



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE



Office for Standards
in Education

Sparsholt College, Hampshire

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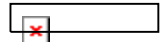
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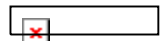
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Basic information about the college

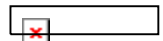


Name of college:	Sparsholt College, Hampshire
Type of college:	Specialist land-based further education college
Principal:	Tim Jackson
Address of college:	Sparsholt College Sparsholt Winchester Hampshire SO21 2NF
Telephone number:	01962 776441
Fax number:	01962 776587
Chair of governors:	Geoff Healy
Unique reference number:	130698
Name of reporting inspector:	Philippa Francis HMI
Dates of inspection:	26-30 April 2004

Part A: Summary



Information about the college



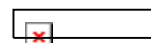
Sparsholt College, Hampshire is a large specialist land-based college in Hampshire on the north-west side of the city of Winchester. The population of Hampshire is 1.6 million with a further 130,000 people who live on the Isle of Wight. Levels of unemployment and deprivation in Hampshire are generally low compared to national averages. There are pockets of deprivation mainly around Southampton and Portsmouth and throughout the Isle of Wight. A large variation in the local mix of ethnic minority population exists at between 4.28% (Southampton) and 1.31% (Isle of Wight), but overall levels are well below the national average. Percentages of non-white minority ethnic enrolments at the college are 0.4% on full-time courses and 1.2% on part-time courses.

The college is the only land-based college in Hampshire and has specialist provision in two land-based areas of learning which have been designated centres of vocational excellence (CoVE); animal management and veterinary nursing and game, wildlife; and countryside management and fishery studies. Other land-based subjects offered are: equine studies; agriculture; horticulture; arboriculture and forestry. Provision in other areas of learning includes engineering, motor vehicle and sport and outdoor leisure and recreation studies. The college has a franchise contract with the British Red Cross for delivery of two-day and four-day first-aid courses throughout Hampshire and also has outcentres offering national skills profile courses, some horticultural courses, provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and a full-time course for rehabilitating offenders.

The main campus includes a farm of 143 hectares, an animal management unit, an equine unit, engineering workshops, a new national aquatics training centre, protected cropping areas and landscaped horticultural areas. An indoor rifle range has recently been completed. The college's mission is to 'be the local, regional and major national centre of excellence for education and training in the provision of learning and skills for the land-based and rural sector community.'

Current full-time student numbers are 1,049 of whom approximately 80% are aged 16 to 18 and 688 part-time students of whom approximately 80% are adults. In 2004, 1,900 students were enrolled on short courses, almost all of whom are adults. The ratio of male to female full-time students is 60:40. The college has been participating in the Increased Flexibility (IF) programme for pupils aged 14 to 16 in most curriculum areas.

How effective is the college?



Inspectors judged the quality of provision as outstanding in game, wildlife and fishery studies and good in the other curriculum areas of animal management, equine studies, horticulture and agriculture, arboriculture and forestry. Provision for work-based learners in horticulture is satisfactory. The overall standard of teaching and learning is considerably higher than for colleges of a similar type. The college's key strengths and areas for improvement are listed below.

Key strengths

- good teaching and learning

- very good range of specialist resources

- highly effective industrial and community links

- outstanding provision in game, wildlife, countryside management and fishery studies
- outstanding leadership and management
- good support for students
- comprehensive initial assessment of students' learning needs
- high pass rates on many courses
- wide range of land-based courses with good progression routes
- highly effective use of management information.

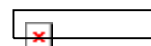
What should be improved

- target setting and monitoring of progress
- greater variety of classroom activities
- use of information and learning technology (ILT) in teaching
- flexible opportunities to access full-time courses
- retention rates on some courses

- o completion of modern apprenticeship framework.

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

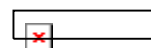
Quality of provision in curriculum and occupational areas



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).

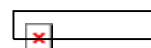
Area	Overall judgements about provision, and comment
Agriculture, arboriculture and forestry	Good. Pass rates are high on most courses. Theory and practical lessons are well planned and interesting as teachers use a wide range of stimulating learning activities. Good use is made of excellent physical resources both on-site and off-site. Retention rates on some courses are low.
Equine studies	Good. Pass rates are high on full-time courses and good development of riding skills takes place. The majority of teaching of theory and practical is good and extensive equine resources are used effectively. Retention rates are low on the first diploma course and there are low standards of stable skills working practice on the equine unit.
Horticulture	Good. Work-based learning contributory grade: satisfactory . Pass rates are good on most courses, although trainees in work-based learning make slow progress towards achieving foundation modern apprenticeships. Excellent resources are well managed and a wide range of courses enable progression for a wide range of students. Teaching and learning are particularly good on entry and foundation courses. In a few lessons, students do not participate sufficiently.
Game, wildlife and fishery studies	Outstanding. Retention and pass rates on most courses are consistently very high and students attain excellent standards of practical skills in a wide range of tasks relevant to industry. Teaching and learning are very good, particularly in practical lessons. Links to industry are extensive and practical facilities are excellent. Courses are well managed and teachers provide effective and inclusive support.
Animal management	Good. Most teaching is good and students progress well to employment or higher-level courses. Pass rates are high on first and national diplomas but low on certificate courses. Industry links are well established and productive. Basic husbandry skills are not effectively developed through routine unit duties.

How well is the college led and managed?



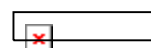
Leadership and management are outstanding. The principal and governors provide excellent strategic leadership and are well supported by an effective senior management team. Communication across the college is excellent and the way in which staff at all levels work together to achieve its mission is exemplary. Strategic planning is very effective. The college has developed extensive partnership and networking arrangements that it uses well to develop and diversify its curriculum and to provide learning opportunities. Quality assurance procedures are comprehensive and understood by staff. Management information systems are well developed and are used effectively. The monitoring of performance by managers at all levels is meticulous. The college manages its finances well and has developed good specialist accommodation and resources. It provides very good value for money.

To what extent is the college educationally and socially inclusive?



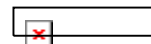
The college's response to education and social inclusion is good. A wide range of land-based programmes and a smaller range of other appropriate provision meet the needs of students both from the local community and from a wide catchment area. The college takes issues of inclusion and equality of opportunity very seriously and teachers give full attention to the differing needs of individual students when planning the curriculum. The college has made positive efforts to address gender imbalances on some courses, however, these actions have produced limited success. The college is fully compliant with the Race Relations (amendment) Act and is pro-active in promoting equal respect and value for all ethnic groups. Provision and support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are very good and the college meets the requirements of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 (SENDA). Teaching of basic skills is effective and well integrated into vocational lessons.

How well are students and trainees guided and supported?



Advice, guidance and support for students are good. Comprehensive initial assessment arrangements work well to identify individual students' needs. The induction programme provides a helpful introduction to college life. Students are well supported by their tutors and by a range of other specialist services. However, target setting within the tutorial framework is not always sufficiently rigorous in helping students to improve their performance. Learning support is organised and delivered well and there is good attendance at these sessions. There is a wide range of specialist support for individuals who have particular learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Good welfare support is available including counselling and advice and guidance on finance, transport and accommodation issues. Support for residential students is very effective. Support for work-based learners is improving through recently introduced arrangements, but the full impact of these changes has yet to be seen. There is good careers education and advice as well as effective guidance on progression opportunities.

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

- helpful and supportive staff

- personal and learning support

- plenty of industry visits

- good range of additional qualifications

- reputation of the college

- good learning resources

- pleasant college environment and atmosphere

- good social facilities for students

- good transport links.

What they feel could be improved

- timing of assignments

- enforcement of deadlines for handing in assignment work

- cost of food and accommodation

- access to computers

- slow pace of some lessons

- shortage of colour printers and scanners for assignment work

- car parking spaces

- a place, other than the library or bar, to meet and discuss work.

Other information

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

Part B: The college as a whole

Summary of grades awarded to teaching and learning by inspectors

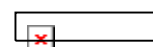
Aspect & learner type	Graded good or better (Grades 1 to 3) %	Graded satisfactory (Grade 4) %	Graded less than satisfactory (Grades 5 to 7) %

Teaching 16-18	76	17	7
19+ and WBL*	71	29	0
Learning 16-18	69	22	9
19+ and WBL*	65	35	0

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

**work-based learning*

Achievement and standards



1. The college offers a wide range of land-based vocational courses mainly at levels 1 to 3. Provision at entry level and work-based learning courses at foundation and advanced modern apprenticeship level are offered in the horticulture curriculum area. Vocational courses offered include first and national diplomas, national and advanced national certificates and national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at levels 1 to 3. In addition, a large number of specialist qualifications are offered either as short courses or as additional qualifications on full-time courses. The college also has level 4 higher national and honours degree programmes validated by the University of Portsmouth and a number of higher national diploma (HND) programmes in related vocational areas. There is provision for students aged 14 to 16 in most curriculum areas.

16 to 18 year olds

2. Of the students aged 16 to 18 in college, the majority are on full-time courses. Pass rates have been consistently high for the last three years at level 1 and level 2 and improved significantly at level 3 in 2001/02. Pass rates at all levels for 2002/03 are well above the national average despite a slight decline at level 2 and level 3. A significant number of students also achieve higher grades at merit or distinction on vocational courses. Over 50% of students on level 3 national diploma courses achieved higher grades in 2002/03.

3. Retention rates declined over two or three years up to 2001/02 at all levels. In 2001/02, retention rates for students aged 16 to 18, at levels 2 and 3, were substantially below the national average and for level 1, close to the national average. Retention rates for students aged 16 to 18 at all levels improved to above the national average in 2002/03, and significantly so at levels 2 and 3.

4. Students are well motivated and confident. Most develop high levels of practical skills relevant to their vocational area. Students in game, wildlife and fishery studies show very good standards of practical skill, such as the capture and handling of fish, which meet and often exceed industry requirements. The standard of practical work in agriculture, arboriculture and forestry is high and students undertake commercial work, such as harvesting timber, effectively.

5. Standards of assignment work are high. Students demonstrate good levels of theory knowledge and appropriate understanding of the industrial context of their chosen vocational field. Skills of analysis and evaluation are well developed through coursework and students use problem solving skills well, often working with real data.

6. Key skills pass rates are high by comparison to national averages. At level 1 and level 2, all pass rates for the three main key skill areas of application of number, communication and information technology (IT) are above national averages. For example, in 2003, the pass rate in communications at level 2 for students doing agriculture and horticulture courses was over 80% compared with a

national average of 42%. Most students are capable and confident in analysing numerical information and written text.

7. Levels of progression to further courses, including in higher education (HE), and to employment, are good. In 2003, 93% of students completing national diplomas progressed either into employment or HE. Across the college, levels of attendance average at approximately 84% compared with a college target of 85% and a national average of 84%. During the inspection, attendance was low in the areas of horticulture and animal care.

8. Trainees on work-based learning programmes in horticulture develop good practical skills. Progress towards completion of modern apprenticeship frameworks is very slow. For example, of the trainees who started in 2001, 30% have yet to complete their courses and achieve the qualification. Trainees enrolled in the last 18 months are progressing at a considerably faster rate.

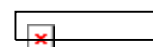
Adult learners

9. Of the adult students at the college, 73% are following part-time courses mainly in horticulture and a few are involved in work-based learning. Pass rates for adults are consistently good at levels 2 and 3. At level 2 in 2002/03, pass rates, having improved steadily, are now above the national average. At level 3, whilst still substantially above the national average, the rate for 2002/03 declined. Pass rates at level 1, although improved in 2002/03, are still below the national average.

10. At level 1, retention rates are good and above the national average. Retention rates remain low for adult students at levels 2 and 3, despite improvement in 2002/03. This is, in part, owing to a large number of mature students, particularly on NVQ programmes, who choose not to take examinations within the timescale allocated to their course and prefer to extend their studies. The college recognises these issues and has made appropriate changes to the structure of courses for adult students in the current academic year. In-year retention rate data at the time of inspection indicate that retention rates are improving.

11. Adult students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities gain good practical skills. In horticulture, students produce attractive hanging baskets for display and sale. Most students use their previous experience effectively and make confident and useful contributions in class. In a garden design lesson, adult students made significant contributions about their experience of layout and construction to a productive discussion prior to undertaking a design exercise.

Quality of education and training



12. Teaching, learning and attainment were graded by inspectors in 85 lessons. Teaching was good or better in 74% of these, satisfactory in 21% and less than satisfactory in 5%. Learning was good or better in 67% of lessons and unsatisfactory in 6%. A small percentage of teaching is unsatisfactory, mainly at level 3 for students aged 16 to 18. Apart from in equine studies, standards of teaching on practical lessons are better than in theory lessons, but there is little difference for both learning and attainment. Attendance, at 81%, is slightly lower than the national average for 2002/03 of 84%. It is particularly good for lessons in game, wildlife and fishery studies, at 89%. Attendance in animal management, at 76%, and in horticulture, at 79%, is lower than for the other subjects.

13. Many teachers are enthusiastic in their teaching and lessons are lively and engage students' interest. Good theory lessons involve a range of stimulating learning activities, such as productive class discussions, effective group work, and, in agriculture, frequent and effective use of data generated from the college estate. In horticulture, teaching of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is very good and these students are highly motivated and make good progress towards their qualification. Teaching is generally well planned but, in less effective lessons,

weaknesses exist in both lesson planning and teaching. In these lessons, learning objectives are unclear with insufficient participation by students and teaching methods lack appropriate variety. There is little structured use of ILT to support teaching.

14. The majority of teaching makes productive connections between theory and practical work. Teachers illustrate lessons effectively with their own industrial experience and make good use of student contributions to discussions. The college estate and all practical units are used productively to promote and reinforce learning. In addition, wide-ranging links with industry are used effectively to extend the learning opportunities available to students through visits and practical instruction off-site. In a small, but significant, amount of teaching and supervision of students' performance, high standards of work are not enforced through rigorous attention to detail. For example, in equine studies, observation of stable skills work showed some examples of poor working practice and low levels of attention to detail that were not promptly corrected by teachers or supervisors.

15. A cross-college team of vocationally based teachers teach key skills within each curriculum area. Course teams have developed a range of vocationally relevant key skills assignments which work well to ensure students see the relevance of their work. Students' progress in key skills is well monitored by the key skills co-ordinator. The college is moving to on-demand, on-screen testing to improve key skills achievements

16. Periods of well-managed work experience for full-time students extends and reinforces effectively their levels of understanding. On-the-job training for work-based learners in horticulture is of a high standard and employers are very supportive in providing good learning opportunities by varying tasks. However, on-the-job and off-the-job training is insufficiently co-ordinated.

17. Teaching staff are well qualified with relevant vocational experience and are appropriately matched to courses offered. Some 86% of full-time and 50% of part-time teachers have or are working towards teacher qualifications. Most teachers have assessor qualifications and over half are qualified as internal verifiers. Staff awareness of health and safety is good. There is a strong emphasis on the importance of routine risk assessments as part of all practical sessions. Thorough health and safety arrangements are in place for work-based learners.

18. Considerable recent and well-planned redevelopment of the college campus has taken place and provides a welcoming environment. Accommodation is well maintained and furnished and has appropriate teaching aids. The library and computer rooms are heavily used. The library is well stocked and students make good use of inter-library loans. The college has made a significant investment in computers for both teachers and students. Students have good access to modern networked computers and the ratio of computers to students is 1:6. Open access to IT drop-in facilities is available seven days a week. Staff and students make good use of the college intranet, which includes a growing range of useful information and online learning materials. Students use well-equipped science laboratories. Specialist curriculum-related accommodation, such as the new indoor rifle range, is of a very high standard.

19. Resources to support learning and to improve students' employment opportunities are extensive. For example, a good range of horses supports the development of riding skills and the new national aquatic training centre houses a large collection of tropical and cold water fish. The college estate, including the farm, gardens, grounds and sports turf are effectively and well used in practical skills development and to demonstrate conservation management. Learning resources to support students with literacy and numeracy needs are outdated and uninteresting. The college has very effective industrial links resulting in high levels of sponsorship and good opportunities for work placements.

20. The college accommodates 400 residential students on the college campus and has access to 100 places off-campus. There is a good range of social and sporting facilities. Students have access to catering facilities between 07:00 and 22:00 each day in a mix of clean, bright settings. There are well-resourced recreational areas including a games room, multipurpose sports hall, cardiovascular and weights training rooms, nine-hole par three golf course and sports fields. All new and recently refurbished buildings are accessible to users of wheelchairs. Adequate temporary arrangements have been made to provide access to the information and communication technology (ICT) suites

and main buildings where accessibility is restricted.

21. Procedures for assessment of students are good. Comprehensive initial assessment, including of practical skills, is well used to inform planning of teaching. Assessment schedules are carefully planned and monitored to ensure that the workload of students is spread throughout the year. Internal verification processes are comprehensive and generally work well. Coverage includes task briefing sheets as well as practical and coursework. An internal moderation committee checks all processes by regular sampling and is effective in ensuring that practice meets quality assurance requirements.

22. Many assessments are practical in nature and teachers are resourceful and imaginative in designing assessments which can be carried out in a relevant practical context. Assessments of tractor driving and aerial tree rescue are good examples. Assessments carried out in the workplace for students on work-based learning programmes in horticulture are done efficiently, often by peripatetic assessors. By contrast, the liaison between employers and the college over trainee progress is not sufficiently effective as college staff do not check that administrative systems and procedures are properly completed.

23. Students' work is marked promptly and usually returned within 15 working days. Marking is clearly focused on assessment criteria and comments are mostly developmental and frequently very detailed. Processes following external verification are well organised and quality assurance works well. External verifiers' comments are reviewed by a quality manager and passed to team leaders for action. Most respond very promptly. For example, following an assessment in countryside management, external verifier comments about a need for increased accuracy in the use of grade descriptors during marking resulted in prompt action and improved assessment practice in subsequent marking practice.

24. Teachers and programme teams make use of assessment results in adjusting the sequence of topics covered by courses, the choice of topics for assignments, and the depth of course content. Use is seldom made of students' assessment results in setting further, more specific academic targets and, when this is done, progress is not monitored regularly against them.

25. The college provides a comprehensive range of full-time and part-time land-based courses. In addition, provision has been developed in sport and outdoor leisure and recreation studies and motor vehicle work in direct response to an identified external requirement. In the majority of programme areas, there are clear progression opportunities from level 1 through to level 4. Gaps in provision, notably at level 1, have recently been identified and are being addressed for 2004/05. However, opportunities remain limited for part-time study towards qualifications normally studied full-time or work-based learning. The college is also very responsive to the needs of the land-based sector both locally and regionally. Through collaborative and innovative work, the college has developed some much-needed training courses for land-based business skills and health and safety legislative requirements.

26. The college is committed to the process of widening participation in its curriculum. Initiatives include organising and supporting a 50 mile radius transport network into the college and the provision of a land-based vocational curriculum for pupils aged 14 to 16 from seven local schools. Other developments include work with adults with learning disabilities and/or difficulties, provision for rehabilitation of offenders and ongoing work to address gender imbalances on some courses.

27. A wide range of additional qualifications are available to students. Many of these qualifications are relevant to industry requirements and ensure students are well prepared for employment. For example, students on agricultural courses take qualifications in health and safety, first aid, tractor operation and rough terrain fork lift operation and sport and recreation students take industrial competency qualifications such as a mountain leader course.

28. All full-time and many part-time courses offer students good enrichment opportunities. Numerous visits and longer trips, both nationally and some internationally, are organised to broaden students' vocational knowledge as well as develop their interpersonal skills. For example, students are

involved with the preparation for, and attendance of, the Chelsea Flower Show. The college organises a formal programme of activities to develop students' personal, health and social education. For example, the student liaison office and the college nurse provide the opportunity for students to join the 'Quit Smoking' programme. Discos and balls are organised by an active students association. A wide programme of sports activities is also offered to all students and many take part.

29. Advice, guidance and support for students are good. Prospective students can gain information about the college and its courses through a comprehensive and attractive range of publicity materials, a clear and accessible website and taster days, including one specifically for mature students. Numerous open days and other events take place at the college, such as the Countryside Day and equine events, and provide another valuable source of information as well as opportunities to sample course activities. Interview days work well to guide students on to the appropriate type of course. They provide a good introduction to the college, an individual interview with a specialist vocational tutor and supply important information including accommodation, finance and transport arrangements. This is also an opportunity for an early assessment of specific learning support needs. Appropriate arrangements also exist to enable students to transfer to another course during the early weeks of the term if their needs and expectations change.

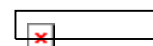
30. Induction is effective and provides a full range of information. Student services provide much useful advice regarding financial support and the help available with regard to students' physical and mental well-being. A student liaison officer and wardens are always on hand to support vulnerable students and the college nurse is regularly available, as are counsellors. A peer mentoring system provides 'buddying' arrangements to support and comfort new students by those who are more experienced at living independently at the college. A child protection officer is in post with a well-established child protection policy in place. Provision of careers education, advice and guidance involving the college careers co-ordinator and advisers from the Connexions service is good.

31. Arrangements for initial assessment are carried out quickly and efficiently. Support for students identified as having additional learning needs is provided through the learning resource centre which houses a specialist dyslexia support unit. Of the 700 students who underwent initial assessment approximately one third were identified as having support needs. Take-up and attendance is good and results in improved performance by students.

32. A comprehensive tutorial framework for full-time and part-time students meets their needs. The relationship between tutors and students is very good and is much appreciated by students and also, where applicable, by parents. Personal tutors communicate effectively with subject tutors and make referrals to specialist services where needed. Target setting within tutorials is underdeveloped. Some targets are inexact and fail to challenge students to improve their performance.

33. The amount of support for work-based learners has increased recently, but has yet to show an impact. New peripatetic assessors are ensuring that trainees are making progress in achieving their qualifications, but there is still insufficient liaison between employers and college staff.

Leadership and management



34. Leadership and management are outstanding. The principal and governors provide excellent strategic leadership and are well supported by an effective senior management team. Communication across the college is excellent. Managers receive extensive briefing to heighten their awareness of learning and skills issues. Paper and electronic means of disseminating information to staff are used well and there are many opportunities for staff to discuss developments and contribute ideas. The way staff at all levels work together effectively to achieve the college's mission to be a centre of excellence for the land-based and rural sector community is exemplary. Most students achieve well and develop the skills and aptitudes that meet the diverse and often specialist needs of employers associated with the land-based economy.

35. Governors bring a wide range of skills and experiences of the land-based industries to the college and are committed to its success. They are critical of their own performance and are well informed and challenging about the performance of the college. Governors appraise their own performance and that of the chair, principal and clerk effectively. They are well supported by an independent clerk. The board is updated on developments regularly and induction procedures for new governors are well structured. Governors work well with senior managers. Planning procedures are well established and governors use their expertise well in setting the strategic direction of the college and in setting challenging targets for raising standards. Procedures for strategic and operational planning and self-assessment are well integrated.

36. As part of its strategy for development and diversification, the college has developed extensive partnership arrangements. These are used effectively and often creatively to develop education and training opportunities for young people and adults that meet the needs of the land-based industries. A wide range of industrial links are used to inform and shape the curriculum and to support its delivery through providing practical working venues, work experience or access to specialist resources or equipment. The college works well with local schools to provide courses for pupils aged 14 to 16. Extensive links and networking arrangements with different organisations representing the land-based industries are providing the college with valuable information about training and development needs. Information is used effectively by curriculum managers to develop provision and by the college marketing team to target potential students and widen participation.

37. Curriculum leadership and management are outstanding in one curriculum area and good in all others. In countryside and fisheries studies, managers attend to all aspects of their responsibilities well. Meetings are well organised and productive. College procedures are well implemented and there is constant attention to detail resulting in continuous improvement to the provision. In agriculture, forestry and arboriculture, self-assessment informs curriculum development well and individual targets set through appraisal are monitored carefully. The personal development needs of staff are carefully linked to the priorities of the curriculum area. Some improvement targets resulting from self-assessment are too vague, however, and are not measurable. Many aspects of the management of equine provision are well managed, but too little attention is given to developing some aspects of good practice. Horticulture staff work well together as a team, but insufficient attention is given to promoting equality of opportunity during lessons and there are weaknesses in the management of work-based learning. In animal management, course team files are well organised and schemes of work are comprehensive, however, target setting to address weaknesses is not always effective.

38. The college is committed to promoting equality of opportunity and inclusion and has clear policies relating to equality of opportunity, harassment and race equality. Although the proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is low, the college is discharging its responsibilities under the requirements of the Race Relations (amendment) Act 2000. Staff have received appropriate training and an action plan is being implemented. The performance of students from different minority ethnic groups and by gender is monitored and there is regular reporting to governors. However, teachers do not pay sufficient attention to avoiding stereotyping during lessons. Opportunities for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are promoted well and students with special educational needs are well supported. The college is meeting its obligations under the SENDA.

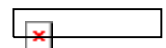
39. Quality assurance procedures are comprehensive. The college has well developed management information systems that provide excellent online access to reliable and up-to-date retention rate, attendance and punctuality data by course module and student. Information is used well by managers at all levels to take prompt action to support students and bring about improvements and to inform judgements about the quality of provision. Good use is made of surveys of students' opinions of their experiences at college. Target setting procedures are used effectively to drive up standards. Courses are reviewed on a continuous basis and areas of underperformance identified. The college is developing procedures for measuring the progress made by individual students compared to their achievements on entry to the college. The involvement of senior managers in monitoring performance and the implementation of action plans for different areas is exemplary. Progress is monitored and discussed in detail at monthly senior management team meetings where curriculum managers report in detail on retention rates, attendance and achievements. Curriculum area teams and course tutors monitor the achievement of targets at their regular team meetings and

personal tutors meet senior and curriculum managers regularly to monitor the impact of support on individual students. Course reports are prepared at the end of the academic year. The college knows itself well and identified most of the strengths and weaknesses identified by inspectors. Self-assessment is effective in identifying areas for improvement and both senior managers and governors are involved in moderating judgements through review panels.

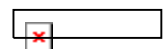
40. There are clear procedures for observing lessons and both full-time and part-time teachers are observed on an annual basis. Practice was changed in 2003. Half of the observations are now conducted by external observers and rigorous moderation procedures have been introduced. The revised procedures are effective and the college profile was similar to that determined by inspectors. A clear, college-wide staff development strategy has been developed to address areas of weakness and is being implemented effectively. The college has not identified effective practitioners to act as teaching mentors to help implement the strategy. There is some peer observation to help disseminate good practice, but practice varies between curriculum areas and approaches to supporting part-time teachers also differ between areas and vary in effectiveness. The outcomes of lesson observations inform individual teacher appraisals and teachers are provided with good opportunities for professional development which are linked to the strategic aims of the college.

41. The college is in a sound financial position and operating surpluses were generated during the three years prior to the inspection. Procedures for budget setting are well established and there are clear procedures for delegating budgets to curriculum areas. Managers bid for capital resources to support the implementation of their development plans. Income targets are set for commercial enterprises. Budget holders are provided with good information on expenditure to date. Expenditure, income generation and student retention rates are carefully monitored by managers and governors and budgets adjusted half way through the financial year. The college has borrowed prudently to develop its accommodation and resources to achieve its strategic objectives. On the basis of good student achievements, development of high-quality resources for teaching and learning, group sizes that are above the average for specialist land-based colleges and effective use of teaching staff and accommodation, the college provides very good value for money.

Part C: Curriculum and occupational areas



Agriculture, arboriculture and forestry



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

Strengths

- high pass rates on most courses

- broad range of stimulating learning activities

- good use of excellent physical resources

- good achievement of a wide range of additional qualifications.

Weaknesses

- low retention rates on some courses
- insufficient provision of work-based learning or part-time courses.

Scope of provision

42. The college offers full-time courses at levels 1 to 3. National certificates at level 2 and national diplomas at level 3 are offered in agriculture, forestry and arboriculture. A full-time NVQ level 1 course is offered in woodland skills and agriculture. A wide range of industry-specific qualifications such as pesticide spraying certificate of competence and certificates of competence in chainsaw use, tree climbing and operation of a chainsaw from a rope and harness are also available as short courses. The college offers progression on to HE courses in forestry. There are 56 full-time students on course in agriculture and 87 on courses in arboriculture and forestry.

Achievement and standards

43. Pass rates on full-time courses are good and above the national average for most courses. Students achieve a wide range of vocationally relevant additional qualifications, for example, safe use of pesticides, tree climbing and chainsaw use. Retention and pass rates on these courses are high, with some rates at 100%. Retention rates for both the full-time national certificate in agriculture and the national diploma in forestry have been below the national average in two out of the last three years. Progression to further study and employment is good, with over 90% of full-time students progressing on to further education (FE) or HE or programme-related employment at the end of their course.

44. Pass rates for key skills awards have improved from previously low rates. Standards of student work in theory and practical lessons are good. For example, assignment work on tree species selection by first-year national diploma students demonstrates good technical knowledge of ground preparation, tree establishment techniques and aesthetic properties.

A sample of retention and pass rates in agriculture, arboriculture and forestry, 2001 to 2003

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
First diploma in agriculture	2	No. of starts	11	9	13
		% retention	97	100	85
		% pass rate	91	78	91
City and Guilds 0330 national certificate in agriculture	2	No. of starts	11	4	9
		% retention	82	100	78
		% pass rate	100	100	86
CS36 cross cut and	2	No. of starts	182	317	207

stack produce		% retention	100	100	100
		% pass rate	95	89	92
CS38 climb trees and perform aerial tree rescue	2	No. of starts	42	44	52
		% retention	88	100	98
		% pass rate	86	100	80
National diploma in agriculture	3	No. of starts	30	27	7
		% retention	83	56	71
		% pass rate	80	93	100
National diploma in forestry	3	No. of starts	11	*	13
		% retention	64	*	69
		% pass rate	57	*	87

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

* course did not run

Quality of education and training

45. Teaching and learning, in both theory and practical lessons, are good. Teaching is inspiring with teachers drawing effectively on their own industrial experience to illustrate topics. Theory lessons involve a stimulating range of interesting activities, such as lively class discussions, effective group work and useful data interpretation exercises or calculations which often use data generated from the college estate. In one lesson, on the analysis of silage reports, data from the college farm was used and the students could easily see the links between management, time of cutting and silage characteristics. Students learn to use numerical skills effectively. In a level 1 lesson, students were making picnic benches and calculating accurately the volume and cost of the raw materials. Lessons link well to the practical experience of students, and teachers make good use of students' contributions in class discussions. Practical classes are interesting and well managed, and always start with comprehensive health and safety checks.

46. Very good use is made of the excellent physical resources on the college site. A good stock of machinery is used for teaching, and students also have full access to the machinery used on the college farm. The college buys areas of standing timber from the Forestry Commission in a local forest, so that students can experience the complete process of marking, measuring, felling and extracting timber. This is then brought back to the college sawmill where the students convert it into saleable products such as fencing or picnic benches. This very good practice allows students to make clear links between each part of the supply chain. Library resources are generally good, but there are few videos relating to forestry and arboriculture, and a limited range of forestry journals.

47. Assessment practices are good. The assessment schedule is planned carefully in advance and provided to students at the beginning of the year, allowing them to plan their workload. Students are given the opportunity to gain formative feedback from tutors before submitting coursework. Written feedback from tutors is generally clear and informative. By contrast, some of the better assignments are returned with very few comments. The internal verification system is effective, and improvements to assessment practice are made as a result of the process. Internal verification of assignment briefing sheets is rigorous, for example, an assignment in arboriculture was amended because of a missed opportunity to assess a learning outcome.

48. Support and guidance are good, from pre-entry advice to tutorial and learning support. Students recognise and value this support. Learning support is available in all theory sessions on the level 1 courses. This includes literacy, numeracy and study skills support. Tutorials are well documented, and concentrate on review and target setting, both academic and personal.

49. There are no opportunities for students to take work-based learning courses or substantive part-

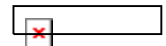
time courses. Part-time routes are not available on existing full-time courses. The college has identified a need to offer NVQ courses in fencing, due to local demand, and is planning a suitable course for the coming academic year.

Leadership and management

50. Curriculum leadership and management are good. Roles and responsibilities in relation to curriculum management and quality assurance are well understood by staff. Communications work well. Staff development is well linked to personal development identified during appraisal and to curriculum area priorities. Targets set during appraisal are monitored. All staff, apart from two new members of the team, have a teaching qualification. All new staff are enrolled on an appropriate course by the beginning of their second year of service. The course teams are active in researching markets for new courses. For example, a market has been identified for work-based learning in fencing, and an NVQ programme to meet this need is being introduced next year.

51. Self-assessment of curriculum area strengths and weaknesses is generally effective and accurate. Weaknesses are identified and targets set for improvement in an action plan. For example, gender imbalance in student recruitment is recognised, and steps have been taken to address this. These include 'female only' taster days for areas where recruitment is predominantly male. Some targets in the self-assessment report are too general. Recent changes to the lesson observation process through the use of external observers have resulted in more realistic assessments of teaching and learning grades.

Equine studies



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

Strengths

- high pass rates on full-time courses

- good development of riding skills

- much good teaching

- effective use of extensive equine resources to enhance learning.

Weaknesses

- low retention rate on first diploma course

- low standards of stable skills working practice

- narrow range of provision.

Scope of provision

52. The college offers full-time courses at first and national diploma level and part-time courses for British Horse Society (BHS) qualifications up to stage 3 level. A range of short courses is offered and includes training for BHS horse owners certificates and courses on clipping horses. All courses are based at a dedicated equine centre at Garston Farm on the college campus. HE courses at HND level and part-time courses through a higher national certificate (HNC) route are also available. Work-based learning courses were discontinued in 2002. There are currently 20 students on first diploma and 77 on national diploma courses. Some 82 students are enrolled to take BHS examinations as additional qualifications. Almost all full-time students are aged 16 to 18 and female.

Achievement and standards

53. Pass rates on first diploma and national diploma courses are consistently high. For the last two years, all retained students on the national diploma course passed the qualification, with improved retention rates in 2003. Pass rates for BHS examinations at stages 2 and 3 declined to below the national average in 2003, although five students have subsequently passed at stage 2. Pass rates for these additional qualification aims are improved in the current academic year as over half of those students enrolled have already successfully completed the awards. Retention rates on the first diploma course are low and well below the national average. Actions taken in the current academic year have been successful in retaining students at the time of inspection. With over three quarters of the college year completed, the retention rate is 90%. While retention rates of students completing the national diploma in 2004 are already below the national average, in-year retention rates of students on the first year of the national diploma have significantly improved at 84%.

54. Students develop good riding skills. All students ride three times a week and those identified as needing extra help receive effective additional lunging sessions weekly. Most students have good basic positions, and are secure and well balanced. All students jump fences regularly. For example, first diploma students, on a range of challenging horses, successfully jumped a course of five fences including a double and several changes of rein. Standards of equine theory knowledge are high. Students make meaningful, well-informed contributions in discussion showing good levels of knowledge and understanding.

55. Standards of working practice in routine stable duties are often low. Students take little pride in the appearance of their horses for lessons and many horses have untrimmed manes, tails and heels. Students are casual about using correct procedures for picking out and washing horses' feet and tack is not regularly cleaned to a high standard.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
British horse society stage 1	1	No. of starts	21	47	33
		% retention	100	96	97
		% pass rate	71	98	78
First diploma in horse	2	No. of starts	15	23	22

care		% retention	80	78	68
		% pass rate	25	94	100
British horse society stage 2	2	No. of starts	4	14	18
		% retention	100	86	100
		% pass rate	50	83	33
National diploma in horse management	3	No. of starts	50	27	31
		% retention	66	70	74
		% pass rate	94	100	100

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

Quality of education and training

56. Much teaching is good and teaching of riding skills is especially effective. Teachers are knowledgeable and practised in their field of expertise. They use examples of industry experience to illustrate key teaching points effectively and this promotes students' interest and good levels of learning. For example, in a lesson on feeding horses, up-to-date information on the use of bran as a feed stuff was used effectively to ensure students understood the practical and theoretical aspects of this topic. In riding lessons, teachers give prompt and effective feedback on each student's performance and challenge students to achieve lesson objectives effectively. Students show good levels of confidence during riding lessons and are often involved in evaluating their own performance.

57. There are weaknesses in planning and delivery of a small minority of teaching. In less effective lessons, teachers set objectives that are too broad and often spend too little time on important parts of the lesson. Explanations and demonstrations in these lessons are often hurried and fail to clarify important learning points. There is low reinforcement of health and safety good practice in a few practical stable management sessions.

58. Extensive, modern equine resources are used well to benefit students and the local and regional equine community. There are sufficient horses of different sizes, ages, types and levels of training. Careful matching of horse to rider ensures that riders gain maximum benefit from each lesson. Staff hold appropriate vocational qualifications and nearly all are active riders and competitors. All full-time lecturers hold teaching qualifications and all other staff either hold or are working toward obtaining these. Vocational staff development is good and staff receive regular training to develop their own riding skills and equine knowledge. For example, experienced dressage and show jumping trainers teach staff on a regular monthly basis.

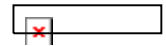
59. Assessment practice is well planned and integrated into schemes of work. Assignments cover awarding body requirements accurately and encourage the development of a range of skills including the use of ILT. While assessment of practical yard duties is carried out regularly, it is underdeveloped in the assessment of extra activities that students undertake by helping with equestrian events on yard duties. Internal verification is rigorous and work is generally well marked.

60. The college is developing the range of provision in the equine area. Neither full-time level 1 provision nor part-time routes on full-time courses are offered as yet, although plans are in hand to offer a level 1 course in the coming academic year. The college is responsive to the local and regional equine industry needs and runs a full calendar of relevant events at the equine centre. Advice and guidance for students are good, with effective pre-course information and a comprehensive induction programme. Initial assessment of both key skills and riding ability works well to help match provision to students' needs. Personal and academic support are provided through a regular and well-documented tutorial system. Target setting for both academic and personal improvement is used generally effectively.

Leadership and management

61. Curriculum leadership and management are good. Staff meet regularly, communicate well and have clearly defined roles and responsibilities. Management information is used effectively at curriculum manager and course tutor level to monitor performance and set targets. Staff are familiar with course data on attendance, retention and pass rates compared to national averages. Effective course review and action planning results in appropriate changes to work experience and yard duties schedules for students to improve retention and pass rates. Liaison between the equine centre and teaching staff is improved through the appointment of equine centre staff as link tutors to each course. Management of standards of horse turnout, tidiness and tack cleaning is less effective on the equine yard and there is too much acceptance of poor working practice by students. Opportunities are missed to involve more experienced students in supervising the work of students on yard duties. Recording systems for horse health and care are underdeveloped and insufficiently comprehensive.

Horticulture



Overall provision in this area is **good (grade 2)**
Work-based learning in horticulture is **satisfactory (grade 3)**

Strengths

- high pass rates on most full-time courses

- very good teaching for students with learning difficulties

- excellent specialist resources

- good support for work-based learners

- productive links with industry and community.

Weaknesses

- slow framework completion for foundation modern apprentices

- low retention rates on some full-time courses

- o insufficient links between on-the-job and off-the-job training for work-based learning.

Scope of provision

62. The college offers courses from entry level to HE in horticulture. Full-time courses at level 2 include a first diploma and a national certificate. At level 3, a national diploma and an advanced national certificate, studied either full time or part time, are offered. Entry level courses, which lead to a level 1 qualification, are run at an outreach centre as well as at the college. Of 698 students at the time of inspection, 15% are studying on a full-time basis, 10% are work-based learners mostly working towards foundation modern apprenticeships and over 30% of students are working towards the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) diploma or certificate. Short courses are offered in general horticulture, technical updating and in amateur gardening. Most students are adults.

Achievement and standards

63. Pass rates on full-time courses are high, especially on first diploma and foundation land-based studies programme. Retention rates on the RHS course are high. Retention rates on certificate courses are below the national average. Full-time students achieve well in a good range of additional qualifications, including extra units of the qualifications and vocational skill certificates. Framework completion for work-based learners is slow. Few learners have achieved the foundation modern apprentice framework. Of the 24 foundation modern apprentices who started in 2000/01, over half are still in learning, as are just over a third of the 29 who started in 2001/02. Apprentices who started in the last 18 months are making very good progress towards framework achievement.

64. The standard of students' work on the foundation course is very good. In one practical session, students with severe learning difficulties made hanging baskets for display of a high standard. The standard of students' practical and theory work on other courses is satisfactory as is key skills achievement. Students complete their key skills portfolios with enthusiasm through work on a project on trees. Progression routes for students from entry to HE are well used especially from level 2 to level 3.

65. Punctuality is good, although attendance is below 80%.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
Foundation land-based	entry	No. of starts	26	19	27
		% retention	88	95	89
		% pass rate	100	94	100
First diploma in horticulture	2	No. of starts	*	16	9
		% retention	*	75	100
		% pass rate	*	100	100
National certificate in horticulture City and Guilds	2	No. of starts	32	13	14
		% retention	78	85	71
		% pass rate	40	91	60
NVQ green keeping and sports turf	2	No. of starts	28	46	10
		% retention	43	25	40

		% pass rate	11	25	100
RHS certificate in horticulture	2	No. of starts	87	69	134
		% retention	99	94	94
		% pass rate	49	66	41
Advanced certificate in horticulture	3	No. of starts	23	11	27
		% retention	57	46	59
		% pass rate	77	80	81
National diploma in horticulture	3	No. of starts	16	39	23
		% retention	94	64	100
		% pass rate	80	88	96

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

* course did not run

Quality of education and training

66. The best teaching is lively and engages students' interest. The most effective lessons have clear objectives and good links between theory and practical work. Students enjoy and take great pride in working on the college's exhibit for the Chelsea Flower Show and other practical projects. High-quality visual aids and handouts are used effectively. Students' understanding is often challenged effectively. A very interesting lesson on garden design included students working in industry effectively sharing their experience with less experienced adults who wished to design their own gardens. In less effective lessons, objectives are unclear, the pace is too slow and the students spend too much time listening to teachers. Some students quickly lose interest. Teaching for students with learning difficulties is particularly good. These students are highly motivated and are making good progress. Work experience is an assessed part of all full-time courses. It is well managed and assessed with rigour. Work experience is highly valued by students with learning difficulties. Students who need help with basic skills receive timely support from experienced staff. On-the-job training for work-based learners is of high standard and very supportive employers provide good learning opportunities. Links between on-the-job and off-the-job training are unsatisfactory. Employers and learners are not always aware of which topics are covered at college.

67. The excellent specialist facilities, including gardens and sports turf areas, are used extensively for practical work and provide good examples of current commercial practice. Learning materials are of good standard and periodicals and books are readily available and up to date. Students are able to maintain contact with their tutors through e-mail. This support is particularly valued by mature students who are able to access assignments and learning materials if they are unable to attend college. Staff are well qualified and maintain close links with industry. Many staff have specific training to help them to manage students with learning difficulties. A recently appointed team of appropriately qualified staff is responsible for the monitoring and assessment of work-based learning.

68. Assessment is well planned and well balanced between theory and practical work. Feedback to trainees is timely and detailed. Most is completed in the workplace with rigorous internal verification. Portfolios for foundation modern apprentices are poorly presented and completed portfolios have omissions.

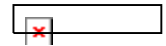
69. Progression routes from entry level to level 4 on either a full-time or part-time basis are well planned. There are opportunities for students who prefer either academic or vocational training routes. School links are very strong and the pupils aged 14 to 16 value their time at the college. Students appreciate the support they receive in selecting appropriate courses and guidance on careers. Employers' views are sought through liaison meetings and frequent contact with college staff. Students enjoy the many visits and projects that are part of every course. All students have interesting enrichment activities. Foundation students are excited about their trip to Wales during

which they undertake mountain climbing and canoeing. Individual tutorials and group tutorials are effective and students are set clear targets. Work-based learners and employers value the high levels of support they receive. They are visited by their assessor in the workplace every four weeks and on a weekly basis at the college during off-the-job training.

Leadership and management

70. The curriculum is well managed with good course management and communications. Staff are highly motivated and work well together. Staff are very self-critical and work hard to improve quality through course reviews and student feedback. The staff are fully involved and committed to the self-assessment process. Staff development is well managed and effectively linked to appraisal and the college's business needs. Staff and students have insufficient understanding of equal opportunities issues. Health and safety are well managed. Management of work-based learning is now satisfactory, but improvements are too recent to judge their full impact. A new training plan which has been introduced for tracking trainee progress is not yet fully implemented. Liaison with employers is good with frequent contact, including employer briefing meetings and support for workplace supervisors as assessors.

Game, wildlife and fishery studies



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

Strengths

- very high retention and pass rates on most courses

- outstanding achievement of practical skills

- high progression rates to further courses and employment

- very good teaching

- excellent resources within and outside the college

- well-planned curriculum.

Weaknesses

- some ineffective target setting and action planning in tutorials.

Scope of provision

71. The CoVE in game, wildlife and countryside management and fishery studies offers a range of courses from levels 1 to 3. Full-time first and national diploma courses provide progression routes from level 2 through to HE. Level 1 NVQ programmes in woodland skills, offered by the agriculture and forestry section, provide entry opportunities to first diplomas in fish husbandry and in game and wildlife. National diplomas are offered in game and wildlife and in fishery studies for both ornamental and sports fisheries. Students have the chance to study extra units and certificates of competence including shotgun safety. There are 119 full-time students on courses in game, wildlife and countryside management and 118 on courses in fishery studies. The majority of students are male and over 80% are aged 16 to 18.

Achievement and standards

72. Within the CoVE, students on full-time courses consistently achieve good results and they attain outstanding standards of practical skills and competence in a wide range of tasks relevant to industry. Retention and pass rates on most courses are very high and well above national averages. Retention rates on the first diploma in game and wildlife dipped in 2003, but have recovered for the group completing in 2004. Strategies to improve retention rates on the national diploma in fish management are having a positive effect. Pass rates for key skills and for additional qualifications are also high. Progression rates within FE and to employment and HE both in the college and to other institutions are particularly good.

73. The standard of the students' theory work is high. Students are confident and enthusiastic in their studies and they have a thorough understanding of the subject and they share information effectively through group work. Lesson notes and records of practical work are well ordered and detailed and their verbal contribution in lessons and written responses to assignments show that their level of attainment is very good. Much of the work produced as key skills evidence at all levels is of a particularly high standard. Attendance rates are high and students are punctual for classes.

A sample of retention and pass rates in game, wildlife and fishery studies, 2001 to 2003

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
First diploma in fish husbandry	2	No. of starts	40	29	36
		% retention	75	69	86
		% pass rate	83	85	100
First diploma in game and wildlife	2	No. of starts	23	40	30
		% retention	91	95	73
		% pass rate	86	97	95
National certificate in game keeping	2	No. of starts	22	11	23
		% retention	95	91	96
		% pass rate	86	90	95
National diploma in fish management	3	No. of starts	36	49	54
		% retention	61	63	69
		% pass rate	86	97	89
National diploma in	3	No. of starts	35	18	30

game, wildlife and countryside management	% retention	80	44	80
	% pass rate	93	88	83

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

Quality of education and training

74. Much of the teaching is very good. Theory lessons are well planned and interesting and informative. They are well linked to other aspects of the students' studies. Lesson objectives are usually clearly stated and topics are logically developed using a range of appropriate learning styles. Teachers use good examples to make effective links between theory and practical applications to promote learning. Their enthusiasm in their subjects is reflected in their teaching and students respond and learn well. Teachers make good use of challenging, well-directed questions to drawing out information and ideas. Most teachers regularly check students' learning in lessons before moving on to new subjects but in a few lessons, discussion is not well managed and some students are not drawn into making a contribution or have their understanding checked. In longer lessons, teachers use well-chosen activities to keep the students interested. Students are highly responsive and most show good levels of understanding. Handout materials are generally well produced and are structured to encourage students to read and develop their understanding of topics. Much of the practical teaching is very good. Lessons are well planned and are highly relevant. Students are clear about the tasks and are well supported by teachers. Health and safety awareness amongst staff and students is carefully managed and maintained for all practical sessions. Work placements augment the teaching and help to consolidate students' learning.

75. Links with industry are extensive. Students benefit from an excellent and extensive range of up-to-date facilities and resources both on-site and off-site that are regularly and well used to support teaching. Staff are extremely well qualified, enthusiastic and have a thorough understanding with a diverse range of industrial experience and interests. Many are nationally recognised experts in their own field and their extensive industrial knowledge is well used to set up valuable practical visits. There are sufficient technical staff who also contribute to the teaching programme. Staff make good use of professional development opportunities and maintain close links with industry to maintain their current knowledge.

76. Students receive very good initial advice and guidance to enrol on the most appropriate course to meet their needs and levels of prior attainment. Induction programmes are well planned and introduce students effectively to the college and their course. These include initial assessment of students' basic and key skills and their preferred learning styles. The results are effectively applied to ensure teaching meets individual needs. Structured programmes of support are provided for students identified with additional learning needs.

77. A range of assessment methods are applied with rigour to assess students' learning and progress. Assignments are vocationally relevant, clearly written with good guidance and grading criteria which teachers use effectively to assess students' work. Assignments are used well to consolidate and develop students' learning. Students are well informed about assessment and value the prompt return of their work. Teachers mark students work well and most provide detailed constructive feedback that helps them to improve their standard of work. Effective quality assurance systems are used for internal verification of written assignments. Students are well informed about their progress and value the substantial amount of informal support they receive from their tutors. Records of individual tutorials are often not comprehensive enough; planned actions are not always clearly specified or monitored.

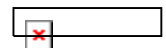
78. The CoVE in game, wildlife, countryside management and fishery studies meets the needs of students, local employers and fulfils the CoVE criteria. The range of courses caters well for students interested in game, wildlife, countryside and fishery studies vocational areas. Courses are regularly reviewed to ensure they meet the needs of students and industry. The college has plans to improve the range of entry level programmes for 2004/05. There are opportunities for pupils aged 14 to 16 studying fish husbandry to progress to full-time courses. Full-time programmes cannot be studied by

a part-time study route, limiting opportunities for students in employment or with other commitments. There is an extensive programme of short part-time courses aimed largely for people working in industry.

Leadership and management

79. Leadership and management of the CoVE curriculum area are very good and quality assurance measures are used well. Employers have provided a good industrial perspective and resources to the many developments and projects undertaken in the college including the new national aquatic training centre. Managers set clear standards and targets for high-quality education. Course teams work well together to plan, develop and deliver courses that meet the needs of students. Communication within the staff teams, between staff and with students is good. There are regular meetings to discuss student progress, review provision and consider the views of students. Minutes are recorded and actions from meetings are consistently followed through successfully resulting in a cycle of continuous improvement. The implementation of most cross-college systems is good. All teachers are involved in course reports and self-assessment. Accurate data on students are used effectively to review enrolment, retention and pass rate trends and to set realistic targets.

Animal management



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

Strengths

- high pass rates on first and national diploma courses

- much good teaching

- good coursework assessment practice

- effective industrial links

- good progression to higher level courses.

Weaknesses

- low pass rates on national and advanced national certificate courses

- ineffective use of animal unit duties to develop practical skills.

Scope of provision

80. The CoVE in animal management offers a range of provision including a full-time first diploma course at level 2 and a national diploma and advanced national certificate at level 3. Part-time courses include an animal nursing assistant course and veterinary nursing NVQs at levels 2 and 3 as well as NVQs in animal care at levels 1 and 2. Of the 284 full-time students, over 90% are aged 16 to 18 and 80% are female. There are 221 part-time students, mainly adults, with a male to female ratio of 1:4. Some 133 of these students are on a college-devised advanced national certificate in zoo animal management delivered nationally by distance learning. Other part-time students study on veterinary nursing courses or for NVQs. Pupils aged 14 to 16 attend one day a week and work towards NVQ level 1 in animal care. A full-time level 1 course is planned to start in the coming academic year.

Achievement and standards

81. Pass rates on first and national diploma courses are high. Retention rates improved on the first diploma to well above the average in 2002/03. While retention rates have declined on the national diploma, they are still above the national average in 2002/03.

82. Pass rates have declined on the national certificate over the last three years to well below the national average and this course has now been replaced by the better-performing first diploma course. Pass rates for the first year of the college-based advanced national certificate course are low and below the national average. Pass rates in key skills are good. In application of number, communications and IT pass rates exceed national averages.

83. Pass rates on veterinary nursing courses are close to or above national averages. Retention rates are generally good and well above the national average on animal nursing assistant and NVQ level 2 courses. Progression from level 2 is good. Over 80% of students progress either to further courses including at HE level or to employment.

84. Standards of assignment work are high. Students are able to research and evaluate contentious issues such as hunting or animal experimentation effectively. Practical dog training skills are good and first-year students can train dogs to perform routine obedience exercises. Standards of practical work during unit duties at the animal management centre are often low. Students do not always follow hygiene procedures and errors are often not promptly corrected.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
First diploma animal care	2	No. of starts	60	47	42
		% retention	95	85	93
		% pass rate	93	98	85
NVQ level 2 veterinary nursing	2	No. of starts	10	11	8
		% retention	90	100	100
		% pass rate	89	64	88
National certificate animal care	2	No. of starts	46	36	14
		% retention	89	72	86

		% pass rate	88	77	75
National diploma in animal management	3	No. of starts	81	87	80
		% retention	84	83	78
		% pass rate	90	88	94

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

Quality of education and training

85. There is much good teaching. Students are well motivated and attentive. In the best lessons, teachers recap effectively on previous learning at the start of the lesson. Videos, or small practical sessions using specialist equipment, are also used within theory-based lessons and work well to help visualise or practice topics such as bandaging. Well-written handouts with space for students to write either in group work or individually, are used effectively to help students learn. However, in a few lessons, teachers provide answers too quickly and do not give students sufficient opportunity to think for themselves. When answering verbal questions, a few teachers do not always ensure all students have opportunity to contribute.

86. Practical teaching makes good use of the full range of resources available including the farm, aquatic and equine units. All students undertake additional routine duties at the animal management centre. There are missed opportunities to reinforce development of some basic husbandry skills, such as animal handling or health checks, through insufficient time allocated to this daily routine work.

87. Resources are extensive including a range of well-designed new animal houses which are attractively laid out. A purpose-built modern veterinary nursing centre is under development. There is a good range of animals including birds, small mammals, primates, reptiles and amphibians as well as some zoo animals. A new dog grooming parlour and kennels includes modern grooming equipment such as a walk-in shower and drier. Classrooms are light, airy, comfortable and clean. Laboratory areas are maintained at a high standard with a high awareness of health and safety. Staff have appropriate vocational and academic skills and qualifications. Outside speakers and other industry specialists are also used effectively to teach specialist subjects. There is a good range of appropriate library books, journals and videos available to students.

88. Students receive assessment plans at the start of their courses and are clear about what they have to do. Written work is marked accurately with clear, helpful feedback. Internal verification of coursework is rigorous. Practical assessment is well planned and assessments are comprehensively recorded, including for unit duties. Assessment of unit duties shows inconsistency in the application of appropriate standards. A significant minority of students receive higher grades than records of their performance indicate. For example, some assessment records show pass grades for students who have failed to follow health and safety and hygiene procedures correctly or are hesitant with animal handling. Internal verification of this aspect of practical assessment has not identified these shortcomings.

89. The CoVE has very good links with industry to improve opportunities to access courses. Working with the Zoo Federation, a tailor-made distance learning course has been developed and has recruited nationally. Other initiatives to improve access include the option of two-year, part-time attendance for the full-time advanced national certificate course. Courses are also delivered for the benefit of the local community such as first aid for pets.

90. Students receive termly one-to-one tutorials. Areas for improvement are effectively agreed, but clear improvement targets are not always set. Course files and records of students' progress are kept accurately. Termly reports are given to students and, where appropriate, to parents or employers. Students also receive effective weekly group tutorials. Students appreciate the advice and support they receive from staff.

Leadership and management

91. Curriculum leadership and management are good. The achievement of full CoVE status has been well managed. Communication is effective with regular team meetings. Action points are clearly identified and followed up promptly. Staff feel well supported and have an annual appraisal and at least one lesson observation a year. Quality assurance systems are well understood by staff and used effectively in most aspects of the provision. Student records are detailed and staff use a range of management information systems productively. Most of the strengths and weaknesses identified during the inspection are also identified in the self-assessment report. However, neither some low standards of working practice, nor ineffective use of unit duties to develop basic husbandry skills have been identified as a weakness.

Part D: College data

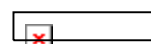
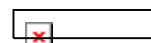


Table 1: Enrolments by level of study and age

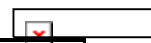
Level	16-18 %	19+ %
1	51	15
2	26	25
3	18	9
4/5	2	4
Other	3	47
Total	100	100



Source: provided by the college in spring 2004

Table 2: Enrolments by curriculum area and age

Curriculum area	16-18 No.	19+ No.	Total Enrolments (%)
Science and mathematics	344	142	4
Land-based provision	2,327	2,888	39
Construction	0	3	0
Engineering, technology and manufacture	224	396	5
Business administration, management and professional	0	59	0
Information and communication	186	153	3



technology			
Retailing, customer service and transportation	0	0	0
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	46	55	1
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	0	0	0
Health, social care and public services	317	3,677	30
Visual and performing arts and media	0	0	0
Humanities	0	0	0
English, languages and communication	144	60	2
Foundation programmes	483	162	5
Unknown AOL	658	972	11
Total	4,729	8,567	100

Source: provided by the college in 2004

Table 3: Retention and achievement

Level (Long Courses)	Retention and pass rate	Completion year					
		16-18			19+		
		2001	2002	2003	2001	2002	2003
		1	Starters excluding transfers	841	857	1,205	299
	Retention rate %	93	80	89	85	74	85
	National average %	84	81	*	80	70	*
	Pass rate %	74	85	86	89	66	67
	National average %	69	76	*	66	77	*
2	Starters excluding transfers	403	462	399	204	234	264
	Retention rate %	86	59	85	63	43	53
	National average %	77	77	*	71	71	*
	Pass rate %	79	92	85	63	72	82
	National average %	73	76	*	69	74	*
3	Starters excluding transfers	343	287	265	228	305	216
	Retention rate %	66	55	77	66	49	58
	National average %	71	75	*	69	64	*

	Pass rate %	76	91	88	75	94	88
	National average %	80	82	*	67	68	*

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 2000 to 2003: College ISR.*

* *data unavailable*

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)	73	20	7	55
Level 2 (intermediate)	73	27	0	22
Level 1 (foundation)	83	17	0	6
Other sessions	100	0	0	2
Totals	74	21	5	85

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