

Moulton College

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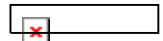
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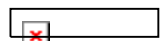
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Basic information about the college

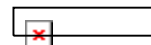


| | |
|------------------------------|--|
| Name of college: | Moulton College |
| Type of college: | Specialist land-based further education college |
| Principal: | Chris Moody |
| Address of college: | Moulton College Moulton Northampton NN3 7RR |
| Telephone number: | 01604 491131 |
| Fax number: | 01604 491127 |
| Chair of governors: | John Thorpe |
| Unique reference number: | 130772 |
| Name of reporting inspector: | Philippa Francis HMI |
| Dates of inspection: | 15-19 March 2004 |

Part A: Summary



Information about the college



Moulton College is a medium-sized specialist land-based further education (FE) college. It is the only provider of land-based vocational courses in Northamptonshire and also markets its provision to neighbouring counties in the south and east. As well as a core land-based curriculum including agriculture, horticulture, animal care, equine studies and countryside management, the college has diversified to provide courses in sports studies, construction and furniture studies. Land-based, entry-level courses are offered for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. A range of short courses is offered based on regional industry needs and local community requirements including in health care and the specialist area of waste management. A college managed community training centre in the Great Billing area of Northampton is the base for a range of vocational programmes for Year 10 and Year 11 pupils. Higher education (HE) courses including higher national diplomas (HNDs) and one-year, top-up courses to degree level are offered in conjunction with University College Northampton. Post-graduate study is also a feature of the college's work in conjunction with Cranfield University, Warwick University and Harper Adams University College. The college's mission is to be 'the regional centre of excellence for the land-based, construction and furniture industries'.

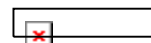
The college is situated in the semi-rural setting of Moulton village, five miles north of the centre of Northampton. Northamptonshire is a largely rural county, mixed in its level of prosperity, with a below national average population density and low unemployment rates. Northampton borough has the greatest density of population and includes some quite serious pockets of economic and social deprivation. Northamptonshire has a population of around 630,000, of which minority ethnic groups comprise 4.9%.

The main college campus at the Moulton site extends to 470 hectares and comprises college buildings, gardens and associated facilities, together with commercial enterprises including the farm, equestrian unit, garden centre, sports complex and a veterinary practice. A horticultural education centre is established in the precincts of Peterborough Cathedral and a construction training centre serving the south and west of the county is based at Silverstone. Residential accommodation is provided on-site for 146 students. A new building project includes a substantial expansion of the learning resource centre.

In 2002, centre of vocational excellence (CoVE) status was awarded to the construction provision within the college. Over 450 students are on work-based learning courses in this area.

In 2002/03, there were 5,398 students enrolled on FE courses. Of these, 19% are full time and 81% part time. Three quarters of full-time students are aged 16 to 18. Over three quarters of part-time students are adults. The highest number of enrolments is at level 2 (24%), with 18% and 19% at levels 1 and 3, respectively. Some 2% of students are from minority ethnic groups.

How effective is the college?



Inspectors judged the quality of provision as outstanding in agriculture and countryside management and for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and good in other land-based curriculum areas of animal care, equine studies and horticulture. Provision in furniture studies, construction and sports studies is good and, in literacy and numeracy, satisfactory. Provision for work-based learners

is higher than for colleges of a similar type and a little better in practical lessons. Training provided in the workplace for work-based students is good. Effective strategies and close collaboration with local and regional partners have widened participation and promoted the profile of work-based learning. Retention rates have improved, but remain around the national average for adult students at levels 2 and 3. Pass rates are generally high and improving for all students. Progress on modern apprenticeships is slow, although a significant proportion of learners eventually achieve all or part of their qualification aim. All aspects of support and guidance work well, including for work-based learners. Specific teaching of literacy and numeracy is less effective in vocational areas. The college's key strengths and areas for improvement are listed below.

Key strengths

- good teaching and learning

- good development of practical skills

- high pass rates

- effective use of a wide range of specialist resources in teaching

- good support and guidance for students

- tidy, well cared for campus

- clear, strong leadership and management

- high profile and status of work-based learning

- effective strategic planning

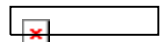
- close collaboration with partners to widen participation.

What should be improved

- retention rates of adult students at levels 2 and 3
- promotion of equal opportunities
- slow achievement of modern apprenticeships frameworks in work-based learning
- provision of full-time courses at level 1
- use of information learning technology (ILT) to support learning
- management of teaching of literacy and numeracy
- use of differentiation strategies in teaching.

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

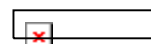


The table below shows overall judgements about provision in subjects and courses that were inspected. Judgements are based primarily on the quality of teaching, training and learning and how well students achieve. Not all subjects and courses were inspected. Inspectors make overall judgements on curriculum 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 |
|----------------|---|
| Equine studies | Good. There is good provision with high pass rates on most courses and good retention rates on level 3 and part-time courses. Teaching of horse management skills is good, however, riding lessons are insufficiently challenging for more capable students. Students receive good academic and personal support. Management of yard duties to develop industry standard skills is poor. |
| Horticulture | Good. Work-based learning contributory grade: satisfactory. Provision is good with high pass rates on a wide range of programmes with very effective practical teaching supported by good resources. In |

| | |
|---|---|
| | a significant minority of theory lessons there is insufficient development of analytical and evaluative skills. Completions of modern framework achievements have declined in the last two years with slow progress by many students. |
| Animal care | Good. Retention and pass rates are high on full-time courses. Practical teaching and development of skills is good, Effective use of a range of resources with good individual support allows students to develop good animal care and employment skills. There is a narrow range of available courses. |
| Agriculture and countryside management | Outstanding. There are high pass rates on most courses and good attainment of practical skills. Teaching and learning are very good. Estate and farm resources are used effectively to support teaching and learning. Aspects of internal verification lack rigour. |
| Construction | Good. Work-based learning contributory grade: good. Pass rates on most college-based courses are high. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory or better; students demonstrate good practical skills and produce high-quality work both in college and in the workplace. There is good support for work-based learners, but slow progress towards modern apprenticeship framework achievement. |
| Furniture studies | Good. Pass rates for those students who complete their course of study are high, however, retention rates on over half the courses are low. The majority of teaching is good or better and standards of work are good. There are very good specialist resources. Quality assurance procedures are applied inconsistently across programmes. |
| Sports studies | Good. Provision is good with very high retention and pass rates. Much good teaching and learning makes effective use of modern specialist resources. Theory and practical work are good. Information technology (IT) used to support learning is insufficient and the range of provision too narrow with no part-time provision and few opportunities for adult students. |
| Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities | Outstanding. Very good teaching and learning which develops skills, challenges students to improve and leads to high retention and pass rates of externally set qualifications. Clear progression routes exist and are well used to further study in the college and in gaining employment. Good specialist accommodation is provided with effective support for students. Insufficient monitoring of personal skills development. |
| Literacy and numeracy | Satisfactory. There is good teaching in literacy and numeracy support lessons. Students develop good levels of skill using vocationally relevant learning materials and activities. Too few appropriate strategies exist in vocational lessons to meet students' individual literacy and numeracy needs with some poor co-ordination of learning support and vocational teaching. |

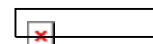
How well is the college led and managed?



Leadership and management are good. The principal and senior managers provide clear and strong leadership. Curriculum management is good in most areas. There is well-founded strategic planning, with a clear vision to develop the skills of students with abilities from pre-entry to postgraduate

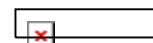
although rates remain around the national average for adults at levels 2 and 3. Quality systems are applied thoroughly in most cases. Most grades in the self-assessment report matched those awarded by inspectors, though the college overestimated the standards of teaching and learning in several curriculum areas. There is good teamwork and communication, with frequent and regular team meetings. Work-based learning has a high profile and is generally well managed. Productive partnerships have been formed with many organisations to widen participation. This financially sound college provides good value for money.

To what extent is the college educationally and socially inclusive?



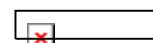
The college's response to education and social inclusion is good. To fulfil its mission of widening participation, the college operates an open-access admissions policy which selects students because of their vocational interests and motivation rather than prior attainment. The college has an extensive range of partners in rural and urban areas within the local community. Out-centres have been established for young people and adults which have successfully encouraged the participation of disadvantaged groups. Subsidised transport to and from the college and outreach centres is provided daily for 600 students who are drawn from a wide catchment area. There is good overall provision and progression opportunities for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Discrete basic skills' teaching is good, but is less effective when integrated into vocational teaching. The college has made satisfactory responses to the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 (SENDA), although its response to the requirements of the Race Relations (amendment) Act 2000 is incomplete. A policy is in place and whilst application data is analysed by ethnicity and gender, student performance data is not.

How well are students and trainees guided and supported?



Students receive good guidance and support. College support and guidance services are well planned and managed. Students have a good awareness of the wide range of support services provided by the college and make effective use of them. Marketing information is clear and informative, and pre-course guidance is effective. A comprehensive induction provides students with a good introduction to their courses. Initial assessment of learning support needs is prompt and thorough. Tutorials provide good pastoral and academic support for students. They are regular and well planned. Tutors conduct personal tutorials in a manner sensitive to individual needs and equality of opportunity. Students' attendance is monitored carefully and effectively. There is some weak target setting in tutorial records. Careers education and guidance are good, as is the guidance on progression to employment and 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

- good transport system into college
- cleanliness and tidiness of the campus
- encouragement to study independently
- good tutors with relevant industrial and vocational experience
- variety of teaching approaches
- friendly and supportive staff
- learning mentors
- help with bursaries and awards
- sports and fitness facilities
- availability of additional qualifications.

What they feel could be improved

- short canteen opening times and queues
- availability of healthy food options
- car parking at the main site

- aspects of timetabling

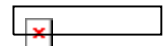
- arrangements for moving between campus sites

- length of time allocated for breaks

- places to eat packed lunches

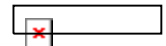
- access to computers.

Other information

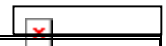


The college inspection report will normally be published 12 working weeks after the formal feedback of the inspection findings to the college. Once published, the college has two months in which to prepare its post-inspection action plan and submit it to the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The 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 LSC. The 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



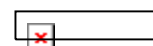
| Aspect and learner type | Graded good or better (Grades 1 to 3) % | Graded satisfactory (Grade 4) % | Graded less than satisfactory (Grades 5 to 7) % |
|-------------------------|---|---------------------------------|---|
| Teaching 16-18 | 65 | 34 | 1 |
| 19+ and WBL* | 67 | 24 | 9 |

| | | | |
|----------------|----|----|---|
| Learning 16-18 | 62 | 36 | 2 |
| 19+ and WBL* | 62 | 33 | 5 |

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. The college offers a range of full-time and part-time courses in land-based subjects, construction, furniture studies, sports studies and for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Most types of vocational programmes are run including national vocational qualifications (NVQs) and certificates and diplomas. A small amount of distance learning takes place as part of waste management courses. Work-based learning is in place in all land-based subject areas, but with generally small numbers, except for in horticulture. Over 500 work-based learners are enrolled on programmes either leading to NVQs or modern apprenticeships in construction. The college also provides courses leading to professional qualifications including those of the British Horse Society (BHS) and the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS). Many short courses are available including those relating to industry legislation such as chainsaw operation and pesticide use.

2. Data on students' achievements drawn from the individualised student records (ISR) for 2001 and 2002 were provided by the LSC. Data provided by the college were used for 2003. The separate reports on areas of learning in Part C provide more detail about achievements and standards for particular courses.

3. In addition to externally set qualification aims, the college uses an established system of college-devised certificates set at pass, credit and distinction level for each type of course to reward the majority of students at the end of their course. Each level of certificate is based on success in a main qualification aim and achievement of additional qualifications, key skills awards, including recognition of part achievement, and an employability score based on work experience relative to each level of certificate. This system works well to ensure that students with low attainment at the start of their course gain maximum credit for their progress. The requirements set by the internal certificates for key skills are unchallenging for some students who begin courses with more standard entry requirements.

4. Attendance in lessons in land-based curriculum areas during the inspection was, at 89%, better than the national average for specialist colleges inspected in 2002/03. Attendance is particularly good in equine studies and agriculture and countryside management, at over 90%. Attendance in lessons in construction and furniture studies is similar to the national average for this specialist area.

16 to 18 year olds

5. The majority of full-time students are aged 16 to 18 and study across the range of curriculum areas and levels. Many students enter the college with low levels of prior achievement and a range of learning difficulties including some long-term barriers to learning such as non-attendance or behaviour problems at school. For example, on a typical level 2 programme, well over half of the students have very low or no formal entry qualifications, over one-third have significant health problems and half of the students have recognised, documented learning and/or behavioural difficulties.

6. Retention rates for students aged 16 to 18 show improvement at levels 1 and 2 in 2002/03 from a

consistently low rate at level 1 and a declining rate at level 2. Retention rates of students at level 3 are improving and significantly above the national average for specialist colleges.

7. Pass rates at level 1 for students aged 16 to 18 improved to well above the national average for specialist colleges in 2001/02, but have declined to around the national average in 2002/03. At levels 2 and 3, which the majority of students study, pass rates are good and significantly above the national average for the last three years. On short courses, both retention and pass rates for students aged 16 to 18 are good and numbers of students have increased substantially in 2002/03.

8. Standards of work are high in most curriculum areas. Students enjoy their learning and work well both individually and in groups. They show confidence and interest, and learn practical skills generally quickly in each vocational area. Sports studies students develop good coaching skills and are fit and competent in their chosen field of sport. Students in agriculture and countryside, relate theoretical concepts to practical work confidently and effectively to produce good work. For example, a group of students replaced a field fence line quickly and to a professional standard. Work-based learning students in both construction and horticulture produce work that meets industry standards and most develop high levels of practical skill competence.

9. The majority of students progress well, although work-based learners often fail to complete their qualification aims by the end of the time allocated for their course. However, a significant number carry on with their study and finally achieve. Most students gain confidence and a strong work ethic whilst at the college. Reinforcement, through teaching, of personal and social values such as tidiness, punctuality and politeness has a positive impact on many. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress and learn useful vocational skills such as handling small animals and growing plants.

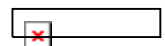
10. Pass rates in key skills for full-time students are good at level 1 and 2 and well above national averages. For example, all students who took level 2 in communications in 2002/03 were retained and the pass rate was 88% compared with a national average of 50%. However, numbers of students entered for full awards have declined significantly in 2002/03, as many students complete only the portfolio element. Successful completion of the portfolio counts towards achievement of a college certificate which the majority of students achieve.

Adult learners

11. Adult students study across the range of curriculum areas, but most are on programmes in construction, furniture studies and horticulture. At level 1, retention rates for adult students have improved from around the national average in 2001/02, to well above the national average in 2002/03. Retention rates at levels 2 and 3 show some decline, but remain around the national average. Pass rates are good at all levels, especially at level 3 where rates have been well above national averages for the last three years. Both retention and pass rates on short courses improved in 2002/03. Low pass rates in 2000/01 have recovered to well above the national average in 2002/03. Some adults on work-based learning courses in construction, where off-the-job training takes place in the evening, fail to attend sufficiently due to the pressure of day-time work. The college offers alternative attendance patterns, but commercial pressures often prevent students taking these up.

12. Adult students produce high standards of work. Portfolios of design work are produced professionally and creatively by furniture students and assessed work in floristry is of a high quality.

Quality of education and training



proportion of teaching graded as good or better is higher than the average of 55% for specialist land-based colleges in 2002/03. At 3%, the proportion of unsatisfactory lessons is low. The best teaching is in agriculture and countryside management where the majority is good or better. In furniture studies, sports studies and courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, almost three-quarters of teaching are graded as good or better. In equine studies, horticulture and animal care, the proportion of good and better teaching is slightly lower, but still above average. The majority of teaching of literacy and numeracy is satisfactory, with only just over one-quarter being graded good or better. There is a small amount of unsatisfactory teaching in equine studies, horticulture, construction and furniture studies. In construction, just over half of the teaching is good or better. This is lower than national average for this area of learning and does not reflect the good on-the-job training received by the high proportion of work-based learners in this area.

14. There is little significant difference in the quality of teaching by full-time and part-time staff. The teaching of students aged 16 to 18 is slightly better than for adults. Teaching is most effective at level 2. Teaching and learning are generally better in practical lessons than in theory lessons. Grades awarded for learning, slightly lower at 62% good or better, mirror the profile for teaching. In agriculture and countryside management, particularly high attainment was observed. In animal care, attainment was good in practical lessons, but lower in theory lessons.

15. Teaching is a strength in many curriculum areas. Particular features include detailed lesson planning with careful pacing of learning, good use of teaching aids, good questioning of students and group discussions that are managed effectively. In the better lessons, there is recognition of individual students' needs with a variety of teaching methods and learning materials. Group work is used to good effect to develop students' skills and communication abilities. However, in most curriculum areas, differentiated activities and strategies to include all students are not recorded effectively on lesson plans. In practical teaching, students are encouraged to work individually and in teams, and good commercial practices are demonstrated. In agriculture and countryside, very small student groups are effectively taught in both theory and practical lessons. There is good attention to health and safety best practices in teaching, although in a few construction lessons this is not fully promoted and enforced by teachers.

16. In less effective lessons, teaching is uninspiring and undemanding. In equine studies, some practical riding lessons are delivered at a slow pace and do not challenge the more able students. During yard duty lessons, higher level equine students are not given the opportunity to develop supervision skills, although this has successfully been established in animal care, where level 3 students supervise level 2 students. There is limited use of ILT in lessons and overall, the use of IT takes a low profile in lessons and student learning. In construction, much teaching observed uses uninspiring teaching methods, although the one-to-one supervision and training provided by employers and work experience supervisors is highly effective in developing students' skills and abilities. Similarly, horticulture employers provide very good on-the-job training. In literacy and numeracy, there is good teaching in individual support sessions, where good use is made of relevant learning materials. In some lessons, where students' literacy and numeracy are developed as part of vocational teaching, teachers are insufficiently experienced in basic skills.

17. There are sufficient, well-qualified staff with industrial experience in the majority of curriculum areas. Strategic planning and the appraisal process are used to form a coherent staff development programme. Cross-college training programmes have addressed a wide range of areas, however, vocational teachers in several areas are insufficiently skilled or confident in the necessary strategies to develop the basic skills needs of some students. Appropriate staff development to address this issue is in progress.

18. There has been significant investment in buildings and other teaching resources both on the main campus and off-site. This has resulted in very good physical accommodation in nearly all areas. The extensive use of the college's commercial enterprises, such as the dairy unit, for teaching, together with high industrial-standard specialist equipment by staff who have recent up-to-date vocational experience, has a very positive impact on students' learning. The purpose-built teaching blocks are spacious, well equipped and low maintenance. Traditional farm buildings have been attractively converted into class and meeting rooms. There is insufficient accommodation for some design courses, where noise levels from construction workshops interfere with the delivery of

teaching. Facilities for dog grooming and housing do not reflect industry best practice.

19. A new extension to the learning resource centre is due for completion in August 2004. This will relieve the current pressures on the centre and provide a larger number of quiet working areas. Access for students with disabilities will be further improved in the new building. The book stock is generally good and there are an appropriate range of journals for most areas except there is a limited range of furniture and design books.

20. There is good specialist accommodation for students with learning difficulties and /or disabilities. A dedicated classroom, base rooms and a bungalow with kitchens for the teaching of independent living skills and food skills are used effectively. Although there are ILT facilities in the dedicated classroom, there are insufficient computers available in the base rooms, especially where basic skills are taught. Learning resources for basic skills are underdeveloped.

21. Assessment procedures are well organised and managed. Initial assessment of literacy and numeracy is rigorous and the results are quickly processed. Assessment schedules for full-time and part-time students are generally well planned using an appropriate range of methods and they effectively inform students of the timing and nature of practical and written assignments. For work-based learners in horticulture and on some furniture studies courses, planning of assessment is less effective. Delays between gathering of evidence and formal feedback on assessment, result in slow progress for some work-based horticultural learners. Not all students in furniture studies receive regular assessments and feedback on their work. For most students, assessment briefs are well written and follow awarding body guidelines. Written and verbal feedback is usually prompt and constructive, and helps students to improve their performance. In agriculture and countryside, in a few cases, marking lacks rigour and students do not receive clear guidance on how to improve their work. Whilst internal verification procedures are generally well managed and effective across the college, such shortcomings in assessor performance are not always clearly identified.

22. Progress is effectively monitored through regular tutorials using individual learning and skills plans. These are mostly up-to-date and contain detailed information on progress with assessed work and key skills. Progress in personal skill development of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is not systematically recorded or used to set individual targets effectively. There is no formal assessment of learning styles to inform teaching methodology.

23. The college offers a good range of provision to meet the needs of land-based, construction and sports leisure industries. There is progression from entry level to HE in most curriculum areas, but insufficient full-time level 1 provision, restricts appropriate progression for some students. The college has recognised this through a detailed curriculum mapping exercise and is addressing the issue through its strategic plan. Curriculum development is based on a thorough needs analysis of local and regional requirements both within land-based provision and in other areas of learning. Close collaboration with regional providers including schools, other FE providers and the LSC, ensures that developments are rationalised to meet both local and regional learner needs to avoid over provision. The college has been successful in raising the profile of work-based learning. Some 512 modern apprentices and NVQ learners are enrolled on various land-based and construction subjects, and a number of new areas are being considered to expand the range of work-based learning opportunities.

24. Beneficial links with an extensive range of partners has resulted in the establishment of a number of out-centres in geographically appropriate areas including Northampton town centre, Silverstone, Peterborough and Great Billing. These centres have successfully enabled participation by disadvantaged groups of young people and adults. The development of the Silverstone out-centre was in response to the lack of access to construction provision in the southern part of Northamptonshire. There are firm plans to develop a similar base in the east of the county. A number of education, training and countryside businesses rent offices on the college estate. The relationship the college has with its tenants, enables it to extend educational opportunities and strengthen links with local and national employers through the Lodge Farm Management Centre.

25. Links with schools are very productive. Students from 24 schools were involved in using the Holdenby Centre which offers day visits for schools with groups from Key Stages 1, 2 and 3. Over

300 students aged 14 to 16, many of whom are disaffected or have special educational needs, are being provided with a vocational experience at the Great Billing Centre, leading to accreditation at entry level 2 in 2 vocational areas. A further group of students aged 14 to 16 are studying either general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) applied science double award, or for an intermediate City and Guilds award in construction through the colleges involvement in an Increased Flexibility (IF) programme.

26. There are plentiful opportunities for students to achieve additional vocational qualifications through curriculum enhancement activities. These are valued highly by students, for example, in horticulture, they provide access to lucrative areas of employment. Links with local sports academies provide students with additional coaching sessions, delivered by very experienced and well-qualified coaches. A wide range of social and sports activities are provided through the Student Association.

27. Students receive good pastoral and academic support. Cross-college support and guidance are well managed with regular briefings and training for all tutorial staff. Specialist services such as learning support, careers guidance, counselling, nursing provision, chaplaincy and the student welfare manager are centrally located on the main college site. The college provides good transport services covering a wide area and this includes transport between college teaching areas. Support services are well publicised through induction, the student handbook and college marketing material. Students have high awareness and make effective use of the services on offer. The student welfare manager has overall responsibility for child protection and the implementation of the college's established child protection policy.

28. The college provides helpful pre-course guidance. All students receive a group or an individual interview. An interview checklist ensures that students are made aware of alternative courses. Marketing information is clear and informative. High-quality newsheets, specific to each vocational area, include up-to-date and useful information, and are used to inform potential students and employers about topical issues and learning opportunities at the college. For example, in the agricultural area, the newsheet included guidance on filling in European Union (EU) subsidy claim forms on-line, as well as details of relevant short courses on offer, such as chainsaw operation. A comprehensive induction, provides students with a good introduction to their courses and helps them settle into college life quickly.

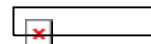
29. All full-time students undergo an effective initial assessment of literacy, numeracy and key skill levels during the first week at the college. Good use is made of learning support assistants who provide in-class support for identified students. The learning support team sensitively follows up on identified students to encourage them to take up appropriate support services. Effective study-skills support is provided in a welcoming environment at the college drop-in centre which is well used. There is insufficient evaluation of the effectiveness of learning support in raising levels of performance. The college undertakes some monitoring, but this is still at an early stage.

30. Tutorials provide good pastoral and academic support for students. Each student has a personal tutor and learner mentors provide effective support to work-based students on construction courses. Full-time students have an entitlement to a minimum of two individual tutorials each term, and part-time and work-based learning students, to one each term. Tutors conduct individual tutorials in a manner sensitive to individual needs and equality of opportunity. Personal support is valued highly by students who feel that staff are approachable, helpful and readily available. Students' attendance and punctuality are monitored carefully and effectively on a daily basis. Weekly reports for subject area managers identify issues promptly and remedial action is taken. An effective 'cause for concern' procedure is used by subject tutors to highlight unacceptable work, attendance or behaviour. There is some weak target setting in individual progress reviews. The college careers centre is well equipped and welcoming, and is staffed with specialist college careers and Connexions service staff. Guidance for those going on to HE is helpful.

31. Key skills are integrated into curriculum areas and are taught appropriately in a vocationally related context. Individual key skills assessment schedules are effectively planned following the results of initial assessment and are recorded in an individual learning and skills plan. In most curriculum areas, the delivery and assessment of key skills is satisfactory. There are some missed opportunities for the assessment of key skills in sports studies and evidence is not systematically

and formally recorded. In animal care and veterinary health, some students are unclear about the relationship of the initial assessment to the key skills requirements. In horticulture, poor achievement of key skills has contributed significantly to the slow achievement of modern apprenticeship frameworks. Vocational staff, whilst effective at helping students to work through key skills assignments as part of teaching, do not all possess the skills to teach basic skills, should the need arise.

Leadership and management



32. Leadership and management are good. The principal and senior managers provide clear and strong leadership. Provision in two curriculum areas is outstanding. It is good in six areas and satisfactory in one. The college has expanded considerably over the decade prior to the inspection. Pass rates are generally high and rising. They are particularly good at levels 2 and 3. The college was awarded CoVE status in construction. Retention rates for students aged 16 to 18 and adults at level 1 have all improved and are better than the national average. Rates for adult students on level 2 and 3 programmes remain around the national average. College managers have forged productive links with other institutions and developed out centres for course provision in other parts of Northamptonshire. These moves have helped to widen participation. The college is financially sound. Quality systems are generally robust, but some aspects of equal opportunities practice are underdeveloped.

33. The college has clear focus on enhancing the skills and personal development of young people and adults interested in a career in land-based industries. It has a strong ethos of meeting the needs of appropriate students of a range of abilities, from pre-entry to postgraduate levels. Strategic and development planning is thorough, utilising regional economic, demographic and social data, and labour market information effectively. The college seeks to complement the work of other educational institutions in Northamptonshire rather than compete. It has forged fruitful partnerships with primary and secondary schools, other FE colleges and University College Northampton. There is a well-founded strategy to provide buses to transport students from many areas of the county to the college. Also, the college has developed provision at out centres, such as Peterborough, Silverstone, Holdenby and Great Billing. The college has exceeded funding targets in all years except 1 over the 10 years prior to the inspection. It has consistently generated operating surpluses in recent years and is financially sound.

34. Governors are strongly committed to the ethos of the college. They provide effective steer to strategic development. Governors maintain thorough oversight of the academic performance of each curriculum area through the work of the Standards Committee. A governor is also linked to each area and attends industrial liaison group meetings.

35. Teamwork is good. Management roles are clearly defined and curriculum management is good in most areas. It is satisfactory in furniture studies. However, co-ordination between additional learning support and the teaching of literacy and numeracy in vocational areas is insufficient. Communication systems in the college are good. Meetings at all levels are scheduled in advance in an annual calendar. Senior managers meet weekly with subject leaders and the director of quality assurance to discuss curriculum and operational issues. This meeting is followed by meetings of subject teams the next day. Thereafter, curriculum leaders and course managers meet promptly to clarify operational and implementation issues. This weekly cycle of meetings enables prompt and speedy communication and action, involving most staff. Action plans are produced following each meeting and the director of quality assurance monitors progress keenly.

36. Quality systems are generally robust. Thorough course reviews feed the production of curriculum area self-assessment reports. These are vetted by the Quality Group before referral to validation panels. Most grades in the self-assessment report match those awarded by inspectors. However, the self assessment report does not identify the overall strengths and areas for development of the

college. Internal verification systems are generally satisfactory. They are particularly thorough in equine studies. However, feedback to assessors from verifiers is insufficient in agriculture and countryside, and assessment criteria are unclear on some major programmes in furniture studies. Target setting for course performance is demanding and realistic, with targets set for punctuality, attendance, retention and pass rates. Senior managers and subject managers meet on a weekly basis to monitor performance against these targets. Management information is generally reliable. However, some curriculum managers are not yet fully conversant in interpreting historic performance data.

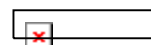
37. There is very good support for new teaching staff. They receive a comprehensive induction and a mentor is attached to new starters for up to 12 months. Teaching and learning materials are shared in a resource bank for each curriculum area. A professional tutor and five advanced practitioners support the development of teachers, based on the outcome of lesson observations. However, the observations undertaken on behalf of the college, over-estimated the standard of teaching and learning in several curriculum areas, compared with that observed during the inspection.

38. All staff receive an annual appraisal. Development needs identified are considered alongside strategic issues to produce the college staff development plan. However, there has been insufficient cohesive training for all staff on equal opportunities. Also, too few staff have been trained in the requirements and operation of the national literacy and numeracy core curriculum.

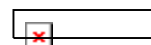
39. The college has made positive moves on some facets of equal opportunities, but other aspects are underdeveloped. There is a useful presentation on equal opportunities that is used with students on induction. The college is planning a plumbing course for women and provision for the Bangladeshi community in Daventry. Images of under-represented groups have been included in the prospectus and newsletters to promote recruitment. However, stark gender imbalances remain in some curriculum areas. Equal opportunities issues are not discussed sufficiently at course team meetings. The college has made satisfactory responses to the SENDA. All new and refurbished premises have lift access to upper floors. The college is formulating and costing an action plan based on an access survey it commissioned. Specialist equipment is available to meet specific individual needs. However, the college's response to the Race Relations (amendment) Act 2000 is incomplete. It has devised a race equality policy, but students were not consulted on its content. The college has not produced and analysed data on performance of students by ethnic background, or by gender. Governors have not been sufficiently informed or trained about the content and implications of SENDA and the Race Relations (amendment) Act 2000.

40. The college provides good value for money. Most provision is good or outstanding. The number of students has grown considerably. Pass rates are generally high and rising, retention rates are improving for students aged 16 to 18 and are satisfactory for adults. Relatively little teaching and learning is less than satisfactory. The average class size is above that generally seen in inspections of land-based colleges.

Part C: Curriculum and occupational areas



Equine studies



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

Strengths

- high retention and pass rates on national diploma in horse management course
- high pass rates for additional qualifications
- good teaching of horse management
- good personal and academic support
- effective internal verification procedures.

Weaknesses

- low retention rate on national certificate in the management of horses
- yard duties poorly managed.

Scope of provision

41. The college offers full-time courses at levels 2 and 3, and a range of short courses at the Pitsford Equine Centre. The college is a BHS approved examination centre and provides training for BHS qualifications up to level 4. At level 2, there are 6 full-time students on a first diploma in horse care course and 16 students following a one year national certificate in horse management course. At level 3, 19 students are on a national diploma in horse management. Some 19 students are on modern apprenticeships, the majority are at foundation level, based in local equine establishments throughout Northamptonshire. These students attend college for one day each week for vocational and key skill training, assessment and portfolio work. The majority of full-time students are aged 16 to 18. All full-time students take additional qualifications including BHS Horse Owners Certificate and BHS qualifications at levels 1 and 2. There are 78 part-time students enrolled on short courses to take BHS examinations.

Achievement and standards

42. Retention and pass rates on the national diploma in horse management are high. Retention rates have improved consistently over the last three years and in 2002/03, all students who began the course were retained and passed. Retention rates on the national certificate in horse management course are low and well below the national average. Some improvement is anticipated for 2003/04, but already over a quarter of the students who began the course have left. Pass rates for additional qualifications are high and most full-time students complete more than two additional qualifications each. Pass rates for BHS short courses, especially at levels 1 and 2, are high and are

well above the national average.

43. Standards of both theory and practical work in lessons are generally good. Students ride well and understand clearly the theory underpinning schooling work. Students undertake a full range of practical work related to horse care competently, but few work quickly enough to match industry requirements. Students develop a critical eye through observation of horses and riders, and are able to give constructive feedback. Attendance in lessons is very good, at 98%. There is good progression from level 2 to level 3 and into HE or employment.

44. Numbers of work-based learners are small and framework achievement is low at between 25% and 50% over the last three years. Retention rates of current modern apprentices are low as, out of 19 learners, 9 have already left. Students' portfolios are satisfactory. They contain sufficient evidence, but little individualised work.

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

| Qualification | Level | Completion year: | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 |
|--|--------------|-------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| BHS stage 1 horse knowledge and riding | 1 | No. of starts | 23 | 30 | 22 |
| | | % retention | 87 | 80 | 100 |
| | | % pass rate | 60 | 96 | 100 |
| BHS stage 2 horse knowledge and riding | 2 | No. of starts | 17 | 8 | 15 |
| | | % retention | 76 | 63 | 100 |
| | | % pass rate | 38 | 100 | 100 |
| First diploma in horse care | 2 | No. of starts | 8 | 6 | * |
| | | % retention | 75 | 67 | * |
| | | % pass rate | 100 | 75 | * |
| National certificate in the management of horses | 2 | No. of starts | 29 | 21 | 18 |
| | | % retention | 69 | 71 | 56 |
| | | % pass rate | 100 | 93 | 100 |
| National diploma in horse management | 3 | No. of starts | 15 | 11 | 12 |
| | | % retention | 73 | 91 | 100 |
| | | % pass rate | 100 | 90 | 100 |

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

* course did not run

Quality of education and training

45. Teaching of horse management is good in both theory and practical lessons. In the best lessons, teachers plan effectively using a range of interesting activities to stimulate and challenge students to work both individually and collaboratively. Lessons start with checks on students' understanding from previous lessons through appropriate oral questioning. More capable students are generally given more challenging tasks, such as working individually in riding lessons and assessing each horse's reactions, to keep them interested. Activities such as crosswords and word searches, at the end of lessons, effectively check students understanding. Effective and good quality learning materials are used well in teaching.

46. Some riding lessons do not challenge more able students. In less effective lessons, students remain in walk for large parts of the lesson and riding exercises used are simplistic. There is no

assessment of individual learning styles to inform teaching and learning.

47. A wide range of equine resources are well maintained and provide a safe environment for learning. Students ride a variety of well-trained horses that successfully improve their riding skills. The horses' workload is well managed to ensure they remain responsive and fit. An appropriate range of specialist equipment is used in teaching and matches industry standards. Staff are vocationally experienced and use realistic industry examples well in lessons. All staff either hold teaching qualifications or are working towards them.

48. Yard duties are poorly managed and unproductive. Students work at a slow pace and are not challenged to match industry standards. The number of students allocated to simple tasks is high. For example, 11 students tidied the muck heap for over 20 minutes. More experienced students do not develop supervisory skills as part of the duties programme. The lack of scales in the feed room and inconsistent use of spring balances to weigh hay nets, restricts students' opportunities for improving numerical skills. There is no sink with hot and cold running water in the tack room. Grooming kits are in sufficient number, but are not clean.

49. Marking of assignment work is good with fair and clear constructive comments which indicate how students can improve their work. Comprehensive internal verification takes place including verification of practical assessments. Clear constructive written feedback ensures assessors maintain the correct standards. The delivery and assessment of key skills is satisfactory. Assessment practice in work-based learning is satisfactory.

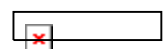
50. An appropriate range of courses matches most students' needs. Provision at level 1 is only available through a work-based NVQ route. The college recognises the need for full-time provision and is planning to include this in the next academic year. Students take additional qualifications including college certificates in safe lifting and first aid as well as BHS qualifications. Enrichment opportunities are linked mainly to the vocational area and give the students a wider understanding of the equine industry.

51. There is good academic and pastoral support for students. Additional learning support is timetabled for those with needs identified through initial assessment. Students have access to a minimum of six individual well-structured tutorials, although often attend more. Clear targets are set to resolve identified issues, such as attendance concerns or problems with assignments, and these maintain progress. Understanding of equality of opportunity and issues relating specifically to the equine industry, are not reinforced by the curriculum.

Leadership and management

52. Leadership and management are good. Weekly team meetings include course development actions and communications at all levels work well. Realistic targets for retention and pass rates are set and reviewed effectively. Staff have a good understanding of quality assurance procedures and use these comprehensively. All staff are assigned a mentor which they value for support in personal and college issues. New staff receive a comprehensive induction enabling them to take up their role confidently. An equine industry liaison group meets annually and is well attended with a good exchange of information. Staff use this information to create an up-to-date and realistic picture of industry needs to feed back into course development, however, the management of yard duties is poor. Most staff are involved in the self-assessment report which identifies similar strengths and weaknesses as the inspection.

Horticulture



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

Work-based learning in this area is **satisfactory (grade 3)**

Strengths

- high pass rates on most courses

- very good teaching to develop practical skills

- effective promotion of industry best practice by staff

- effective use of a wide range of specialist resources

- good curriculum management.

Weaknesses

- declining framework achievements for modern apprenticeships

- insufficient emphasis in teaching on the development of analytical and evaluative skills.

Scope of provision

53. The horticultural department offers full-time and part-time courses in amenity horticulture, arboriculture and floristry, leading to accredited qualifications from levels 1 to 3. Horticulture entry-level provision is offered through the college's general education programme. There are progression opportunities within the college that lead to the associated HND specialisms of amenity horticulture, garden design or urban forestry.

54. There are 110 students on full-time courses and 737 enrolments on part-time programmes. About two-thirds of the students are adults. Most are studying towards nationally accredited awards at levels 2 or 3.

55. Some 40 foundation and 8 advanced modern apprentices are on a variety of amenity horticulture programmes including sports turf management, landscaping and arboriculture. These apprentices are employed by a variety of private and public organisations such as local authorities and golf courses. Apprentices attend college on a day release basis during college term times for off-the-job vocational training and key skills.

Achievement and standards

56. Pass rates on college-based courses are generally good and at, or above, national averages. All retained students have passed the national diploma in horticulture for the last three years. Over the same period, pass rates have declined on the national certificate in horticulture and are now around the national average. Pass and retention rates on NVQ courses at level 2, for 2002/03, are well above national averages.

57. Students produce work that is orderly and matches industry standards. They show confidence and good levels of skill in practical tasks in a range of horticultural work including hard landscaping, tree climbing and handling turf. Most students develop some skill in evaluating their own work.

58. Progress on modern apprenticeships is slow. Many apprentices take two years to pass the NVQ element of the framework, but over half are eventually successful and retention rates in training are satisfactory. Completion of modern apprenticeship frameworks was good, at 68% in 2000/01, but will decline to a maximum of 26% in 2001/02, if all apprentices remaining on the programme eventually achieve the full framework. The maximum rate for 2002/03 is 68%, if all 17 apprentices retained in training achieve. Work-based learners produce high standards of work and meet industry requirements.

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

| Qualification | Level | Completion year: | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 |
|--------------------------------------|--------------|-------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| NVQ horticulture (decorative) | 2 | No. of starts | 10 | 27 | 8 |
| | | % retention | 60 | 41 | 75 |
| | | % pass rate | 83 | 100 | 100 |
| NVQ horticulture (hard landscape) | 2 | No. of starts | 28 | 4 | 12 |
| | | % retention | 68 | 25 | 100 |
| | | % pass rate | 83 | 100 | 75 |
| First diploma in horticulture | 2 | No. of starts | 11 | 15 | 11 |
| | | % retention | 80 | 85 | 91 |
| | | % pass rate | 100 | 83 | 90 |
| National certificate in horticulture | 2 | No. of starts | 25 | 26 | 24 |
| | | % retention | 88 | 85 | 83 |
| | | % pass rate | 100 | 95 | 80 |
| National certificate in floristry | 3 | No. of starts | 8 | 7 | 8 |
| | | % retention | 88 | 71 | 75 |
| | | % pass rate | 100 | 71 | 83 |
| National diploma in horticulture | 3 | No. of starts | 12 | 7 | 9 |
| | | % retention | 92 | 71 | 100 |
| | | % pass rate | 100 | 100 | 100 |

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

Quality of education and training

59. Practical teaching is very good. Vocationally experienced teachers bring a wealth of industrial experience to teaching with a strong focus on skills development. Health and safety issues are emphasised and useful professional hints and tips are passed on. The practical lessons are characterised by a brisk pace of delivery and effective demonstrations focus on techniques. Quick progress to hands-on opportunities works well to allow students to practise and acquire skills. In

hard landscaping practical lessons, students rapidly gain confidence in using hand tools and there are similar examples in propagation, tree climbing, turf care and floristry.

60. Students' individual learning needs are met. A range of in-class support is available for weaker students and extension tasks for more capable students. For example, in a botany practical lesson, key terms were provided on flash cards, a prompt sheet was made available to slower students and more advanced tasks were available for those who completed the main body of work quickly.

61. Some teaching is less effective. Typically, this centres on uninspiring activities and insufficient challenge to develop learning skills. Opportunities are missed to develop students' research skills, powers of analysis and evaluative skills. There is little use of ILT to promote learning.

62. Students benefit from having easy access to a wide range of specialist resources used in teaching and assignments. For example, the nursery and garden centre are used for lessons in commercial nursery practice, sales and promotion. Turf care lessons make good use of the sports fields. The plant collections are gradually becoming established and are labelled well. There are landscape areas for general horticulture practice and an arboretum is used for arboriculture practice.

63. On modern apprenticeship programmes, all learners receive training from their employers and this is supplemented by attendance at college, usually for one day each week. Employers are strongly committed to the programmes and provide high-quality on-the-job training for work-based learners. Modern equipment is used with a strong emphasis on the quality of work, and health and safety. Learners are visited every three months by a training advisor to conduct a quarterly review in conjunction with the employer. Additionally, learners are visited in the workplace by college tutors who conduct work-based assessments and give good informal support. Key skills are well integrated into off-the-job training provision at the college.

64. The standard of coursework is generally very good. Assignment tasks lack some originality, but some excellent pieces of work are produced, particularly from mature students. There is a strong emphasis on presentation skills and an expectation that IT will be used to present finished assignments. Marking is thorough. Constructive comments are given to guide students in future assignments and in most cases, spelling and grammar are marked.

65. Assessment practices are less effective in work-based learning. Portfolios are presented well and in a professional style, however, insufficient planning of assessments results in long delays between learners gathering evidence and getting feedback from assessors. Job sheets provide an acceptable form of assessment, but are time consuming to prepare and do not make use of wider learning opportunities. Not enough use is made of alternative forms of assessment such as witness testimonies. Some portfolios show little evidence of internal verification activity including some of those close to completion.

66. Tutorials are managed effectively. Monitoring and reporting of individual student's academic progress are good. Progress towards achievements is recorded carefully and onward progression is monitored. Whilst after initial assessment, additional learning support is offered according to need, recording of individual progress is minimal and less effective.

Leadership and management

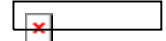
67. Leadership and management are good. The curriculum manager sets a clear direction and is supported by experienced team leaders. Agendas for course meetings focus on academic issues and result in effective action plans. Course reviews are thorough and include detailed analysis and monitoring of retention rates, achievement and progression data. Management of work-based learning is generally satisfactory. However, managers have been slow to recognise that learners are taking longer than expected to complete the frameworks, and the number of frameworks being completed is declining. They have not taken appropriate action to address these issues.

68. Full-time and part-time staff benefit from staff development opportunities. New staff are well supported as the teaching team includes two mentors who are also advanced practitioners. Staff

who have been in teaching for some time are encouraged to spend short periods of time working alongside industry partners to ensure their skills and knowledge are up to date. Examples include green keeping, nursery work and management work shadowing.

69. Communications with employers and the local community work well. Regular and informative news letters are used to keep industry partners updated. Employers report a fast response by college staff in response to requests for information.

Animal care



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

Strengths

- high retention and pass rates on full-time courses
- much good teaching
- good development of practical skills
- good pastoral and academic support for students
- effective use of animal and farm resources.

Weaknesses

- insufficient differentiation in teaching of theory lessons
- narrow range of part-time, full-time and work-based provision
- inadequate grooming parlour and day kennels.

Scope of provision

70. The college offers full-time and part-time courses in animal care and veterinary nursing. Full-time courses at level 2 include first diploma and national certificate in animal care and at level 3, national diploma in animal management. Part-time courses include NVQ veterinary nursing, NVQ animal care, certificate in small animal care and canine studies, and the certificate in pet store management. All courses are based at the Holcot centre on the main college site. There are 117 students on animal care full-time courses, of which, 25 are on a first diploma, 16 are on a national certificate and 76 are national diploma students. There are 57 students on part-time courses, of which, 16 are veterinary nurses and 19 are NVQ animal care students. The majority of full-time students are aged 16 to 18. The college also runs HE courses in animal welfare and veterinary health.

Achievement and standards

71. Retention rates on all full-time courses are high and rates on the national diploma course have consistently exceeded the national average for the last three years. The retention rates of the current national certificate students are low, as only 16 of the original 25 students remain. High pass rates on full-time courses meet or exceed the national average. Pass rates on both national diploma and first diploma courses have declined from 100% to around the national average in 2002/03.

72. Students have good practical and employment skills. They work confidently, displaying good husbandry skills, handling and caring for a wide range of large and small animals. Many students overcome low prior attainment and significant barriers to learning, and successfully complete their course, as well as learn other useful social and personal skills. Systems for measuring the added value each student receives are underdeveloped. Students are punctual, attend regularly and are enthusiastic about learning. National diploma in animal care students gain good supervisory skills through the supervision of first-year students whilst on unit duties.

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 | 29 | 31 | 39 |
| | | % retention | 86 | 81 | 90 |
| | | % pass rate | 100 | 100 | 83 |
| National certificate in animal care | 2 | No. of starts | 76 | 67 | 60 |
| | | % retention | 84 | 85 | 95 |
| | | % pass rate | 98 | 100 | 96 |
| National diploma in animal management | 3 | No. of starts | 52 | 38 | 37 |
| | | % retention | 94 | 97 | 100 |
| | | % pass rate | 98 | 100 | 86 |
| Pet store management | 3 | No. of starts | 50 | 36 | 28 |
| | | % retention | 98 | 100 | 100 |
| | | % pass rate | 90 | 50 | 68 |

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

Quality of education and training

73. There is much good teaching. Teachers are knowledgeable and enthusiastic about their subject and use a range of methods to inspire students including individual and group work, role play and discussion. In a good national diploma lesson, students effectively researched animals who have adapted to extreme climates. They produced posters and fact sheets, which were discussed and assessed by the whole group. Part-time and full-time students develop good practical industry-

related skills as a result of effective practical teaching, planned work experience and well organised routine duties. Attention to animal welfare and health and safety is good.

74. Students work well together in practical situations, but less well in theory lessons. In the weaker theory lessons, there is a lack of challenge and stimulation. Students spend much of their time listening to the teacher or completing gapped hand-outs. There is little use of technology or visual material to illustrate and reinforce teaching, or activities to extend the more able students. Teachers do not regularly check on students learning and understanding in theory lessons. Despite good initial assessment, teachers often fail to adapt their teaching to the needs of individuals and to acknowledge the range of prior experience and learning in the group.

75. Most theory teaching takes place in comfortable classrooms which contain attractive displays of students' work. The learning resource centre contains a good range of books, journals, CD-ROMS and videos. There is a good range and sufficient number of companion and farm animals, housed in purpose built accommodation. Good scheduling of students' lessons with the animal collections, ensures efficient use of the resource without compromising animal welfare. A new veterinary surgery on the campus provides excellent resources for the teaching of veterinary nursing. The dog grooming parlour lacks a reception area and adequate facilities for washing and grooming large dogs. The wooden day kennels are insufficient in number and do not reflect industry best practice. Staff are well qualified, both academically and vocationally, and use their recent industrial experience to good effect to enhance learning.

76. Assessments are well planned using a range of appropriate methods. Assessments on full-time courses are rigorously internally verified. There is good integration of teaching and assessment, with prompt feedback on assessment to students. Group and individual tutorials are planned and structured providing good individual support. The standard of students' written work is satisfactory. Most students take effective notes and maintain their work well.

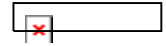
77. There is no full-time provision at level 1, reducing the opportunities for entry level students to progress. Opportunities to study part time are limited. There are few short courses in animal care or lessons in the evenings and at weekends. As part of their enrichment programme, students undertake additional training in human and animal first aid, safe lifting techniques and safe use of veterinary medicines, however, this training does not lead to a recognised qualification. Students participate in visits, but there are few visiting speakers and little opportunity to use the good sporting facilities at the college. All full-time students take part in a well-managed programme of work experience. Students on the national diploma, undertake this in the summer break, but would prefer to attend their work placements on a one day a week basis.

78. Students receive good quality advice and guidance at interview. The college has an open admissions policy and full-time students often enter the first diploma with low prior attainment. Full-time students receive effective guidance from their tutors and additional support teams. Tutors are aware of students' circumstances and individual needs, and demonstrate high levels of commitment to ensuring that students make individual progress. Key skills achievement is satisfactory, but some students are not sufficiently challenged. Students with good school exam results are not always given challenging key skill targets.

Leadership and management

79. Curriculum management is good. Course teams are effective, meet regularly and work well together to develop effective management processes. Staff are involved in and understand self-assessment and the strategic planning process. Courses are reviewed regularly leading to continual improvement. Targets for retention and pass rates are set at course team level, but staff are not fully aware of these for their courses. Staff deployment is good. New teachers receive effective induction and support. Formal and informal communication is good. There is little evidence of strategies to promote equal opportunities, support diversity and challenge gender stereotypes.

Agriculture and countryside management



Overall provision in this area is **outstanding (grade 1)**

Strengths

- high pass rates on most courses

- good attainment of practical skills

- very good teaching and learning

- good use of estate and farm resources to support teaching and learning.

Weaknesses

- insufficient rigour in aspects of internal verification.

Scope of provision

80. The college offers courses at first diploma, national certificate and national diploma level in agriculture, farm mechanisation and countryside management. National certificates and diplomas are offered in sustainable land management. NVQs are available in agricultural subjects at levels 1 and 2. There are 61 full-time and 214 part-time students on courses. Some 10 work-based learners are currently on programmes in agriculture and gamekeeping. Additional vocationally related qualifications are available such as pesticides and chainsaw certificates. The majority of students are aged 16 to 18. There are no female students.

Achievement and standards

81. There are high and some very high, pass rates on most courses. All students were retained and all passed on both the first diploma in agriculture and the national diploma in countryside management courses in 2002/03. Pass rates on the national diploma in agriculture course are near the national average, however, retention rates have improved significantly. Retention rates are improving on all courses. Achievement of NVQs, as part of modern apprenticeship frameworks, is good in both agriculture and gamekeeping. Framework achievement is satisfactory. Retention rates of current trainees on work-based programmes are good. All full-time students achieve, on average, two useful additional qualifications in land-based subjects, for example certificates in the safe use of all terrain vehicles, sprayer operation, safe lifting and fork lift truck operation.

82. Students' practical skills are good. They complete tasks competently and efficiently using previous knowledge and experience. In one practical session, students, working effectively as a

team, removed and replaced a field fence quickly and to a high standard. Students show a good understanding of their chosen vocational field. Countryside management students have a clear and detailed understanding of organisations involved in countryside recreation.

A sample of retention and pass rates in agriculture and countryside management, 2001 to 2003

| Qualification | Level | Completion year: | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 |
|---|-------|------------------|------|------|------|
| First diploma in agriculture | 2 | No. of starts | 11 | 7 | 5 |
| | | % retention | 91 | 100 | 100 |
| | | % pass rate | 100 | 71 | 100 |
| City and Guilds 0330 national certificate in environmental conservation | 2 | No. of starts | 15 | 9 | 17 |
| | | % retention | 73 | 89 | 94 |
| | | % pass rate | 82 | 100 | 94 |
| NVQ mixed farming | 2 | No. of starts | 1 | 9 | 15 |
| | | % retention | 100 | 67 | 93 |
| | | % pass rate | 0 | 100 | 100 |
| National diploma in agriculture | 3 | No. of starts | 15 | 10 | 12 |
| | | % retention | 67 | 75 | 100 |
| | | % pass rate | 100 | 83 | 83 |
| National diploma in countryside management | 3 | No. of starts | 8 | 6 | 6 |
| | | % retention | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| | | % pass rate | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| NVQ mixed farming | 3 | No. of starts | * | 3 | 15 |
| | | % retention | * | 67 | 100 |
| | | % pass rate | * | 100 | 88 |
| Pesticides PA-01.00 foundation module - 1 year | 3 | No. of starts | 108 | 91 | 56 |
| | | % retention | 93 | 93 | 100 |
| | | % pass rate | 90 | 99 | 98 |

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

*course did not run

Quality of education and training

83. Teaching and learning are very good. Well planned, vocationally relevant lessons, contain a good mix of appropriate activities which motivate and encourage students to learn. In most lessons, students are confident, attentive and responsive. Many lessons use group work very well to help students learn from each other, using their previous knowledge and experience. Most handouts are of good quality, informative and are used effectively to promote interaction between the teacher and students. Opportunities to integrate key skills teaching into lessons are well used.

84. Good use is made of estate and farm resources to support teaching and learning in both practical and theory lessons. In one lesson, the teacher used two shapes of cooked beetroot to demonstrate differences in the soil particle shapes and then took the students out to assess soil types in the fields. In another session, the teacher explained the theoretical design of cattle housing

and then visited the college dairy unit to illustrate that principles are put into practice. In the better lessons, teachers used directed questions to check prior learning and reinforce knowledge. IT is used extensively in academic group tutorial support lessons, mainly for assignment work.

85. In the few less-effective lessons, students are not challenged or questioned sufficiently and insufficient guidance is given on note taking. Little use is made of the section on lesson plans to identify differentiation needs, particularly when courses at different levels are taught together. Key skills work is not systematically included on schemes of work.

86. Resources are modern, well maintained and designed to maximise opportunities for learning. For example, cow sheds incorporate several different types of design and have extra wide passageways to allow easy student access and viewing, and promote animal welfare. Staff and students value these facilities. Library resources are good. Books can be ordered for essential coursework. IT facilities and Internet access are good. Teachers have good technical knowledge, a wide range of experience and are well qualified. Most hold a teaching qualification. Classrooms are of a good quality and are close to practical areas. Work placements for trainees are generally good. The inter-site travel arrangements are, at times, unreliable. Students complain that this makes them late for lessons.

87. Assessment of both practical and theory work is well planned and ensures students meet the requirements of their courses. Initial assessment is thorough and identifies students needing additional support. For example, several students are provided with a laptop computer to help with literacy skills. There is a good range of vocationally relevant assignments. Marking is generally accurate and fair. Despite a well-documented system, some aspects of internal verification are insufficiently rigorous. For example, poor grammar on some assignment briefs, a pass grade awarded to work clearly copied from the Internet and to work that was well short of the required word count, and some insufficiently clear feedback to aid improvement, were not identified and challenged through internal verification. Effective on-the-job assessment of work-based learners takes place by college staff who regularly visit work placements.

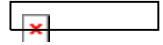
88. The number of students on agriculture and countryside courses is small, but has increased on NVQ and environmental conservation courses. Many lessons have very low numbers. To ensure viability, small courses are taught effectively in mixed groups. There are good progression routes from level 2 through to HE. There is no full-time level 1 provision in either agriculture or countryside. Many students take extra qualifications to enhance their employability and skills, and a wide range of vocational activities, such as visits to shows are organised. There is an insufficient range of enrichment activities provided. Six monthly meetings are held with industrial representatives to discuss curriculum developments. However, no student representatives attend.

89. Good academic and personal support is provided for students. Individual learning and skills plans are used effectively with a review twice each term and much informal personal support takes place. A few tutorial records do not set clear action plans for improvement. Work-based apprentices are well supported by college staff who visit in order to make assessments and monitor progress.

Leadership and management

90. Leadership and management are very good. Staff are involved with strategic planning, self-assessment, the setting of challenging targets for retention and pass rates, and are aware of quality assurance procedures. New staff value the thorough induction process which includes regular meetings with a mentor in the first few months of their appointment. Staff development needs, including industrial updating, are identified and actioned through annual appraisals. Annual observations of teaching are carried out on all staff which they value. While course teams meet regularly to discuss current issues, some previous actions are not always monitored. Student representatives take part in annual course reviews and receive a report on actions and their progress. Equal opportunities have a high profile in the department, however, there is no formal raising of awareness relating to the latest legislation. Many members of the curriculum area are associated with external industrial organisations such as the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group and Young Farmers Clubs.

Construction



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

Contributory grade for work-based learning is **good (grade 2)**

Strengths

- high pass rates on most courses
- high NVQ pass rates on advanced modern apprenticeships
- very good on-the-job training developing high level skills
- support for students is highly effective
- effective use of very good resources, on-site and off-site.

Weaknesses

- declining NVQ pass rates in carpentry and joinery, and plumbing for adult work-based learners
- slow progress towards foundation modern apprenticeship framework achievement
- low retention rates on three-year programmes for NVQ level 2 plumbing and brickwork.

Scope of provision

91. The construction curriculum area holds CoVE status and offers foundation, intermediate and advanced-level programmes for construction craft and technician students. These include City and Guilds, NVQ programmes, modern apprenticeships for work-based learners, and certificate and

diploma awards for technician students. Courses are also offered for pupils aged 14 to 16 on open college network (OCN) and school-based qualifications. There are evening courses for career-change adults and 'do-it-yourself' type programmes.

92. Current programmes include bricklaying, carpentry and bench joinery, and plumbing and technician studies. At the time of inspection, there are 349 full-time students mostly aged 16 to 18, 487 part-time students and 459 work-based learners, many of whom are adults. Some 140 pupils aged 14 to 16, attend one day a week at the Great Billing Centre.

Achievement and standards

93. Pass rates are high for the majority of courses and are well above the national average. Pass rates on college-based NVQ courses at level 2, in both plumbing and carpentry and joinery, as well as on the national diploma in construction course, have maintained, or improved to, a high level over a three-year period. Retention rates on these courses have also improved. All three year college-based NVQ level 2 courses have low retention rates. In plumbing, rates have declined sharply over the past three years to well below the national average.

94. Pass rates for the NVQ element of advanced modern apprenticeships are high in all craft areas. For advanced modern apprentices finishing in 2002, the NVQ pass rate was 85% in plumbing, 67% in carpentry and joinery, and 78% in brickwork. Over three-quarters of foundation modern apprentices following carpentry and joinery, achieved the NVQ and over half of foundation modern apprentices following plumbing and brickwork also achieved the qualification. By contrast, NVQ pass rates have declined and are low for adult learners, other than modern apprentices, who are following work-based learning programmes in carpentry and joinery, and plumbing. Attendance and punctuality of these students are frequently poor. These students find it difficult to attend college due to the commercial pressures of their work. In all crafts at foundation level, modern apprentices generally make slow progress towards achieving the full modern apprenticeship framework. A significant minority eventually succeed, but often well after their targeted end date. Retention rates of students are generally satisfactory.

95. The standard of students' work is high. Students acquire good practical skills in tasks which are vocationally related, such as the use of hand tools for each of the different craft areas. For example, students build good-quality brickwork models, and carpentry and joinery students produced good woodworking joints in year-one projects. Many projects and portfolios are well presented and technically accurate.

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

| Qualification | Level | Completion year: | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 |
|------------------------------------|--------------|-------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Intermediate construction award | 2 | No. of starts | * | 28 | 76 |
| | | % retention | * | 21 | 39 |
| | | % pass rate | * | 20 | 100 |
| NVQ plumbing (2 year) | 2 | No. of starts | 50 | 59 | 47 |
| | | % retention | 48 | 44 | 85 |
| | | % pass rate | 92 | 88 | 98 |
| NVQ carpentry and joinery (2 year) | 2 | No. of starts | 23 | 30 | 57 |
| | | % retention | 70 | 73 | 91 |
| | | % pass rate | 88 | 95 | 97 |
| NVQ plumbing (3 year) | 2 | No. of starts | 43 | 27 | 42 |
| | | % retention | 70 | 48 | 32 |
| | | % pass rate | 83 | 100 | 100 |

| | | | | | |
|------------------------------------|---|---------------|----|-----|----|
| NVQ carpentry and joinery (3 year) | 2 | No. of starts | 41 | 60 | 33 |
| | | % retention | 37 | 32 | 46 |
| | | % pass rate | 93 | 100 | 97 |

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

* course did not run

Quality of education and training

96. Teaching is satisfactory or better in almost all lessons. Good practical skills development takes place both in lessons and, in particular, in the workplace. Through effective on-site supervision, students generally meet industry skill standards across occupations. In all crafts, students work on a range of well designed and complex tasks and produce work which is mostly to a high standard. Teaching in theory lessons is satisfactory. In the better lessons, students are actively engaged and relate theoretical concepts to their own practical work. All teachers give good practical advice based on their own experiences within the construction industry. An identified staff development need in the CoVE development plan has resulted in participation in a teaching and learning development pilot with the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) Standards Unit.

97. Staffing levels are adequate and teachers are qualified to industrial standards with extensive and relevant vocational experience. Staff either hold or are working towards teaching qualifications. Other staff training needs are identified effectively through appraisal including industrial updating requirements.

98. Physical resources are very good. There are large well-equipped workshops in all craft areas. These are custom built to match industry standards. The plumbing workshops are imaginatively designed. Computers are provided in most work areas in addition to dedicated, well-equipped IT rooms. CoVE funding has been used to obtain up-to-date equipment for surveying and to help equip workshop areas. Classrooms are furnished to a high standard and many have interactive whiteboards. Whilst the carpentry workshops are spacious, noise levels from power tools can affect other students. The supply of materials is adequate. At times, small tools are in short supply, owing to loss and this can slow down work. Resources in the workplace are subject to health and safety checks and are of a high standard.

99. Assessment practices are fair, accurate and are carried out on a regular basis. Recording, monitoring and tracking of students' progress and achievement is effective. Students can at any time identify what they have achieved. However, many students do not achieve inside set target dates. Training advisors and qualified assessors from the college visit work-based learners in the workplace for assessment and review purposes. Effective assessment documentation is available for work-based learners to collect evidence such as witness testimonies. However, some learners do not promptly or methodically present work-based evidence for assessment, resulting in missed opportunities that delay completion.

100. The range of programmes and attendance patterns offered are flexibly designed to meet the needs of students who have differing abilities and employment status. Careful consideration of the needs of construction-industry employers has taken place and is reflected in the college's willingness to match individual learning plans (ILPs) to each student's circumstances. A substantial number of students use the foundation or intermediate construction awards to learn basic construction skills and they work towards the technical certificate whilst seeking employment. Many then transfer into work-based learning, often before completing their original qualification aim. The progression of students on to level 3 programmes is low as many students secure employment easily with their level 2 skills. The college is extending its range of provision for the next academic year by offering stonemasonry, roof slating and tiling, and wall and floor tiling.

101. Initial assessment and the on-going identification of additional support are highly effective. Good individual personal and work-related support is provided at the college by mentors allocated to

each specific trade. Effective links between mentors, tutors and training advisors ensure good communication and prompt action to support students where needed. Students are knowledgeable about their programmes and good advice is given in relation to future career paths.

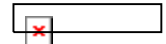
102. Effective on-site reviews for work-based learners include active participation by employers and work supervisors. College progress reports are reviewed and discussed, with issues identified resulting in clearly defined action planning. The CoVE has identified the need to offer training to employers in the effective completion of training plans and actions to address this are underway.

Leadership and management

103. Curriculum management is good. Staff are effectively deployed and understand their roles and responsibilities within the team. Communication channels are clear, including with employers and external bodies, through an active liaison group. Students' and employers' views are actively sought, and issues and suggestions acted upon. Management of a substantial number of work-based learners within the curriculum area is good and quality assurance procedures are effective. The effective implementation of the CoVE development plan is monitored by a steering group in close liaison with the LSC. The subcontracted training for part of the brickwork provision is well managed through monthly quality monitoring meetings. Growth in student numbers has stretched physical and human resources, however, adequate actions have been taken to overcome overcrowding, pressure on equipment and to ensure there are appropriate staffing levels.

104. The CoVE development plan includes objectives to widen participation from a variety of non-traditional groups. Active marketing takes place to attract under-represented groups, for example, female plumbers. Minority ethnic groups are brought into college during the summer period for taster sessions. Promotion of equal opportunities is good. For work-based learners, equal opportunities issues are effectively discussed and reinforced by training managers during on-site reviews.

Furniture studies



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

Strengths

- high retention and pass rates on the diploma in foundation studies art and design course

- high pass rates on most programmes

- good student portfolios

- good range of specialist provision

- good and enthusiastic teaching which motivates students.

Weaknesses

- low retention rates on many programmes
- insufficiently consistent application of quality assurance procedures
- insufficient appropriate accommodation for design activities.

Scope of provision

105. The college provides a range of furniture, and craft and design related courses based at the Holcot centre. Courses are offered mainly at levels 2 and 3 and include certificates and diplomas. The college also offers a diploma in foundation studies in art and design in partnership with, and delivered at, University College Northampton.

106. At the time of inspection, 52 students aged 16 to 18 and 22 adults are on full-time programmes based at the college. In addition, 309 adults and 5 students aged 16 to 18 are on part-time programmes. Over 100 students are on the diploma course delivered at University College Northampton. In addition, there are 60 students aged 14 to 16 from local schools who are attending a schools link programme in design and interior decoration.

Achievement and standards

107. Pass rates for those students who complete their course of study are high. For example, in 2002/03, pass rates were 100% on the national diploma in interior design course, City and Guilds cabinet making and furniture making progression award and creative skills certificate in interior design and soft furnishing course. Pass rates on the diploma in foundation studies art and design course are also above national averages at 99%.

108. Retention rates on many courses are low and have declined over a two or three year period, up to 2003. However, retention rates have improved significantly on the creative skills soft furnishing course in 2003. The diploma in foundation art and design has maintained retention rates consistently above national averages for the same period. The duration and attendance of many courses have been reviewed effectively as part of strategies to improve retention rates by the college. At the time of inspection, retention rates on the majority of courses have improved.

109. The majority of students produce work of a consistently high standard. For example, a student produced a high-quality small veneered jewellery box with blackwood inlays including a secret locking device and internal compartments.

110. Students' portfolios are good, both in terms of technical content and presentation, across the programme area. Craft portfolios contain detailed notes and images that trace the significant stages in the design, development and manufacture of the work. All portfolios contain extensive research materials from a variety of sources, including the Internet.

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

| Qualification | Level | Completion year: | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 |
|--|-------|------------------|------|------|------|
| City and Guilds 6995 progression award (furniture) | 2 | No. of starts | * | 12 | 18 |
| | | % retention | * | 75 | 44 |
| | | % pass rate | * | 89 | 100 |
| City and Guilds 7802 creative skills certificate (soft furnishing) | 2 | No. of starts | 6 | 7 | 10 |
| | | % retention | 100 | 57 | 70 |
| | | % pass rate | 83 | 75 | 100 |
| Diploma in foundation studies art and design | 3 | No. of starts | * | 99 | 100 |
| | | % retention | * | 93 | 95 |
| | | % pass rate | * | 92 | 99 |
| National diploma in design (interior design) | 3 | No. of starts | 8 | 12 | 9 |
| | | % retention | 88 | 83 | 56 |
| | | % pass rate | 100 | 90 | 100 |
| City and Guilds 6955-30 cabinet making | 3 | No. of starts | * | 6 | 20 |
| | | % retention | * | 100 | 45 |
| | | % pass rate | * | 50 | 100 |

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

* data not available

Quality of education and training

111. The majority of teaching is good or better. In the best lessons, students are actively engaged throughout the session and enjoy their learning. Teachers are well qualified, enthusiastic and give good practical advice, based on their own experiences and engagement in creative practice. Teachers use questions and answers effectively to develop and check students' understanding and reinforce their learning. For example, in one theory session on 'timber attackers', effective questioning techniques drew on students' experiences to identify a range of wood beetles. The teacher then gave examples of beetle damage from experience, reinforced with examples of beetle-damaged timber and preserved beetles.

112. Teachers set demanding and challenging design briefs that motivate the students. For example, first diploma students produced innovative and zany design solutions to a 'Bertie Basset' brief which included beanbags, room dividers, lighting and beds. In the few less effective lessons, teachers fail to give enough clear direction to students and lesson objectives are not met fully.

113. Furniture studies courses are located in purpose-built workshops. These are well equipped and serviced by a woodworking machine shop that includes industrial standard machines and a computer numerically controlled router which students can programme and operate as part of their course of study. Students on soft furnishing courses also have a dedicated studio. The main design room has 16 Internet-linked computers with up-to-date software. However, dedicated rooms for interior design-based courses are located next to a plumbing and wood machine workshop. Noise from these workshops, at times, renders formal teaching difficult. In one session, students involved in a critique failed to achieve the planned learning outcomes, owing to difficulties hearing each presentation and overcoming noise to make a formal input into the lesson.

114. Assessment arrangements, using standard documentation, are satisfactory. Feedback to

students on assessed work is mostly detailed, clear and developmental. However, inconsistency with good practice includes irregular assessment and insufficient feedback on progress for a few students and some inappropriate grading criteria used to assess their work. Internal verification is well planned, but has failed to identify these inconsistencies across the programme area.

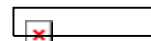
115. The range of specialist courses is broad and offers students opportunities to learn about different aspects of furniture craft and design. These include furniture making, furniture restoration, upholstery, soft furnishing, patchwork and quilting, curtain and loose cover making, lace making, calligraphy and interior design. Courses for some craft areas are available through evening sessions as well as by day-time attendance.

116. Support for students is good. Individual learning and skills plans are up-to-date and contain detailed information on targets, achievements and enrichment activities. Learning support workers provide useful additional help for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities during classroom and workshop-based lessons. Induction is well organised. There is an effective planned tutorial programme, including subject-based group tutorials across the programme area.

Leadership and management

117. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The curriculum manager was appointed in August 2003 and has implemented a number of strategies to address poor retention rates. Although it is too early to identify the overall impact of these, there is evidence that in-year retention rates are improving. Communication within the section is good. There are regular formal and informal meetings. Staff rooms have computing facilities that allow electronic communication including access to management information reports and e-mail. Staff performance and professional development are well managed. All staff undergo appraisal meetings and performance reviews linked to effective staff development. The self-assessment process includes all staff and has clearly identified the strengths, but not all the weaknesses in provision. Targets are set and monitored regularly for recruitment, retention and pass rates. Quality assurance procedures are not applied consistently across all programmes. The diploma in foundation studies in art and design, delivered at the college's partner HE institution, does not follow all the college's quality assurance procedures. Staff teaching on this programme do not produce lesson plans or schemes of work consistently and there is insufficient formal planning to ensure the programme covers all learning outcomes included in the awarding body specifications.

Sports studies



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

Strengths

- very high retention and pass rates on all full-time courses

- good standard of students' work in practical lessons and written assignments

- much good teaching and learning in practical and theory lessons

- o effective use of a wide range of specialist training resources.

Weaknesses

- o insufficient use of ILT in learning
- o narrow range of provision.

Scope of provision

118. Full-time courses offered in sport studies are first diploma and national diploma in sport and exercise science. Additional qualifications offered include community sports leader award, English basketball association coaching award, first aid and the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) teaching exercise and fitness certificate. Students also take part in horse riding, water sports, clay pigeon shooting and archery. Specialist academies in football, basketball and rugby are delivered in partnership with Northampton Town Football Club, Northamptonshire Schools Basketball Association and Northampton Saints Rugby Club. The college also offers a HND in sports management and a one-year Bachelor of Arts top-up degree with honours in sport and recreation management, in conjunction with University College Northampton. In 2003/04, approximately 135 full-time and 4 part-time students are enrolled on sports courses. Most are aged 16 to 18. There is no provision at level 1 and limited part-time provision. The college plans to introduce a range of sports massage, sports therapy and holistic therapy courses for September 2004, in response to market research and feedback from existing full-time students.

Achievement and standards

119. There are very high pass and retention rates on full-time courses in sport that significantly exceed the national average. All retained students have passed the national diploma in sport science course for the last three years and retention rates on this programme have steadily improved. The standard of work is good in the majority of lessons. First diploma students demonstrate effective coaching skills and a confident and detailed knowledge of human anatomy. Sports students demonstrate considerable proficiency in practical skills, particularly in football, rugby and basketball. There is good progression to level 3 and to HE. Most students improve their progression prospects by successfully gaining additional qualifications. For example, all first-year sports students complete two additional coaching qualifications. National diploma students complete two further additional coaching qualifications in their second year.

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

| Qualification | Level | Completion year: | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 |
|--|--------------|-------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| First diploma in sport and exercise sciences | 2 | No. of starts | * | * | 7 |
| | | % retention | * | * | 86 |
| | | % pass rate | * | * | 100 |
| Teaching exercise and fitness certificate | 2 | No. of starts | * | * | 20 |
| | | % retention | * | * | 100 |
| | | % pass rate | * | * | 100 |

| | | | | | |
|--|---|---------------|-----|-----|-----|
| Community sports leaders award | 2 | No. of starts | * | 5 | 31 |
| | | % retention | * | 100 | 100 |
| | | % pass rate | * | 100 | 100 |
| English basketball coach award | 2 | No. of starts | * | 10 | 4 |
| | | % retention | * | 100 | 100 |
| | | % pass rate | * | 100 | 100 |
| National diploma in science (sports studies) | 3 | No. of starts | 15 | 26 | 43 |
| | | % retention | 67 | 85 | 91 |
| | | % pass rate | 100 | 100 | 100 |

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

* course did not run

Quality of education and training

120. Teaching and learning are good in a high proportion of lessons. The use of a range of teaching and learning activities engages students well and learning is checked by effective questioning. In very good lessons, learning material and activities are differentiated effectively. The use in teaching of effective teamwork ensures that most students work to their full potential. Students are well motivated and self-disciplined and can work well independently. Teachers have a good rapport with their students who speak positively about the benefits of the support they receive from staff. There are missed opportunities for the assessment of key skills in a minority of lessons and there is limited use of ILT in the majority of lessons observed. Some students arrive late to a minority of lessons, however, this is dealt with effectively by the teacher.

121. Resources for sports courses are very good and well maintained. The sports hall provides opportunities for a broad range of activities which include basketball, football, volleyball and badminton. Students have access to the college's modern fitness suite, well-prepared outdoor pitches and a floodlit artificial turf pitch. Most courses have good-quality specialist rooms with access to interactive whiteboards, computers and projectors. Students' work is displayed in base rooms and provides a stimulating environment. Students have access to a good range of enrichment activities including a full sports fixture schedule for a range of teams.

122. Teaching staff are well qualified with relevant up-to-date experience in the subjects they teach. Effective links have been made with local primary schools and students coach school children as part of their course. All full-time students gain work experience locally and make full use of the opportunities offered to them. The football, basketball and rugby academies give access to up-to-date training methods and research, and coaching staff have high levels of specialist coaching qualifications.

123. Rigorous assessment and internal verification procedures are in place. Written and verbal feedback is focused on action needed by the students to improve their performance. Assignment briefs are well written and follow awarding body guidelines. Students attend two tutorial lessons each week and progress is monitored effectively on a regular basis. Full-time students have three written progress reports each year.

124. There is full-time provision at levels 2 and 3. The academies provide students with additional practical coaching sessions and students are involved in extensive competitive sport. Progression from level 2 to level 3 is good. Untypical of the sector, there are very few female students on full-time courses. Limited opportunities exist for competition in some sports, for example netball. There are a limited number of adult students on courses and few courses are targeted at the adult market. The current range of provision is narrow, owing to a lack of part-time provision and no level 1 or work-based learning provision as yet. Plans to expand the curriculum in response to market research are

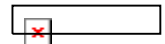
in hand.

125. An effective tutorial system is in place with good tracking and monitoring of individual students' academic progress. There is an effective system of reporting behaviour and personal problems through 'cause of concern' forms. Good attendance monitoring takes place as a result of effective communication between sports tutors. Students value the support given by vocational staff. All full-time students have initial screening for basic and key skills. Whilst additional support is offered to those students who are identified as needing it, some students do not make good use of this. Over three-quarters of the first diploma students are identified as having literacy or numeracy skills at entry level, but less than a quarter of these actually attend additional learning support.

Leadership and management

126. Leadership and management are good. Significant growth in full-time numbers has taken place during the last three years and has been well managed. Regular monitoring of performance indicators at course-team level and the use of challenging targets for recruitment, achievement, attendance and punctuality, all ensure that students reach their full potential. The area has a number of new teachers who are well supported by managers and other teachers. Effective staff development is linked directly to staff appraisals which are carried out on a regular basis. Action to widen participation to include more adult students and females is making slow progress.

Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities



Overall provision in this area is **outstanding (grade 1)**

Strengths

- very good teaching and learning which develops skills and challenges learners

- high retention and pass rates through external accreditation

- excellent progression to further study at the college.

- good specialist accommodation for provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities

- effective support for students in practical lessons.

Weaknesses

- o insufficient monitoring of development and achievement of personal skills.

Scope of provision

127. The college offers courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, linked to land-based vocational areas. Currently, there are 83 students on full-time and part-time courses. A two-year, full-time course in rural skills, caters mainly for students who have moderate learning difficulties as well as some who have severe and challenging support requirements. This course teaches life skills alongside vocational training options in animal care, horticulture, agriculture and horse care. Opportunities exist to progress to a third-year 'Bridge to Work' course, work-based provision or training at level 1. In addition, there is a limited range of part-time courses in some vocational areas. In all the courses, external accreditation at entry level is available including the Skills for Life Award and the Preliminary Cookery Certificate.

Achievement and standards

128. Pass rates on externally accredited qualifications are all high, at 100% on most of these courses. High expectations of students, results in the production of very high standards of work to meet learning goals. High rates of retention and attendance, at 92%, are all well above national average. Personal skills are clearly developed with students improving their confidence, self esteem and independence skills. Students on entry-level courses are now working towards and passing adult basic skills qualifications. On vocational options, students learn practical skills such as handling animals effectively, in realistic working situations and using a full range of equipment, including driving of small tractors. All students learn useful basic cooking skills and understand the importance of health and safety in kitchen work.

A sample of retention and pass rates in provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, 2001 to 2003

| Qualification | Level | Completion year: | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 |
|---|--------------|-------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) FE award | Entry | No. of starts | 8 | 8 | 10 |
| | | % retention | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| | | % pass rate | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| National Proficiency Tests Council (NPTC) horse care | Entry | No. of starts | 3 | 5 | 6 |
| | | % retention | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| | | % pass rate | 100 | 100 | 83 |
| NPTC animal care | Entry | No. of starts | 12 | 6 | 13 |
| | | % retention | 92 | 100 | 100 |
| | | % pass rate | 100 | 100 | 88 |
| NPTC horticulture | Entry | No. of starts | 11 | 15 | 18 |
| | | % retention | 100 | 87 | 94 |
| | | % pass rate | 100 | 89 | 92 |
| Entry level certificate in life skills | Entry | No. of starts | * | * | 25 |
| | | % retention | * | * | 100 |
| | | % pass rate | * | * | 100 |
| City and Guilds 333 | Entry | No. of starts | 18 | 19 | 11 |

| | | | | | |
|---------|--|-------------|----|-----|----|
| cookery | | % pass rate | 94 | 100 | 91 |
|---------|--|-------------|----|-----|----|

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

* course did not run

Quality of education and training

129. Very good teaching and learning helps students to develop an extensive range of skills and challenges them effectively. Staff are highly committed and display a sound understanding of the broad and sometimes complex range of individual student's needs. Most learning materials and activities are differentiated to meet these needs, however, teaching strategies for differentiation are not shown consistently on lesson plans. Literacy and numeracy skills are developed in vocational and life skills options, but are not yet embedded fully and mapped to the national standards. This is partly as a result of insufficient staff training in the requirements of the core curriculum. Low awareness of IT programmes to support teaching of basic skills, limits learning opportunities and activities to develop these skills.

130. Dedicated, good specialist accommodation for provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities includes a modern teaching block, a bungalow and two specialist kitchens for development of independent living skills. However, the kitchens do not have lowered work surfaces and cookers to meet the needs of wheelchair users. In vocational areas, students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities access the full range of specialist facilities and equipment.

131. Limited learning materials for adult basic skills are not fully available in classrooms where basic literacy and numeracy takes place. Computers are only available in one of the base rooms where much of the teaching takes place, restricting students' access. Students can access the computers in the learning resource centre at the main college site, but this is a short distance away.

132. Initial assessment procedures are highly effective and take place either during transition from school or within the three-day induction process. Further diagnostic assessments are carried out and information from schools and other sources is used to provide a full picture of each individual student. However, this information is not systematically recorded and used to monitor individual targets on the individual learning and skills plans.

133. Progression to further study at the college is excellent. There are clear progression routes within the two-year rural skills full-time course, with further opportunity to progress to the 'Bridge to Work' course or level 1 vocational course. In 2002/03, well over half the number of Year 2 students on the rural studies course progressed on to further study.

134. Year 2 students also participate in very good relevant work placements in local garden centres, do it yourself stores and supermarkets. One student, who had spent a day in a local supermarket, spoke confidently about completing a variety of activities including working on the till and had a very positive and comprehensive report from the workplace supervisor. This experience has supported nearly a quarter of students on the 'Bridge to Work' course, in 2002/03, to progress to employment. However, the work placement log books have not been adapted to meet the individual basic skills needs of the students.

135. The varied range of vocational options available are integrated well into mainstream curriculum areas and delivered by specialist vocational tutors. Part-time provision is limited and only available in some vocational areas. Currently, there are no part-time options in sports studies or construction. The full-time course predominantly caters for students aged 16 to 18. Links with special schools are very good, but are underdeveloped with other external agencies such as social services and adult day centres.

136. Students are extremely positive about the guidance and pastoral support they receive from friendly and helpful teachers, and support staff. Effective support in practical lessons is provided by

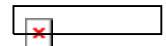
learning support assistants, who proactively promote and develop students' health and safety awareness, and understanding.

137. Monitoring and recording on individual learning and skills plans, of personal skills targets and achievements, are not strong or systematic. Students are aware of their tutorials, but are unable to explain or reflect on progress of their own personal skills targets. Basic skills support requirements are not met fully by learning support assistants who are not yet qualified in basic skills.

Leadership and management

138. Curriculum leadership is good, with clear direction, effective communications and good teamwork which all ensure students' success. A strong commitment to equal opportunities exists and a fully inclusive approach is taken throughout the curriculum area. Course reviews are an important part of the quality assurance process and take place regularly as part of team meetings. A few action points are monitored insufficiently. Course leaders are not involved fully in the self-assessment process. Whilst staff are attending some relevant training events, the emphasis on training in compulsory legislation training and national initiatives is too low. Staff have generally not attended SENDA training and are not aware of the Disability Discrimination Act 2001 (DDA) part 4 requirements.

Literacy and numeracy



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

Strengths

- good teaching in individual and small group literacy and numeracy lessons

- good skills development for students attending literacy and numeracy lessons

- effective use of vocationally relevant materials and activities in learning support and key skills lessons.

Weaknesses

- insufficient strategies in vocational lessons for meeting students' individual literacy and numeracy needs

- insufficient co-ordination of learning support and vocational teaching.

Scope of provision

139. The college offers literacy and numeracy support for students through drop-in, individual and small group lessons taught in the learning resource centre. General in-class support is also available. There is no discrete literacy and numeracy provision. Key skills teaching is integrated into all mainstream courses and work-based learning and is delivered largely by vocational teachers. The number of students receiving support has increased over the past two years. After initial assessment in 2003/04, 264 full-time students were identified as having literacy and numeracy needs. Of these, 149 have been offered individual or small group teaching in the learning resource centre and others receive in-class support.

Achievement and standards

140. Students attending one-to-one and small group literacy and numeracy lessons taught by learning support teachers, achieve well against the targets identified on their individual learning plans. Students are proud of the improvement in their literacy and numeracy skills. Students are offered the opportunity to take adult literacy and numeracy entry-level certificates, to aid progression to key skills level 1. At the time of inspection, 20 students had been entered for the qualifications.

141. In vocational lessons, students with literacy and numeracy needs do not receive specific, targeted teaching, to enable them to improve the skills needed to underpin key skills development. Across the college, pass rates for the Key Skills award, at levels 1 and 2, are good and substantially above the national average in both application of number and communications. However, only a small percentage of students take the external test and submits a portfolio; most students concentrate on the portfolio element alone. Portfolios are generally good and, once marked and verified, are used as evidence towards college certificates. Some more capable students are unchallenged in key skills lessons. Students with GCSE grades of C and D work at key skills level 1 and others repeat work at level 2. Some students progress successfully to working towards key skills level 3 on national diploma courses.

Quality of education and training

142. There is good teaching for students attending one-to-one and small group lessons for literacy and numeracy. Teaching is well planned, vocationally relevant and challenges students to improve. Tasks set are matched carefully to each student's needs. Students learn well and make progress against the targets recorded on their individual learning plans. Teachers use learning materials and activities which are vocationally relevant and stimulating. For example, in a learning support lesson for brickwork students, discussions about measurements for perimeter and area were followed by practical measuring activities in the grounds of the college. The students measured accurately a paved area, using the correct mathematical terms, in preparation for work on estimating and costing.

143. Students have access to good paper-based materials and most use computers competently. However, when key skills are delivered in vocational lessons, whilst teachers integrate key skills learning objectives well with vocational learning objectives, they do not have sufficient teaching and learning strategies to help students to improve their level of literacy and numeracy. Students with identified individual literacy and numeracy needs are not targeted systematically for checking of basic skills learning. In-class, learning support assistants, offer general support to students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

144. Learning resources are devised by the college; they are well produced and are work related. Well-qualified learning support teachers are skilled in teaching literacy and numeracy. Learning support assistants are either working towards or are qualified as classroom assistants. Staffing levels are satisfactory in relation to the numbers of students who take up additional support. Out-of-class learning support sessions are taught in the well-equipped learning resource centre. The open-plan design of the centre creates some distractions for students in parts of lessons. Learning resources for teaching adult basic skills or literacy and numeracy are limited.

145. Initial assessment is rigorous and students needing literacy and numeracy support are identified quickly, interviewed and offered support. The numbers attending taught lessons are low in comparison with the numbers identified as needing support. At the time of inspection, 264 students had been identified as needing support. A total of 149 students have been offered one-to-one or small group lessons, but only 75 students are actually taking up the support offered. Others benefit from in-class support.

Leadership and management

146. Curriculum management of literacy and numeracy across the college is satisfactory. There is a commitment to improving standards in basic skills and developing learning opportunities for students. There are regular meetings of learning support staff to discuss attendance, students' progress and course development. Staff have defined roles and responsibilities clearly. Most learning support staff have attended courses for basic skills core curriculum training, none have attended pre-entry 'Skills for All' training. The learning support curriculum leader organised useful staff training in behaviour management which was attended by learning support staff and lecturers from vocational areas.

147. There is insufficient communication between learning support lecturers and vocational teams. Students attending literacy and numeracy lessons have well-developed individual learning plans which are used to inform the development of their individual learning and skills plan. The learning and skills plan is used to record main, additional and key skills qualification targets and outcomes. The targets and actions set in the learning and skills plan are not communicated back to learning support lecturers and they are not sufficiently informed of each student's progress. Students are not able to make links between their main qualification targets and those for their literacy and numeracy development. Vocational tutors see the main responsibility for literacy and numeracy teaching as part of the responsibility of the learning support team.

Part D: College data

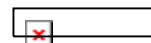
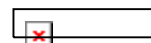


Table 1: Enrolments by level of study and age



| Level | 16-18 % | 19+ % |
|--------------|------------|------------|
| 1 | 29 | 18 |
| 2 | 31 | 24 |
| 3 | 13 | 19 |
| 4/5 | 1 | 3 |
| Other | 26 | 36 |
| Total | 100 | 100 |

Source: provided by the college in spring 2004

Table 2: Enrolments by curriculum area and age

| Curriculum area | 16-18 | 19+ | Total |
|--|--------------|--------------|----------------|
| | No. | No. | Enrolments (%) |
| Science and mathematics | 339 | 156 | 5 |
| Land-based provision | 964 | 1,681 | 26 |
| Construction | 553 | 958 | 15 |
| Engineering, technology and manufacture | 19 | 41 | 1 |
| Business administration, management and professional | 27 | 441 | 5 |
| Information and communication technology | 221 | 445 | 7 |
| Retailing, customer service and transportation | 60 | 363 | 4 |
| Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel | 120 | 574 | 7 |
| Hairdressing and beauty therapy | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Health, social care and public services | 258 | 744 | 10 |
| Visual and performing arts and media | 105 | 112 | 2 |
| Humanities | 130 | 25 | 2 |
| English, languages and communication | 243 | 79 | 3 |
| Foundation programmes | 325 | 82 | 4 |
| Unknown area of learning | 544 | 497 | 9 |
| Total | 3,908 | 6,198 | 100 |

Source: provided by the college in spring 2004

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 | 537 | 274 | 154 | 528 | 255 | 439 |
| | Retention rate % | 71 | 67 | 71 | 67 | 88 | 67 |
| | National average % | 83 | 84 | 81 | 74 | 80 | 70 |
| | Pass rate % | 68 | 80 | 99 | 60 | 69 | 90 |

| | | | | | | | |
|------------|------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| | National average % | 65 | 69 | 76 | 65 | 66 | 77 |
| 2 | Starters excluding transfers | 501 | 615 | 455 | 564 | 556 | 682 |
| | Retention rate % | 77 | 76 | 72 | 65 | 76 | 71 |
| | National average % | 77 | 77 | 77 | 69 | 71 | 71 |
| | Pass rate % | 79 | 88 | 96 | 74 | 79 | 85 |
| | National average % | 74 | 73 | 76 | 69 | 69 | 74 |
| 3 | Starters excluding transfers | 341 | 285 | 344 | 464 | 528 | 492 |
| | Retention rate % | 67 | 81 | 88 | 70 | 70 | 65 |
| | National average % | 71 | 71 | 75 | 62 | 69 | 64 |
| | Pass rate % | 76 | 90 | 95 | 72 | 80 | 83 |
| | National average % | 79 | 80 | 82 | 63 | 67 | 68 |
| 4/5 | Starters excluding transfers | 31 | 11 | 378 | 742 | 583 | 852 |
| | Retention rate % | 97 | 100 | 97 | 95 | 93 | 91 |
| | National average % | 96 | 96 | 95 | 96 | 97 | 96 |
| | Pass rate % | 47 | 73 | 91 | 60 | 61 | 80 |
| | 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 ISR.

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

| Courses | Teaching judged to be: | | | No of sessions observed |
|------------------------|------------------------|----------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| | Good or better % | Satisfactory % | Less than satisfactory % | |
| Level 3 (advanced) | 62 | 36 | 2 | 50 |
| Level 2 (intermediate) | 70 | 25 | 4 | 68 |
| Level 1 (foundation) | 57 | 42 | 0 | 14 |
| Other sessions | 60 | 34 | 4 | 23 |

| | | | | |
|---------------|-----------|-----------|----------|------------|
| Totals | 65 | 32 | 3 | 155 |
|---------------|-----------|-----------|----------|------------|

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