are recruited throughout the year and will not complete their qualification until later in the academic year.

12. Provision for adult students following NVQs and other competence-based qualifications is well established in horticulture and early years care. Pass rates are satisfactory, although progress is often slow. Students employed in early years and care make use of an effective NVQ assessment centre. The assessment of NVQs in the workplace is increasing pass rates for early years and care. Floristry students display very good practical aptitude in their work. A specialist competence-based programme for cemetery operatives is successfully raising achievement for a group of adult students. The college works with a range of external agencies to support adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. These students are well supported in their studies and most make significant gains in personal development and gain relevant skills in practical subjects such as horticulture.

Quality of education and training



13. Teaching, learning and attainment were graded by inspectors in 78 lessons. There were significant variations in the quality of teaching across areas of learning. The most effective teaching was seen in horticulture and sport where over 70% of teaching was good or better. In contrast, only 50% of teaching was good or better in equine studies. In early years 60% and in animal care 56% of teaching was good or better. Teaching at levels 1 and 2 is significantly better than at level 3. Teaching was judged to be good or better in 83% of level 1 lessons and 72% of level 2 lessons. However, only 52% of level 3 lessons were good or better. The teaching of adults was slightly better than that of students aged 16 to 18, with 69% of lessons for adults judged to be good or better and 61% of lessons for students aged 16 to 18 good or better. Adults were also judged to learn and attain better in lessons than students aged 16 to 18. Lessons in which teachers combined the teaching of theory with practical activities were generally good or better. Teaching from part-time staff, at 84.6% good, very good or excellent, was better than that from full-time staff, with 57.8% good or better.

14. In Equine studies, lesson plans were good, with well written learning objectives, but planning of lessons was poor in horticulture and animal care. Schemes of work are available for all areas of learning, but many are restricted to lists of content and are insufficiently detailed. Teaching and learning in all areas of learning benefit from the relevant and up-to-date industrial and sector experience of the staff. In horticulture and in sports studies, there is good, well-organised practical teaching. Practical teaching in equine studies is weaker and there is insufficient practical teaching in animal care. Students are well motivated and enthusiastic in their studies and staff and students develop good working relationships. Teaching in horticulture, sport and some early years lessons, is lively and stimulating with effective student participation. ICT is used infrequently for teaching and learning, despite recent staff training. In a few lessons, teaching is dull and uninspiring with teachers failing to challenge students sufficiently and encourage appropriate learning.

15. In basic skills and key skills, teaching and learning are satisfactory with some individual needs very effectively met through one-to-one support. In a few basic skills and key skills lessons, there was little variety in the activities which teachers set students and learning was not effective. Where appropriate, basic skills and key skills are linked with work-place activities. Work-based learners join part-time courses to gain basic knowledge. Many work-based learners receive good on-the-job training, although there is little attempt to co-ordinate this with college activities. For equine studies work-based learners, on-the-job training is well structured.

16. The college is located in a spacious estate with a grade one listed building surrounded by gardens and parkland. There are large and safe riding areas for equine students which are well used. Good use is made of floristry resources with sufficient material to fully occupy all students at all times. While most horticultural facilities are good, some glasshouses are dated and the college has plans for replacements. The animal care unit utilises converted farm buildings, some of which provide a poor teaching environment. The college plans to build new teaching and practical facilities for animal care during 2004. There is a good range of animals. Early years and care classrooms are well resourced and decorated, and have specialised equipment such as 'real care babies' and craft materials. However, there is a shortage of some software related to study skills. There are good indoor and outdoor sports facilities. Good use is made of the resources provided by work placement providers in some curriculum areas. Some classrooms are old and provide a poor learning environment. A recent report identified areas where access for people with restricted mobility is poor. The report also identifies deficiencies in signs and lighting for people with restricted sight. There has been some progress in improving access. The learning resources centre provides inadequate accommodation for current and planned numbers of students. The college has recognised the unsatisfactory conditions. Plans to build a new learning resource centre are at an advanced stage of development. Work-based learners benefit from the good resources of a range of employers. These offer a wide range of commercial activities and industrial-standard learning resources.

17. Most staff are well qualified and experienced in their vocational area. Recent extensive staff development has been provided on topics such as key skills assessment and the development of teaching and learning skills. There are good opportunities for professional development and updating in vocational topics. However, few staff have appropriate qualifications in helping students

with literacy and numeracy problems. Part-time teachers bring valuable current and professional experience to the classroom. Staff turnover is high, at 31% in 2002/03. Some new staff have not yet qualified as assessors or internal verifiers, and the college has had difficulty in ensuring quality of provision, particularly on work-based learning programmes. A small proportion of staff has teaching qualifications: an estimated 68% of full-time and 48% of part-time staff had at least an initial qualification in 2002/03. The college has set a target to achieve 75% of full-time and 55% of part-time staff qualified by 2005/06. Governors have set a target to achieve a 4% reduction in staff turnover in 2003/04 and have put strategies in place, including assistance with residential accommodation.

18. Overall, assessment practice is satisfactory. Thorough planning of assessment on full-time courses includes an appropriate range of assessment methods and meets regulatory body requirements. Students receive suitable assessment schedules for both practical and coursework at the start of their courses. Assessment is included in schemes of work. Clear and relevant assessment briefing sheets include grade criteria which students use effectively. The standard of assessment is satisfactory, with accurate and fair marking. Feedback on some work does not include sufficient advice for students on how to improve their performance. In the previous academic year, the return of work, in line with the college policy of a 10-day return, was unsatisfactory in some programme areas. At the time of inspection, while very little work had been submitted, some had already been returned within deadlines. Assessment results are recorded efficiently and regular progress reviews keep students and parents informed about progress. The setting of academic targets within tutorials is weak and some students are insufficiently challenged to improve their grades. For work-based learners, reviews do not effectively set and monitor specific targets in relation to assessment and progress. Comments in work-based learners' progress reviews are often vague and unhelpful.

49. Initial assessment of students' numeracy and literacy needs assists effective planning of key skills sessions. Initial assessment takes place within the first three weeks of term. The results are used by tutors when they meet with students to agree additional support requirements and preferred learning styles. Vocational initial assessment takes place in equine studies but is not well established in other areas. For NVQs in horticulture, animal care and equine studies, there is insufficient direct observation of students performing tasks, an over-reliance on witness testimony and assessment within the commercial settings of the college, and a lack of supporting evidence such as photographs. Good management of assessment centres for veterinary nurses and for NVQ child care and education improves pass rates and the quality of assessment. Internal verification of both practical and coursework is effective on full-time courses. A cross-college group monitors the implementation of the process and makes improvements to the policy. For work based learners, there is ineffective planning of assessment and poor monitoring of progress. There is an insufficient range of practical evidence in portfolios for animal care and horticulture students.

20. Progression opportunities are good and include full-time, part-time and work-based routes in most curriculum areas. There is a good range of part-time and short courses in animal care and horticulture. Useful additional qualifications, such as coaching and sports leadership, are available for sport students. However, few additional qualifications are available for full-time students in horticulture and, on some courses, practical certificates essential for employment are not available. A level 1 programme in land-based studies started in September 2003. However, there is no sport provision at level 1 and this reduces the attraction of the college to students from a non land-based background. In early years care there is no part-time or modular, flexible provision to facilitate access for adults. However, care provision does include an NVQ assessment centre to enable the skills of employed adults to be accredited by assessment in the workplace.

21. The college has an enrichment programme that includes a good range of competitive sports opportunities. This includes the organisation of a major sports tournament for land based colleges. Sports students run an activity programme for students with learning difficulties from a neighbouring college, and provide an after-school club for children aged 5 to 7. Equine students are actively encouraged to take part in study tours, field trips and competitions at the equine studies centre. The college has a popular film club which helps students relate to diversity issues using films as a starting point for discussion.

22. There is good partnership work with five local schools through the Increased Flexibility Programme. There are 115 Key Stage 4 pupils representing a wide range of ability levels on courses in leisure and recreation, construction, health and social care, and land-based skills. College links with employers are good. A partnership is in place to provide HE at the college. There is a small but useful amount of community provision at 10 sites across the locality. This has been successful in increasing participation by including venues likely to attract under-represented groups of people. A successful partnership with a subcontractor provides a specialist horticultural course for adults with learning difficulties. Another partnership takes basic skills training into the workplace for employees of small to medium-sized enterprises.

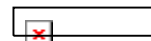
23. There is insufficient awareness and promotion of equality of opportunity. Until recently, few initiatives have been taken to raise awareness on equal opportunities issues. Few images in college publicity materials challenge traditional stereotypes. In July 2003, equal opportunities policies were updated and all staff and governors have received training relating to relevant recent legislation. The college complies with the requirements the Race Relations (Amendment) Act and SENDA. It has a thorough written policy and action plan to promote race equality. The college plans to establish a diversity group to assess and monitor the impact of its policies on students and staff from different racial groups. Although the college records the ethnic origin and gender of its students, it does not examine in sufficient detail their experiences, including retention rates and their achievements. No targets are set for improvement.

24. Guidance and personal support for both full-time and part-time students are good. An annual review of each aspect of student support ensures continuous improvement. Effective personal support helps students to settle into college life quickly and make good progress. Regular group and individual tutorials are well planned and guide students effectively through their courses. Group tutorials are well used to cover a range of social issues such as drug abuse and equal opportunities. Students receive effective help in applying for HE. A college access fund, including bursaries to support the costs of residence both on and off campus, is used effectively to support full-time and part-time students. Requests are dealt with efficiently and a substantial number of students benefit. Subsidised transport and childcare help to widen participation and are well used by students. The student services centre works closely with Connexions and local social services and arranges counselling where necessary. Initial advice and information about courses is comprehensive and informs students' choice of course effectively. Interviews offer objective information on each course and include vocational assessments for equine students. Induction procedures are comprehensive with innovative team building exercises for sports students off site.

25. The diagnosis of individual learning needs is prompt. Study skills staff give useful guidance to vocational staff, who use this and the results of assessment to plan teaching strategies. All full-time students and some part-time groups are given an initial assessment in literacy and numeracy, as well as completing a learning styles questionnaire and a free writing test. Students requiring additional learning support are identified early and receive good study skills support. This includes effective and sensitive one-to-one support encouraging confidence in coping with learning and using a range of specialist resources such as the 'inspirations' programme. Students' contracts and tutorial records work well to document course results and actions. While students who receive additional learning support agree specific learning targets through individual learning plans, insufficient use is made of this process with other students. Poor punctuality on animal care, horticulture and equine studies courses disrupts the start of some lessons and often goes unquestioned by teachers.

26. Careers guidance is readily available and includes specialist advice on land-based careers, an active jobs and work placements file and assistance with HE applications. Approximately a quarter of students within the college progress from level 2 to level 3 courses and there is satisfactory progression to HE. The college's destination analysis shows that only a small proportion of students move directly into employment.

Leadership and management



27. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The principal, governors and senior managers have worked steadily to address the issues identified in the previous inspection report produced by the Further Education Funding Council in September 1999. However, weaknesses in many areas have not been treated with sufficient determination to bring about rapid improvements in students' experience, the quality of teaching and learning and, in particular, students' achievements. Much development work is being completed in 2003 and, although inspectors reported significant improvements, it is too early to judge the full impact for students. Following the last inspection, the college has worked to improve the quality of teaching and learning, low pass rates, clarity of roles for senior managers, poor target setting and monitoring of college performance, and to establish a coherent quality framework. Most of these issues are being addressed successfully.

28. In October 2001 a re-organisation simplified the college's management structure, with responsibilities linked to strategic objectives. Accountabilities are now clear. A new strategic plan was agreed, with key objectives clearly based on improving students' experience and raising success in line with the college's mission. The college's strategic plan promotes improvements in learning and achievement through the setting of high standards and continuous quality improvement. The new strategy and associated staffing structures were introduced in January 2002 to improve areas of poor performance. Improved monitoring has been an effective strategy to help the college achieve the objectives set out in the strategic plan. In 2003, retention rates improved in many curriculum areas and pass rates show some improvement but generally remain below national averages. Enrolment continues to be buoyant and is above target in many curriculum areas.

29. Governors have a clear understanding of the college's strategic plan and support it strongly. They receive progress-monitoring reports twice yearly. They monitor students' performance and progress against agreed targets. Governors have started to challenge managers' reports on students' achievements sufficiently to test the effectiveness of strategies to bring about improvement. The curriculum and standards committee has paid insufficient attention to the quality of education and training provided by the college and the standards achieved by students. In some areas, there are few clear performance indicators to assist the board in assessing the college's progress in improving the quality of its provision and students' achievements.

30. The college's strategic plan sets a clear framework for academic development and resource management. Strategic aims are student-centred and address clear priorities in response to weaknesses identified at the last inspection. Challenging targets for enrolment, retention and pass rates are set. Performance against targets is regularly monitored, but only 4 of the 12 targets were achieved in 2003. Curriculum management is generally good in horticulture, sports studies and equine studies and satisfactory in animal care and early years. There is some inconsistency in the effectiveness of curriculum management. Lesson plans in horticulture lack detail and course files in animal care are incomplete. Poor pass rates in many areas have not been addressed effectively to bring about rapid improvements. Despite improvements, the management and quality assurance of work-based learning provision remains unsatisfactory. Leadership, management and the implementation of arrangements to teach key skills have been poor. This has adversely affected the overall pass rates and the ability of students on work-based learning programmes to achieve the full modern apprenticeship framework. Future plans for the use of ICT in the curriculum are unclear. Management of student guidance and support is good.

31. Communications in the college are generally good. The values and objectives of the college are understood and promoted by staff at all levels. Senior managers are open and consultative. Staff feel well informed through team meetings and briefings and informal arrangements with line managers. The college senior management team comprises the principal, vice-principal and the director of finance. They meet regularly but minutes of meetings are brief, with no action points. The management group, comprising the senior management team, heads of programme and the personnel manager, is the main strategic forum in the college and meets regularly; its meetings are well reported. The academic board is effective. The new curriculum structure comprises three heads of programme and 12 team leaders to provide strategic and curriculum management. Regrouping of programme areas has led to more co-operation, better teamwork and communication in most curriculum areas. However, there have been a considerable number of changes in staffing and some

areas have experienced difficulties in recruiting specialist staff to key positions. This has led to some disruption for students in a few curriculum areas.

32. The college makes good use of questionnaires to improve provision. The vice-principal oversees quality assurance procedures. This includes monitoring the implementation of key processes, to identifying poorly performing courses and managing strategies to improve teaching and students' achievements. Day-to-day operational management is the responsibility of heads of programme and the senior tutor. A quality assurance policy and a range of quality assurance activities include quality audits. Quality assurance and planning are closely linked, but there is no cohesive strategy. The first full cycle of quality assurance arrangements is yet to be fully evaluated through self-assessment. Course reviews include analysis of retention rates and achievement data against targets, but there is no trend analysis or comparison against national averages. Students' attendance is closely monitored. Strategies are in place to improve pass rates. Curriculum teams and support areas prepare self-assessment reports and an operating plan. Self-assessments are combined into an overall report, which is based on the common inspection framework. Curriculum self-assessment reports were mostly accurate but some curriculum areas lacked detail and clear judgements and failed to identify substantial weaknesses. Operational plans are clearly linked to the strategic aims but many objectives are descriptive and lack clear, measurable targets, which makes it difficult to monitor progress and achievement effectively.

33. The college's teaching observation programme is central to its strategy to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Apart from newly appointed teachers, all teachers are observed annually by external consultants. Observations are graded and feedback is focused on improving teachers' performance. Lesson observation and good staff support have been effective in improving the quality of teaching and learning. During the inspection, 63% of lessons were good or better and 9% of lessons were unsatisfactory. This is in line with the national average for colleges of a similar type and well above the level reported at the last inspection. However, there is considerable variation between curriculum areas and college data significantly overestimate the quality of teaching and learning.

34. Appraisal and staff development arrangements are good. The chair and vice-chair of governors appraise the principal, and all three then appraise the vice-principal and director of finance. All other staff are appraised by their managers and have individual action plans with targets. Teaching observation provides information for these appraisals and training opportunities are linked to college objectives and personal aspirations. Despite more staff training, actions taken to remedy low pass rates have been slow in leading to improvements. A 'buddy' system, which assigns teachers into pairs to share good practice and provide support for new teachers, is highly valued by staff. There are good opportunities for teachers to gain or improve their teaching qualifications. However, owing to its recent expansion, the college employs a large number of full-time and part-time staff who do not possess teaching qualifications. The quality of the teaching of full-time staff was not as good as that of part-time staff.

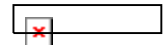
35. The college has developed a range of successful partnerships and collaborations. In partnership with the local education authority (LEA), the college provides vocational pathway programmes for over 115 students aged 14 to 16 in a number of curriculum areas. Strong links have been developed with a local college of HE and a consortium of FE colleges to widen participation in the area. Collaborative partnerships have helped the college to develop new relationships within the community. Partnerships with local health and welfare professionals have resulted in successful courses for young mothers. The college works closely with local community groups, particularly in the more deprived areas. European computer driving licence (ECDL) courses have been provided for the local Sikh community. An adult education programme is provided in conjunction with the LEA. Effective industry links enhance students' experience in most curriculum areas.

36. There is insufficient awareness of equality of opportunity although the college has made good progress in the widening of participation. Until recently, no group has had oversight of equality issues and few initiatives have been taken to raise staff and students' awareness on equal opportunities issues. Few images in college publicity materials challenge traditional stereotypes. In July 2003, equal opportunities policies were updated and all staff and governors have received equality of opportunity training and attended awareness training. The college complies with the

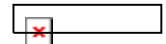
requirements of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act and the SENDA. It has policies relating to harassment and bullying, a thorough written policy to promote race equality and an action plan which identifies clear action points and time scales. A physical access audit of the campus has been undertaken. The college plans to establish a diversity group to assess and monitor the impact of the policies on students and staff from different racial groups. The college is broadening its database to monitor the recruitment and career progression of staff. Although the college records the ethnic origin and gender of its students, it does not examine in sufficient detail the experiences and achievements of different groups of students in the college. Equal opportunities matters are reported to governors through the curriculum and standards committee. These reports contain insufficient information to allow effective analysis of performance and contain no targets for improvement.

37. Management information systems have improved since the last inspection. Information is accurate and readily available. Use of information for planning purposes is increasing and most curriculum areas use the data systematically to monitor performance. The college has had several changes of director of finance in the past two years. Financial reporting to senior managers and governors is satisfactory. The college has had operating deficits for the last three years and cash flow restricts investment in the curriculum. Following clearance of the deficits, the college is anticipating that it will have sufficient funds to meet capital and revenue priorities such as a new learning resource centre. The estate and horticultural and equine studies resources are well used to improve teaching and learning. Financial management is satisfactory. The college is aware of the need to grow, increase class size and improve pass rates in order to offer better value for money.

Part C: Curriculum and occupational areas



Animal care



Overall provision in this area is **satisfactory (grade 3)**

Strengths

- high retention and pass rates on veterinary nursing courses

- high pass rates on first and national diplomas in animal care

- well-motivated students

- effective use of work experience to promote learning

- productive and effective links with the veterinary industry.

Weaknesses

- low pass rates for key skills

- insufficient practical teaching on animal care courses

- some poor teaching environments in the animal care unit

- poor punctuality on most courses.

Scope of provision

38. The college offers full-time courses in animal care, including a first diploma and a national certificate at level 2 and a national diploma at level 3. There are 166 students enrolled on these three courses, of whom 150 are aged 16 to 18. Progression routes to HE are available at the college. There is no full-time animal care course provision at level 1, although seven students are enrolled on a foundation certificate which includes an animal care option. Part-time courses include NVQ animal care at levels 1 and 2; of the nine students enrolled on the NVQ courses, six are work-based learners. Veterinary nursing courses include the animal nursing assistant award at level 2 and the NVQ in veterinary nursing at levels 2 and 3. These courses are offered on a part-time day release, a block release and a full-time basis. There are 27 students enrolled on the day-release courses, of whom 8 are aged 16 to 18. There is a range of short courses in animal care and veterinary nursing leading to college awards.

Achievement and standards

Retention and pass rates on veterinary nursing courses and the first diploma in animal care are high. Pass rates are also high on the national diploma in animal care. Pass rates on the national certificate in animal care and retention rates on the national diploma in animal care fell in 2002/03, to below the national average. Key skills pass rates are low, as students fail to complete portfolio work. Modern apprenticeship pass rates are low. Of the 33 work-based learners who have started since 1998, 11 achieved their NVQ, and 8 achieved the full framework. Students are not given the opportunity to take any additional qualifications. A few students have progressed from the pathways entry level course to complete courses successfully at levels 2 and 3. Students are well motivated, with high attendance rates. This exceeded 90% during the inspection. However, in the majority of lessons, some students arrive late and are not sufficiently questioned by teachers.

A sample of retention and pass rates in animal care, 2001 to 2003

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
First diploma in animal care	2	No. of starts	55	40	33
		% retention	89	95	97
		% pass rate	88	95	91

NVQ veterinary nursing	2	No. of starts	52	22	26
		% retention	96	91	77
		% pass rate	82	65	80
National certificate in animal care	2	No. of starts	20	21	31
		% retention	85	95	84
		% pass rate	88	85	69*
Pre-veterinary nursing / animal nursing assistant	2	No. of starts	23	**	17
		% retention	100	**	88
		% pass rate	78	**	60
National diploma in animal care	3	No. of starts	50	48	53
		% retention	74	81	66
		% pass rate	97	85	97
NVQ veterinary nursing (short)	3	No. of starts	34	23	**
		% retention	100	100	**
		% pass rate	53	78	**

Source: ISR (2001 and 2002), college (2003)

*some students have not yet completed

** fewer than 15 starters enrolled

Quality of education and training

39. Overall, teaching is satisfactory. In the best lessons, teachers use a variety of appropriate methods to maintain students' involvement and check that learning is taking place. In one class, a teacher effectively reinforced learning from a previous session by getting students working in groups to select items from a collection of tights, tubes, bottles and other materials to create a representation of the female reproductive system and adjacent organs. Each group then had to describe their model and explain the function of each part. There is good incorporation of key skills into vocational teaching. Some lessons are uninspiring and undemanding. In these lessons, teachers fail to direct questions at individual students to ensure that they understand the work or to involve the whole class in discussions. They do not vary the activities they set sufficiently and rely too much on note taking. A few lessons are poorly organised and managed. Practical classes involve groups of up to 15 students. This makes it difficult for students to obtain sufficient hands-on experience with livestock to develop competence. Work experience is effectively integrated into courses. It is used on both first and national diploma courses to reinforce key skills as well as developing practical competence. There is little use of ICT for teaching or learning in the classroom.

40. Staff have sufficient appropriate vocational qualifications and recent industrial experience to teach the full range of courses. Many of the teaching staff are relatively new to teaching and are undergoing in-service teacher training. They work well together as a coherent team. There is a poor teaching environment in some parts of the animal care unit. Plans have been approved to build a new animal care teaching and practical unit on the site in 2004. There is a wide range of animals in the unit, although there are insufficient animals in some cases, relative to student numbers. The health and well-being of the animals is good, in spite of some poor accommodation, with monthly monitoring visits from a zoo veterinary surgeon.

41. Annual assessment schedules are produced for students at the start of each course. These are well planned and rigorously followed. Students' written work is at an appropriate level. Assessment on full-time courses follows examination board criteria and applies appropriate standards. Feedback is good in some assessments; in others it is brief and fails to indicate how students could improve

their performance. There is over-reliance on witness testimonies in NVQ animal care portfolios, with insufficient diverse evidence and work-based observation used to assess practical competence. There are too few qualified assessors for work-based learners.

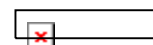
42. There are good opportunities for animal care and veterinary nursing students to progress within the college from level 2 to level 3 and to HE. In 2003, 56% of first diploma students progressed to the national diploma. A good range of part-time and short courses is offered for the general public or matched to specific industrial needs. Links with industry are particularly strong in veterinary nursing and have improved in animal care in recent years. The college is approved by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons as a veterinary nursing assessment centre and leads a group of twelve veterinary practices providing assessment for the veterinary nursing NVQ. They meet twice a year to review and monitor provision. Links with schools have been developed and fourteen Year 10 pupils from five local schools attend one day a week on an entry level course.

43. There is good initial diagnosis of literacy and numeracy needs and learning styles. The test results are analysed and passed on to teachers and support services rapidly. They are used to establish whether students need learning support. Information on learning styles is used by tutors to help students with their studies and by some teachers in their lesson planning. There is insufficient initial assessment of vocational competence. Support for individual students is good, particularly in tutorials. There is a lack of effective target setting and monitoring of progress against a learning plan in tutorials. Day-release veterinary nursing students receive a similar level of tutorial support to that offered to full-time students. Work-based learners receive satisfactory progress reviews from monitoring officers, although these do not set measurable targets.

Leadership and management

44. Leadership and management within animal care are satisfactory. The small enthusiastic staff team work well together. There are fortnightly meetings of the animal care and veterinary nursing team which discuss all aspects of provision, with good use of action planning and monitoring of outcomes. The course review process leads to the production of a self-assessment report for each course. This makes effective use of information from course team meetings at the end of each semester (following meetings between course tutors and student representatives) together with information from student surveys. The veterinary nursing assessment centre group makes a good contribution to veterinary nursing course reviews but there is no formal industrial input into animal care course reviews. The structured self-assessment reports are comprehensive but the ones for the national diploma and national certificate in animal care failed to effectively identify and deal with the reasons for the low retention and pass rates in 2003. Course files vary considerably in content and most do not meet the requirements set out in the college checklist. Resources are deployed efficiently, with large average class sizes.

Equine studies



Overall provision in this area is **satisfactory (grade 3)**

Strengths

- high retention and pass rates on full-time courses

- good equine studies resources

- effective team work to co-ordinate the equine studies curriculum

- strong support for students through tutorials.

Weaknesses

- low pass rates on part-time BHS courses

- low pass rates for key skills

- insufficiently challenging practical teaching and yard duties.

Scope of provision

45. The college offers full-time, part-time and work-based courses in equine studies. Full-time courses lead to a first certificate and a first diploma in horse care, a national diploma in horse management, and an advanced national certificate in equine business management. BHS awards are offered on a part-time and short-course basis and as additional qualifications for full-time students. Most of the 64 students on full-time courses are aged 16 to 18. There are four work-based learners following foundation and advanced modern apprenticeships. Students progress within FE, to advanced modern apprenticeships and or to HE courses at the college. In the last year, 21% of full-time students progressed to the next highest course level and one national diploma student progressed to HE.

Achievement and standards

Retention and pass rates on the first certificate, first diploma and national diploma courses are high. In 2002, retention and pass rates on the first diploma were 100%. This has declined slightly in 2003, but pass rates are still high. Most students are recruited to the national diploma in horse care, and retention and pass rates have improved in 2003. On the national diploma, retention rates improved from 63% in 2001 to 95% in 2003. The pass rate increased to 100% in 2003. Pass rates on BHS part-time courses are low. Key skills pass rates are low. Work-based learners are not set sufficiently demanding targets and few achieve the NVQ. Some work-based learners take additional industry-specific qualifications such as BHS stage 1 and 2 examinations. The standard of students' written work demonstrates good understanding of their subject. Practical work on the college's equine unit do not challenge students sufficiently to work at industrial standards. At 91%, there is good attendance on all courses. Attendance at key skills lessons is poor. Students do not arrive punctually for some lessons. All students benefit from their participation in enrichment activities. Students are enthusiastic about their studies and have developed good working relationships with the teaching and equine studies yard staff.

A sample of retention and pass rates in equine studies, 2001 to 2003

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
---------------	-------	------------------	------	------	------

National diploma in horse management	3	No. of starts	35	*	19
		% retention	63	*	95
		% pass rate	95	*	100

Source: ISR (2001 and 2002), college (2003)

* fewer than 15 students enrolled

Quality of education and training

46. Overall, teaching is satisfactory. Students benefit from well-structured courses. Most lessons adequately cover the required subject. There is insufficient variety of teaching methods in theory lessons. Students are well-motivated but a few are disruptive, which disadvantages others. In one theory lesson, there was little attempt to cater for students' individual learning styles. There is very good promotion of health and safety in all practical riding sessions and equine yard duties. Teaching of practical riding is poor; the more capable students are not sufficiently challenged to reach their full potential. Where, because of illness, injury or lateness, students are required to observe lessons, arrangements to include them in the learning are inadequate. All full-time students perform equine yard duties. These are, however, unrealistic due to the excessive group sizes and are quite undemanding. In practical and theory lessons, teachers fail to use questioning techniques which question every student. Teaching of key skills in IT is good where groups are small, but when groups are large it is poor. On-the-job training and practical skills development for work-based learners are good.

47. There are satisfactory staff numbers to manage the equine studies centre and courses. Teachers have relevant industrial experience and are appropriately qualified. All equine studies teachers either hold, or are working towards, a formal teaching qualification. Staff development is supported and encouraged by the college. The equine studies centre is well equipped and includes a large indoor arena, an outdoor exercise area, 52 stables and an appropriate range of horses and yard equipment. Horses for training students are at college on a working livery basis, and are suitable for all types of learner. Students have the option to bring their own horse.

48. There is good planning of assessment for students on full-time courses. Assignment briefs are well designed, clearly written and make good use of on-site equine studies resources. Assessment portfolios for full-time students and for work-based learners are of a satisfactory standard. Assessment activities and assignments are verified before they are set. A sample of assessed work is verified after it has been marked. Assessed work is returned promptly but contains little feedback to help students improve their performance. There is insufficient use of equine yard duties to gather assessment evidence. Students understand that key skills are an integral part of their course. The assessment of key skills is well integrated with assignments and is equine-related. Parents of students aged 16 to 18 are given regular progress reports. The assessment practices of work-based assessors are satisfactory, but the assessors receive little feedback to help them improve.

49. There is a good range of provision in equine studies. Recruitment on some courses is poor. 'Taster' days are arranged within the college to encourage prospective students. Work placements provide work-based learners with good training opportunities. Students are actively encouraged to participate in enrichment activities such as study tours, field trips and competitions at the equine studies centre. Students benefit from a good range of talks from guest lecturers and visiting speakers. Students' learning and personal skills development is enhanced when equine studies facilities are hired out for commercial activities such as competitions and when students have opportunities to work with outside organisations such as the riding for the disabled association.

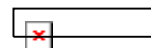
50. Students receive good initial guidance from vocational staff to help them choose the correct course. All students are interviewed and receive a riding assessment before commencing their course. There is good additional learning support for students in relation to literacy and numeracy needs. Students receive effective support and guidance. There is an effective induction plan, which enables students to settle into their course quickly. Courses are flexible and designed to meet

individual needs. Tutorials are used to monitor students' progress and mutually agreed action plans are drawn up. Students can obtain equine-specific careers advice from FE and HE staff as well as the college careers adviser. There is good support for residential students from an effective team of college wardens. Work-based learners are well supported by their supervisors and assessors.

Leadership and management

51. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The equine studies team works effectively to co-ordinate the equine studies curriculum. The team is new to the college and is currently reviewing course management procedures. There are regular staff meetings. Communication within the team is good. Minutes of team meetings are satisfactory but do not follow a standard agenda. Staff contribute effectively to self-assessment. Staff receive appraisal but do not fully understand the process. New staff are well-supported in their teaching. Management of equine yard duties to develop students' learning is poor. Links with work placement employers are good but the industrial liaison advisory group has not met for two years. The lesson observation strategy lacks rigour. The equine studies section of the college prospectus shows only photographs of females and currently there is only one male on a full-time equine studies course. Staff awareness of equality and diversity issues is limited. Resources are used efficiently.

Horticulture, countryside and floristry



Overall provision in this area is **good (grade 2)**

Work-based learning in this area is **unsatisfactory (grade 4)**

Strengths

- high retention rates in 2002/03

- wide range of practical resources

- effective teaching with good student participation

- good use of initial assessment to plan teaching

- very good support and training for staff

- wide range of provision with clear progression routes.

Weaknesses

- low key skills pass rates
- poor achievement of qualifications by work-based learners
- insufficient technician support.

Scope of provision

52. There are 93 full-time and 302 part-time students following courses in horticulture, countryside, floristry and horticultural machinery service engineering. Half of the full-time students and 9% of the part-time students are aged 16 to 18. There are 60 full-time and 246 part-time horticulture students, 21 full-time countryside students, 12 full-time and 40 part-time floristry students and 4 part-time students following horticulture machinery service engineering. Full-time courses include first diplomas in countryside studies and horticulture and national certificates in floristry, horticulture and sportsturf, and green keeping. There are national diplomas in countryside studies and horticulture and an advanced national certificate in floristry. Part-time courses range from a level 1 practical skills certificate to advanced national certificate and higher national certificate courses. NVQ courses are available from level 1 to level 3. There are 34 work-based learners, of whom the majority are foundation modern apprentices; this is approximately 9% of the overall student number. Work-based learners join NVQ courses on a part-time basis to gain basic knowledge.

Achievement and standards

Retention rates are high, particularly for the year 2003. In 2003, pass rates are satisfactory for students aged 16 to 18 and good for adult students. There are good pass rates on RHS examinations. Pass rates on some part-time courses are low, as students choose not to take the external assessments. Some work-based learners pass their NVQ but the very poor key skills pass rate means that these students are not achieving their full apprenticeship. Key skill pass rates are low on all courses. Teaching builds well on previous learning, with many lessons emphasising previous attainment before moving forward. Students acquire a good standard of practical skills. The standard of work in floristry is particularly high. Work-based learners benefit from good work placements which provide a wide variety of opportunities to develop competence and gain employment skills.

A sample of retention and pass rates in horticulture, countryside and floristry, 2001 to 2003

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
City and Guilds 7802 creative skills in floristry	2	No. of starts	*	16	33
		% retention	*	100	94
		% pass rate	*	94	97
RHS general examination	2	No. of starts	29	26	28
		% retention	100	100	100
		% pass rate	76	88	61

National diploma in horticulture	3	No. of starts	*	16	18
		% retention	*	69	78
		% pass rate	*	73	67

Source: ISR (2001 and 2002), college (2003)

* fewer than 15 students enrolled

Quality of education and training

53. Teaching is effective and most students participate well. Students are well motivated and teachers use this to set high standards and help students to make good progress. In many lessons, teachers use a wide range of teaching methods including discussion, visual presentations, individual and group work. In one lesson on employment law for countryside students, the subject was enlivened by an enthusiastic teacher who used a variety of methods. The commercial-standard floristry work is displayed in the college's main reception area and around the college. In most lessons, learning and attainment are good. Practical teaching is good. Experienced adult students following the cemetery operatives training scheme are well motivated and inspired to improve their performance through lively and enthusiastic teaching. However, many lesson plans are not sufficiently detailed and do not specify measurable learning objectives. On a few courses, students are not punctual to lessons. Measures to improve key skills pass rates include better integration with vocational subjects and relevant teaching sessions prior to key skill tests.

54. Effective use is made of the college's good horticultural resources. The college grounds are well stocked and contain a wide range of plant material that is used regularly by classes and individual students to improve plant knowledge. Floristry students benefit from spacious and well-equipped classrooms. Students make effective use of a wide range of floristry materials. Staff have good vocational qualifications and industrial experience. However, there is insufficient technician support to ensure that all practicals are prepared on time and to maintain plant stock in prime condition.

55. Assessment is satisfactory. Students' work is assessed to an appropriate standard. Feedback to students is good and helps them to improve their performance. Overall, internal verification is satisfactory. Some portfolios are not verified until they have been completed and assessment errors are not identified. There is a wide range of evidence in floristry portfolios. Most portfolios contain satisfactory evidence and students understand the process of compilation and the components included. However, the majority of evidence in work-based learners' portfolios is generated at college and there is very little work-based evidence. Little use is made of diverse sources of evidence such as witness testimony or photographs. Key skills are insufficiently linked to the teaching of vocational topics, and progress in key skills frequently lags behind that being made towards achievement of the NVQ. Tutorials are held regularly. These effectively support students' vocational and personal needs. However, few targets are set at reviews.

56. There are good progression routes from level 1 through to HE either at the college or at other HE institutions. In 2003, over 53% of first diploma students progressed to the national diploma. Programmes all have effective industrial liaison groups to ensure that they meet industrial standards, and some short courses, for example, the cemetery operatives courses, are specifically designed to meet industry requirements. Students are also able to gain a small range of additional qualifications. There is insufficient provision for industrial-standard competence certificates, such as chainsaw operation and maintenance.

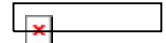
57. There is good initial assessment. Staff receive copies of the initial assessment and the results are used effectively to plan teaching methods and individual students' requirements. In one case, coloured paper was used for all handouts to help dyslexic students in the group. Guidance at interviews is good. All interviews are carried out by vocational tutors to ensure good occupational advice. Students with identified needs are referred to the learning support unit where good support is given. Hearing impaired students are well supported by a signer in all sessions. The signers are provided with an outline of the lesson to ensure maximum assistance is given to the student. The

tutorial system is effective in identifying and dealing with students' individual and personal needs.

Leadership and management

58. Overall, leadership and management are good. There has been a high turnover of staff in this area and procedures aimed at improving the management of the area have been introduced. A new management structure for work-based learning has been put in place, aimed at improving achievement in key skills. There are regular team meetings and communication is good. Part-time staff are included in all communications. Signers are well supported by the college. There is a good mentoring and work shadowing system to support new staff. A wide range of staff development opportunities is available for all staff. New staff are enrolled on a teaching qualification course within their first year. Technical updating courses are made available whenever possible. Resources in the area are well used. Inspectors agreed with the judgements in the area self-assessment which is being used as the basis for the area operational statements and development plan. There is insufficient on-going reinforcement of equal opportunities in lessons and tutorials. Timetable changes are not always communicated to students.

Sports studies



Overall provision in this area is **good (grade 2)**

Strengths

- high pass rates

- stimulating and inspiring teaching

- motivated and enthusiastic students

- good sports facilities

- effective collaboration within the community

- well-managed curriculum.

Weaknesses

- low retention rates on first diploma and soccer coaching courses

- poor professional standards in some practical lessons

- poor key skills pass rates.

Scope of provision

59. The college offers full-time courses for 83 students. There are 31 students following the first diploma in sports studies and 50 following the two-year national diploma in sports studies. The majority of full-time students are aged 16 to 18. There has been a rapid expansion of student numbers over the past three years, with a 20% growth in 2003. Courses focus on the outdoors and provide internal progression from levels 2 to 4. Some 13 students are following a higher national diploma in sports industry management. At the time of inspection, two students were completing an Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE) programme which ceased recruiting in 2003. Five part-time students are following an NVQ course in sports and allied operations. Students undertake work experience, take additional coaching and sports leadership qualifications and take part in competitive sports activities. Some 29 students aged 14 to 16 follow a GCSE programme in leisure and recreation. The college has a contractual partnership with a local organisation to provide soccer coaching courses. This programme successfully recruited 437 adult students from 1999 to 2002.

Achievement and standards

60. Overall, pass rates for full-time students are high and improving. In 2002, pass rates on the first diploma and AVCE courses both exceeded national averages. The retention rate is poor on the first diploma, with only 62% completing the course. At 93%, attendance is good. Students are well motivated and engage willingly in class and group activity. Students are punctual. Assessed work is of a high standard and attainment is at a satisfactory level. The practical skills of most students are good. Of students completing the national diploma in 2003, 64% progressed to HE. Students' performance on Football Association coaching courses is satisfactory. Between 1999 and 2002, 69% of students completed the programme, and 78% of coaching licence students and 90% of coaching certificate students who remained on programme achieved the full qualification. Key skills pass rates are poor. Recent changes have been made to better integrate key skills with sports studies. Students' work in the community is effective in reinforcing coaching and leadership skills.

Quality of education and training

61. Most teaching is good or better. Teachers are motivated and enthusiastic. Some demonstrate outstanding teaching abilities. Most lessons provide students with stimulating and challenging learning opportunities. In the best lessons, teachers include a variety of tasks, maintain a good pace of learning and effectively include all students in the work. Students are encouraged to perform to the best of their ability by teachers who consistently develop and consolidate students' understanding through enjoyable activities. Students are regularly made to recount the learning points. In one lesson, students gave a lucid account of ways in which the use of clear, concise and helpful rules is crucial to the maintenance of health and safety in a sports environment. In another lesson that looked at barriers to participation in sport, gender and disability issues were covered well. Some lessons are less demanding and teachers do not consolidate students' learning or ensure that all students are involved in the work. The lack of structure in the way weights training is organised reduces the opportunities for continuity and progression.

62. Full-time teachers are well qualified. They have qualifications in sports studies, and demonstrate varied expertise and good levels of current industrial expertise. Four teachers are undertaking

teacher training. Indoor and outdoor sports facilities are good. There is a well-equipped sports hall and weights room. Outdoor facilities include an all-weather netball and tennis facility and soccer, rugby and hockey pitches. Students also have access to canoeing and climbing facilities. Classrooms are adequate but some are too small for the size of classes and restrict learning.

63. Assignment briefs are clear. They outline learning objectives, clarify tasks to be completed confirm the assessment criteria and list the grading specifications. Students find these briefs helpful and value tutor comments and feedback. Most assessment is thorough and student achievements have improved within a revised assessment regime. Students' work in class is satisfactory and often better. Teachers effectively help students to progress through discussion, debate and practical activity. There is good use of assessment to develop students' ability to understand, analyse and use information appropriately. In a sports leadership lesson, students were introduced to aspects of planning and invited to prepare a short practical activity for ageing clients. Perceptive evaluation by the teacher and fellow students soon highlighted the weakness in the planning. In other lessons, the pace of assessment and teachers' expectations of students are less demanding. In these lessons, students are not clear about the objectives and lower standards are achieved. Students' progress is monitored at tutorials and discussed at staff meetings. Individual targets and completion dates are agreed with students and progress monitored. Significant concerns are taken to staff meetings, action plans are agreed and, where necessary, parents are contacted.

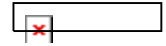
64. There are good progression opportunities from levels 2 to 4. Recent curriculum change has increased the practical content of full-time courses. There is a lack of provision at level 1. Students gain improved skills for employment through a well-managed work experience programme. Students have good opportunities to take additional coaching and sports leadership qualifications throughout their course. Students benefit from the provision of a wide range of competitive sports opportunities in the college's enrichment programme. The college's reputation in the community is good. Sports students work with local schools and colleges to perfect their coaching and leadership skills. The college runs a thriving activity programme for students from a neighbouring college and provides an after school club for children aged 5 to 7. Students stage an annual sports tournament for agricultural colleges across the country.

65. Students are allocated to tutor groups at enrolment. Induction programmes are well planned and operate within subject areas. In the sports area, all new students and staff attend a two-day team-building camp during the first week of term. This is effective in helping them to settle into college life. All students undertake initial assessment and receive individual learning support where necessary. Tutorials are regular and are used effectively to discuss progress, agree performance targets, address support issues and deal with educational or personal matters, as necessary. Tutors also provide helpful guidance on work experience, HE progression and careers guidance. Students who consistently miss deadlines or fail to meet the college's expectations are put on report and action taken. There is good support for students with dyslexia.

Leadership and management

66. The sports team is well managed. Priorities are communicated to staff at weekly meetings which discuss assessment and verification practices, monitor students' performance and discipline, discuss cross-college initiatives such as key skills and enrichment, and conduct risk assessment. Targets are set and performance is measured against known benchmarks. Evidence from student surveys is used to plan curriculum development. Sports staff complete annual course team reviews and these are put to good use in the programme area review and college self-assessment report. Annual performance targets are set and progress is monitored. Actions emerging from self-assessment are systematically addressed and changes to practice implemented. Teachers value teacher observation. Observation is by both external assessor and as part of internal peer review by fellow teachers. Teachers also have an annual appraisal which highlights staff development needs. The strategy to promote equality of opportunity is inconsistent. Gender issues are dealt with randomly and they are not regularly included in schemes of work. Quality assurance for the soccer coaching programme is weak.

Early years and care



Overall provision in this area is **satisfactory (grade 3)**

Strengths

- high retention and pass rates on the CACHE certificate
- effective NVQ assessment practices
- stimulating and effective teaching at levels 1 and 2
- well-managed NVQ assessment centre.

Weaknesses

- narrow range of course provision
- poor key skills pass rates
- insufficient variety and challenge in teaching at level 3.

Scope of provision

67. The college offers courses in early years at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels. There are 91 full-time and 11 part-time students following CACHE courses in childcare and education. NVQs in childcare and education are offered at levels 2 and 3. All full-time students are aged 16 to 18. There are 57 work-based candidates working towards these qualifications. There are six students on the recently introduced NVQ in playwork and six students are following a higher national certificate in early years. Collaboration with local schools provides 25 young people aged 14 to 16 with an introduction to health and social care. The college has established productive working partnerships with nurseries, schools and employers. There are six work-based learners, three of whom are following a modern apprenticeship.

Achievement and standards

Pass rates are satisfactory at all levels. Students achieve well on the recently introduced foundation

course and out of the 12 who started in 2003, 11 passed. Retention and pass rates for the first diploma are high: 100% in 2001 and 2002. The CACHE certificate replaced the first diploma in 2002 and, at 85%, the pass rate is high. Retention and pass rates are lower on the two-year CACHE diploma. Progression is satisfactory, with approximately 33% of students on the certificate courses progressing to the diploma. An increasing number of students are studying for NVQs; 22 students are enrolled at level 3 and 73% of them are currently continuing with their qualification. Work-based learners gain skills and experience from the commercial requirements of their employer. Work-based learners take part in national initiatives and a national award for progress in the area of additional learning needs was awarded to a student studying at the college. Full-time students participate in work experience. Students are able to make links between theory and practice when caring for young children. There is insufficient awareness and understanding of key skills. Key skills pass rates are poor. Key skills are not integrated into the vocational programme, nor are they monitored effectively. Progression to employment is good from level 2 and 3 courses. Progression to HE and professional training is improving.

A sample of retention and pass rates in early years and care, 2001 to 2003

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
CACHE certificate in early years child care and education	2	No. of starts	**	**	26
		% retention	**	**	85
		% pass rate	**	**	95
CACHE diploma in early years child care and education	3	No. of starts	39	34	56
		% retention	79	82	82
		% pass rate	71	46	68

Source: ISR (2001 and 2002), college (2003)

** course not running

Quality of education and training

68. Overall, teaching is satisfactory. At levels 1 and 2, teaching is good. In one lesson, skilful teaching effectively prepared students for a work placement in early years by introducing them to story telling using sounds and actions. Through this, students achieved a good understanding of learning theories, practical application and language development in children aged between 3 and 5. In a good level 2 lesson, the teacher encouraged students to learn how to introduce young children to activities that develop their manual dexterity and fine motor skills. One lesson introduced a cold cooking task and students were able to identify the importance of health and safety. They asked relevant questions and identified how to support children's physical and intellectual development. Some lessons are poorly managed and practical activities are not split into manageable tasks that can be achieved, evaluated and used as sound evidence of knowledge and understanding. Teaching is weak at level 3. Lessons are insufficiently stimulating. Students have a weak understanding of theories that impact on childcare practice. There are insufficient opportunities for diploma students to reflect critically on the verbal contributions they make during discussion or demonstrate that they have read extensively about the subject. Lessons start on time and students and, at 79%, students' attendance is satisfactory.

69. The accommodation and resources available to early years students is satisfactory. Good use is made of students' work for classroom displays. There is a good range of specialist equipment such as 'real care babies', play equipment and craft materials. Staff work effectively as a team. They are well qualified and all of them have good recent professional experience in early years care and education. Staff participate in a good range of professional development activities such as CACHE development days and college training days. The workplace is used effectively for NVQ assessment. There is a good range of well-resourced placements for full-time students and work-based learners.

70. Assessment is well planned and closely linked to schemes of work. Students have a good understanding of assessment procedures. The criteria for assessment for each assignment are set by CACHE and level 3 students take responsibility for identifying the level they think they have achieved. Second-year diploma students produce research projects of a high standard. All students receive useful written feedback from staff on the quality of their work and information on how to improve and demonstrate further understanding to achieve a higher grade. NVQ assessors are occupationally competent and carry out their role effectively and efficiently. All NVQ students have an assessor who works closely with them to monitor progress. The managers of the NVQ centre achieve consistency of assessment in the workplace and monitor the process accurately.

71. There is good opportunity for progression from level 1 to level 3 for full-time students in early years. The introduction of a foundation course provides good opportunities for entry level students to progress to level 2 and 3 courses in childcare and education. Overall, however, the range of provision is narrow and there are no part-time courses. The structure of courses is not designed to meet the individual requirements of adult students. The NVQ assessment centre is effective in widening participation from those working in care in early years at levels 2 and 3 and play work at level 2.

72. There are satisfactory arrangements for recruiting students. Initial assessment is used effectively to identify additional support needs in literacy and numeracy. Most students have good recall of their induction to the college and their course. Tutorial support is good. Students value the useful support provided by staff and acknowledge the sound vocational advice and guidance they receive. There is good support for students requiring additional support to deal with needs related to dyslexia and dyspraxia. Timetabled whole-group tutorials and individual tutorials ensure students are guided appropriately and encouraged to review their progress. Individual learning plans do not include sufficient reference to key skills support. Staff monitor students' absence carefully. There is effective support from college managers to improve attendance.

Leadership and management

73. Leadership and management of early years are satisfactory. Managers are enthusiastic and courses are well managed. However, staff are unaware of the strategic aims and operating statement for the area. Curriculum targets set in 2002, such as improved adult participation, offering short courses and integrating key skills with the curriculum, have not been met and performance is not monitored effectively enough to ensure improvement. Recently appointed staff receive insufficient support to help them develop and improve their teaching techniques. The NVQ assessment centre is managed effectively. It has increased student numbers and kept pace with assessor training to ensure that students are well supported in the workplace. Instructors train assessors, recruit candidates and monitor the quality of the service offered effectively.

Part D: College data

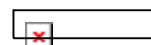
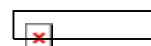


Table 1: Enrolments by level of study and age 2002/03

Level	16-18	19+
1	24	6
2	52	31
3	21	11



4/5	1	3
Other	2	49
Total	100	100

Source: provided by the college in 2003

Table 2: Enrolments by curriculum area and age 2002/03

Curriculum area	16-18 No.	19+ No.	Total Enrolments (%)
Science and mathematics	352	38	8
Land-based provision	111	1,027	22
Construction	1	170	3
Engineering, technology and manufacture	1	5	0
Business administration, management and professional	3	8	0
Information and communications technology	291	155	9
Retailing, customer service and transportation	0	26	1
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	88	335	8
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	0	0	0
Health, social care and public services	7	119	2
Visual and performing arts and media	1	567	11
Humanities	0	0	0
English, languages and communication	264	118	7
Foundation programmes	208	34	5
Unknown AOL	470	793	24
Total	1,797	3,395	100

Source: provided by the college in 2003

Table 3: Retention and achievement

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Level (Long Courses)	Retention and pass rate	Completion year					
		16-18			19+		
		2000	2001	2002	2000	2001	2002
1	Starters excluding transfers	233	136	14	90	60	30
	Retention rate (%)	97	70	93	84	48	93
	National average (%)	83	84	81	74	80	70
	Pass rate (%)	57	39	62	45	14	50
	National average (%)	65	69	76	65	66	67
2	Starters excluding transfers	199	220	206	300	455	288
	Retention rate (%)	83	85	81	77	86	82
	National average (%)	77	77	77	69	71	71
	Pass rate (%)	83	64	68	64	42	69
	National average (%)	74	73	76	69	69	74
3	Starters excluding transfers	129	142	129	99	179	194
	Retention rate (%)	84	73	71	69	64	70
	National average (%)	71	71	75	62	69	64
	Pass rate (%)	89	86	70	69	64	56
	National average (%)	79	80	82	63	67	68
4/5	Starters excluding transfers	43	24	54	525	246	168
	Retention rate (%)	100	88	100	99	93	100
	National average (%)	96	96	95	96	97	96
	Pass rate (%)	49	33	83	69	35	57
	National average (%)	69	79	81	77	78	82

Note: summary of retention and achievement for the last three years by age and level of course, compared against national averages for colleges of the same type (that is general FE/tertiary colleges or sixth form colleges).

Sources of information:

1. National averages: Benchmarking Data 2000 to 2002: Retention and Achievement Rates in Further Education Colleges in England, Learning and Skills Council, September 2003.
2. College rates for 1999/2000 to 2001/02: College IS

Table 4: Quality of teaching observed during the inspection by level

Courses	Teaching judged to be:			No of sessions
	Good	Satisfactory	Less than	

	or better %	%	satisfactory %	observed
Level 3 (advanced)	52	36	12	42
Level 2 (intermediate)	72	21	7	29
Level 1 (foundation)	83	17	0	6
Other sessions	100	0	0	1
Totals	63	28	9	78

© CROWN COPYRIGHT 2004. This report may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that all extracts quoted are reproduced verbatim without adaptation and on condition that the source and date thereof are stated. Inspection reports are available on the Ofsted web site (www.ofsted.gov.uk).

Office for
Standards
in Education

