



Reaseheath College

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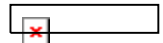
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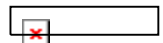
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Basic information about the college

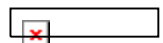


Name of college:	Reaseheath College
Type of college:	Specialist Land-Based Further Education College
Principal:	Vic Croxson
Address of college:	Reaseheath College Nantwich Cheshire CW5 6DF
Telephone number:	01270 625 131
Fax number:	01270 625 665
Chair of governors:	John Platt
Unique reference number:	130623
Name of reporting inspector:	Peter Brook
Dates of inspection:	8-12 April 2002

Part A: Summary



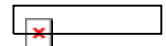
Information about the college



training needs of the agriculture and cheese-making industries of Cheshire. It has diversified its activities since then and currently provides full-time and part-time courses and work-based training for industries that are mainly rural or land based. The college offers a range of courses at pre-entry and foundation level, and at levels 1 to 3 and higher education (HE) courses including Higher National Certificates (HNC), Higher National Diplomas (HND), foundation and Bachelor of Science degrees. Courses are provided at most levels in agriculture and countryside, adventure sports, animal care, equine studies, horticulture, food technology, business management and information and communication technology (ICT), engineering and construction. The college also provides off-the-job training as a subcontractor for other work-based training providers and specialist courses on a full-cost basis for industry. The college's mission requires it to expand the knowledge, skills and adaptability of individuals enabling them to respond to change in the pursuit of excellence and prosperity, particularly in rural communities and land-based business environments.

The college is the focus for land-based education and training in Cheshire, but students are also recruited from other parts of the country. In the current year, students were recruited from 49 local authority areas and from overseas. In 2000/01, the college enrolled 2,534 further education (FE) students. Of these, 35% were students aged 16 to 18 and 65% were aged 19 and above. Some 27% were on full-time courses with 73% on part-time or short courses. An additional 120 students were on work-based learning programmes. A further 149 full-time and 137 part-time students were on HE courses. In the same year, there were 3,259 course enrolments by FE students. Some 22% of these were at level 1, 36% at level 2 and 16% at level 3; 26% were enrolled on short courses and other courses. In 2000/01, less than 1% of students were from a minority ethnic group. Some 64% of all students were male and 36% female. The college is in an area of low social deprivation and unemployment and only 0.1% of the population are from minority ethnic groups. The county of Cheshire was severely affected by the outbreak of foot and mouth disease in 2001.

How effective is the college?



Standards achieved by most full-time and part-time students are high. The college fulfils its mission well in providing a wide range of courses that meet the needs of students and industries in the land-based and associated sectors. Agricultural engineering is outstanding; equine studies, horticulture and foundation courses are good; agriculture and countryside and animal care are satisfactory.

Key strengths

- good teaching and learning in all curriculum areas
- high level of attendance at classes
- good range of specialist equipment and resources to support learning
- good use of the college estate for teaching

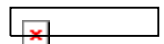
- strong industrial links
- excellent agricultural engineering provision
- effective strategies to widen participation
- high level of individual support for students
- effective college management and governance.

What should be improved

- consistency of assessment practice
- low completion rates of modern apprenticeship frameworks
- consistency of implementation of key skills
- monitoring and review of students' progress through tutorials
- quality of some general teaching accommodation.

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



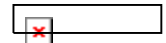
The table below shows overall judgements about provision in subjects and courses that were inspected. Judgements are based primarily on the quality of teaching, training and learning and how well students achieve. Not all subjects and courses were inspected. Inspectors make overall judgements on curriculum 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 and countryside	Satisfactory. Pass rates on National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) level 3 agriculture and national certificate courses are good, but framework completions for work-based learners are low. Much of the theory teaching is good, but the needs of individual students are not always addressed in teaching. Integration of key skills into some agriculture courses is poor and there is insufficient monitoring of students' progress in tutorials and on monitoring visits. Courses are well planned, but weaknesses exist in course management.
Agricultural engineering	Outstanding. Retention and pass rates on all courses are very high. Practical and theory teaching are very good and students' work is of a high standard. Excellent links with the industry have led to highly relevant programmes that are well received by both students and industry with good and well-established progression routes. An excellent range of modern equipment and machinery is available.
Animal care	Satisfactory. Overall attainment is satisfactory with good retention rates on first and national diploma courses. Pass rates have declined over the last three years on the national diploma course. Most teaching is good and is enhanced by the high standard of resources and strong industrial links. Progression opportunities are good, but some aspects of course management are weak.
Equine studies	Good. Pass and retention rates on most courses are good, although at national diploma level they are below the national average. There is good teaching of theory lessons, but the organisation of some practical riding lessons is weak. Resources and equipment are of a high standard. Courses are well managed and the working relationship between staff and students is good. Links with the industry and employers are strong.
Horticulture	Good. Pass rates on full-time programmes are good, but retention rates on NVQ level 2 programmes are low. Completion of modern apprenticeship frameworks is poor. The curriculum is well managed and students are enthusiastic and demonstrate high standards of work. Excellent physical resources are well utilised in students' practical work.
Foundation (supported learning)	Good. There are good retention rates on all programmes and most students progress to higher level courses. Teaching is good, with account taken of individual learning needs: a high level of classroom and pastoral support is provided. Good use is made of the practical resources to develop basic and vocational skills. Individual learning plans are not used effectively to monitor progress. Courses are well managed and there are good links with other curriculum areas.

How well is the college led and managed?

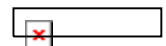
Leadership and management are good. The governors' expertise and commitment to the college are strengths. There are good external links and partnerships, particularly with industry. Communication with partners and within college is good. Though quality assurance procedures had improved since the last inspection, some evaluation in the self-assessment report was found to require further development. There had been a decline in retention and pass rates in 2000/01, compared to those in the previous three years. Staff development is good. There was some variable practice in managing the curriculum and work-based learning. The college's financial position is good. Judicious management of resources enhances the students' experience.

To what extent is the college educationally and socially inclusive?



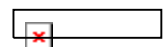
The college's approach to educational and social inclusion is good. There is a wide range of provision and clear progression routes are available from foundation level through to HE. Successful strategies have been implemented to encourage young people and adults from under-represented groups to return to learning. A pre-entry course has been developed in collaboration with social services and the provision at entry and foundation levels has been improved and expanded. These students are well taught and effectively supported and they are able to benefit from the extensive range of resources available. The college is working closely with both its associated industries and local organisations and partnerships to attract adult students back into education. It is providing training courses in the work place for employees who have few or no formal qualifications and has introduced a very successful adult apprenticeship scheme for some employers. It is also making progress in widening participation in the local community by offering taster sessions that are encouraging students on to other college courses. Equality of opportunity is promoted at all levels, although some promotional material perpetuates gender stereotyping.

How well are students and trainees guided and supported?



Guidance and support for students are good. Clear and impartial advice and information are provided for prospective students. Most students are inducted well into the college and their programmes. Arrangements for tutorial support for most students are good. Effective individual support is provided, but there is no cross-college co-ordination of tutorials and, on some courses, monitoring and review of students' progress are weak. The college provides a range of support services, including advice and guidance on welfare matters such as finance and accommodation. Good support is provided for students by residential wardens. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported. Good additional learning support is available to all students. Reliable careers advice is provided by Connexions staff based at the college and by teaching staff, but some students applying for HE are not given sufficient support with the application process.

Students' views of the college



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

What students like about the college

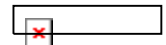
- friendly, supportive and knowledgeable staff
- good learning environment
- broad range of resources
- high standard of teaching
- practical content of courses
- adult ethos within college
- excellent work-experience opportunities
- good access to learning support
- broad range of social activities
- support with transport to college.

What they feel could be improved

- insufficient practical work on some courses
- insufficiently varied theory teaching on some courses

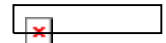
- maintenance of temporary accommodation
- quality of older residential accommodation
- range, quality and price of food in dining areas.

Other information



The college has two months to prepare an action plan in response to the report. It must show what action the college will take to bring about improvements in response to issues raised in the report. The governors must agree the plan and send copies of it to the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED).

Part B: The college as a whole



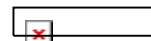
Summary of grades awarded to teaching and learning by inspectors

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	73	24	3
19+ and WBL*	81	19	0
Learning 16-18	68	24	8
19+ and WBL*	69	31	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 full-time and part-time courses, and work-based learning in land-based provision. Most vocational courses are offered including foundation programmes, NVQs, first and national diplomas and national certificates. The college also provides courses leading to professional qualifications including those of the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) and British Horse Society (BHS). Courses are provided leading to technical skills certificates in subjects including pesticide application and chain saw operation. Courses are offered in most subjects at levels 1, 2 and 3. Approximately 6% of learners are on work-based learning programmes leading to foundation and advanced modern apprenticeships.

2. Since the last inspection, the college has set and met a target for students' retention rates which, until last year, were at or above the national average for specialist colleges for all students at levels 1, 2 and 3. Retention rates declined to below national average for students at levels 1 and 2 in 2000/01. This decline was attributed in some part to the foot and mouth crisis that prevented some students from attending college for a considerable period of time. Pass rates for students aged 16 to 18 and adult students were higher, and, in some groups, considerably higher, than the national average in the three years up to 1999/2000. In 2000/01, many students were entered for the new key skills awards at the same level as their vocational qualification. Many failed to pass key skills examinations which, combined with the effect of the foot and mouth crisis, led to a significant overall decline in pass rates. If key skills are excluded, pass rates declined, but still remained above the national average for all groups apart from students aged 16 to 18 on level 3 programmes.

16-18 year olds

3. The proportion of students studying at level 1 and below has increased considerably in recent years. Many students enter the college with low levels of prior achievement and a range of learning difficulties. The college provides good learning support and tutorial support on pre-entry, entry and foundation programmes. Students are encouraged and supported to gain qualifications and skills appropriate to their aspirations and ability. Students comment favourably on their learning experience. Retention and pass rates on foundation and level 1 courses are very high and 90% of entry level students progress to other courses in the college.

4. Most students on level 2 courses make good gains in knowledge and understanding. Standards achieved in practical and theory lessons are generally good and extensive use is made of the college estate to support learning. Standards of practical work in engineering and horticulture are particularly high. Retention and pass rates are consistently high in most areas. Some engineering courses consistently achieve pass rates of 100%. Many students study for highly relevant additional qualifications, for which retention and pass rates are generally high. Pass rates at NVQ level 2 in horticulture are low.

5. Retention and pass rates on many level 3 programmes have consistently been above the national average. Pass rates at national diploma level in horticulture and at advanced General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQ) in engineering have been particularly high. At NVQ level 3 in agriculture, the pass rate is significantly above the national average. On national diplomas in animal care and horse studies, pass rates are below the national average and declining. In most subjects, national diploma and GNVQ students carry out practical work with good levels of competence and develop a good balance of practical skills and supporting knowledge. In some practical agriculture classes, students' achievement is below the level expected at the stage of the course. Opportunities to develop students' supervisory skills further are missed on agriculture, animal care and equine courses. Assignments and other written work from students are generally good.

Adult learners

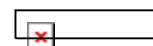
6. The majority of adult students are following the same courses as the students aged 16 to 18. These include the supported learning programme that is successful in improving adults' basic and independent living skills. A significant number of adults attend college for specific part-time and

short courses at levels 2 and 3. Pass rates of adults were significantly higher than the national average at all levels in 1999/2000, but declined in 2000/2001. Many adult students attend part-time and short courses to gain technical certificates and for leisure purposes. These include certificates for pesticide and chain saw operation, a general examination in horticulture, a certificate in gardening and creative studies courses. Retention and pass rates on short courses are consistently high at over 90%.

Work-based learners

7. There are significant numbers of work-based learners in two curriculum areas. They represent approximately 21% and 13% of learners in agriculture and horticulture, respectively. Retention and completion rates on foundation and advanced modern apprenticeships are poor. In most groups, fewer than 50% of learners complete the programme and very few achieve all the requirements of the apprenticeship framework. In horticulture, many make slow progress towards achieving the NVQ, whereas in agriculture the rate of progression is faster, but the quality of some evidence in portfolios is poor. Most learners who remain on the programme achieve the NVQ. Key skills are now integrated well into programmes, although learners have previously been very slow to acquire the key skills required. Evidence of apprenticeship framework completion is being compiled for some recently completing trainees.

Quality of education and training



8. Teaching, learning and attainment were graded by inspectors in 91 sessions. Teaching was good or better in 76% of these, satisfactory in 22% and less than satisfactory in 2%. Learning and attainment were good or better in slightly fewer lessons, and only 5.5% of lessons were less than satisfactory. The quality of teaching is of a consistently good standard across all programmes. Only two lessons were unsatisfactory, both of these on the same level 3 course for students aged 16 to 18. Practical and theory teaching were linked well in most lessons. Attendance, at 87%, was significantly higher than the national average that, for 1999/2000, was 76%. It was particularly good for lessons in horticulture and agricultural engineering. Attendance at animal care lessons, at 79%, was significantly lower than for the other subjects.

9. On courses at level 1 and below, teachers plan lessons well and successfully meet the learning needs of a wide ability range. In all theory and many practical classes students are ably assisted by learning support tutors. Lessons are based around activities that are both interesting and stimulating. Particularly good use is made of the opportunities provided on the campus to carry out practical activities. One group of students weighed pigs to calculate weight gain and another learnt how to handle and groom dogs. Good links are made between practical work and key skills.

10. On courses at levels 2 and 3, the quality of teaching and learning is generally good. Lessons contain a good balance of theory and practical work. In the best lessons teachers use a variety of methods and a range of activities to stimulate learning and link theory to practical work. The college estate, local work sites and work placements are used extensively and enable learners to develop good knowledge, skills and understanding. For example, students carried out turf restoration at a prominent football stadium in preparation for an international football match. Skilled supervisors provide good on-the-job training to work-based learners. Second-year, level 3, animal care students, however, have few practical classes and resources are not used sufficiently to support theory teaching. There are insufficient opportunities provided for many level 3 students to develop supervisory skills. Insufficient use is made of ICT in vocational teaching in some subjects.

11. Much theory teaching is good. Teachers use their own industrial experience and that of the students to relate theory teaching to commercial practice. In the best lessons, teachers use a wide range of techniques to involve all students and attempt to accommodate individual learning styles and meet individuals' needs. In less successful lessons, teachers talk too much and do not allow

enough time for students to solve problems for themselves. In some agriculture classes, individual needs of students are identified on lesson plans, but these needs are not met within the lesson. Off-the-job training for work-based trainees in horticulture is well planned and lessons capture students' interest.

12. The quality of key skills teaching and learning varies across the college. In foundation, engineering, equine and horticulture courses key skills are well integrated into other aspects of the curriculum. Evidence from vocational tasks is used for key skills and students understand what is required of them. In horticulture, innovative methods are used to record evidence of key skills, including video conferencing. In agriculture and countryside and animal care, key skills are poorly integrated into some courses.

13. The college's large estate provides a welcoming environment for students. The specialist accommodation is good. The college has developed effective links with industry which help to provide up-to-date resources and equipment for students' use. The engineering centre, horticulture unit, animal care and equine units, and extensive sports facilities are equipped to current industrial standards and provide students with many opportunities to develop practical skills. The college has effectively adapted buildings to provide for new areas of the curriculum such as animal care. The accommodation is used appropriately by students following full-time specialist courses and those who are enriching their studies by gaining additional qualifications. A good range of social and sporting facilities are available to students.

14. The library and computer suites are well used and provide suitable resources for those who wish to research and work independently. The college has made a significant investment in computers for teachers and students. Students have good access to modern computers and the ratio of full-time equivalent students to computers is approximately 9:1. All computer suites are available for drop-in use by students when timetables allow, although the demand for computers is sometimes very high. Students who wish to use a computer for their work sometimes cannot do so because others are using the machines for recreational activities. Most classrooms are suitable, with appropriate equipment for teaching. Some 90% of the classrooms are accessible to users of wheelchairs and if necessary timetables are altered to ensure that students with mobility impairments can attend. Some of the older classrooms are of poorer quality.

15. Most teachers are academically well qualified, have relevant vocational experience and are appropriately matched to the courses on which they teach. Many have first degrees or equivalent professional qualifications. Some 90% hold or are working towards a teaching qualification. Members of staff have made good progress in gaining awards as assessors and verifiers. Most staff have used the extensive opportunities provided to improve their specialist skills and qualifications. Many staff have received ICT training to help them to improve their teaching, but a minority lack the necessary ICT skills for teaching or administration. Recent industrial experience is lacking in some curriculum areas. Part-time teachers bring valuable current industrial experience and professional experience to the classroom, although some have little teaching experience. Technical and administrative support staff provide good support for teachers. Staff awareness of health and safety issues is mostly good and this is reflected in their teaching. Routine monitoring of health and safety is carried out in the workplace and risk assessments are completed, but sometimes these are not used effectively in planning lessons.

16. Staff carry out most assessment and monitoring of students' progress effectively in line with awarding body standards. The college has well-written assessment and internal verification policies. These contain clear information on assessment strategies and procedures, accreditation of prior learning, action in the event of academic misconduct, exemplar assessment and monitoring proforma, examination rules and internal verification procedures. Student handbooks also provide clear assessment information and guidance to students.

17. Assessment is used well to support learners' progress in most cases. Assessment schedules are provided to full-time students at the beginning of their programme of study, enabling them to plan their work effectively. Regular and timely review meetings take place on most courses. Feedback to students and recording of their progress is generally effective, however some learning plans, for example on foundation programmes, do not contain sufficient individual target setting. The

assessment of key skills is inconsistent. Some staff and students do not fully understand the role of key skills in the curriculum. Internal verification procedures are rigorous and effective in most cases. Joint marking takes place regularly, particularly for new staff, to provide continuous moderation of assessment standards. In horticulture and agriculture, some staff do not follow the internal verification procedures accurately. The college holds regular parents' evenings and frequently reports on students' progress to parents and the employers of work-based trainees.

18. There is some weak assessment practice in work-based training. The quality of witness testimonies is inconsistent. Some agriculture and horticulture trainees lack clear guidance on the apprenticeship framework and the standard of some work-place assessment in these areas is poor. Many trainees do not have sufficient understanding of the assessment process and assessment itself is infrequent. The quality of the evidence portfolios for some work-based trainees is poor, however, this has been recognised by the college and more recently compiled evidence is of a higher standard.

19. The range of provision is good and effectively meets the needs of students. The college offers clear progression routes from foundation level to HE in all its main areas of provision. Many areas offer alternative modes of attendance to accommodate the differing needs of the students. A significant feature of the college's inclusive provision is the expansion of its entry and foundation level programmes. A successful pre-entry programme has also been developed in collaboration with social services. Bespoke courses for young offenders institutions are provided by the college and a number of students have successfully progressed from these on to other college courses. Other effective initiatives to promote wider participation are the extension of the network of subsidised bus routes to take in urban areas and the provision of residential bursaries.

20. Partnerships are strong. A veterinary practice, an outdoor activity-based personal development company, wildlife organisations and a food-packaging factory all have accommodation on the campus. Their close working relationship with the college is mutually beneficial and adds valuable breadth to the students' experience and enhances their learning. Links with employers are good and enable the students to gain realistic training and work experience. There are industrial representatives on course teams and the college hosts a biennial industrial consultation conference to keep informed of the changing needs of its associated industries. A number of major national engineering and food companies have cited the college's flexibility and responsiveness as the major reason for choosing it as their preferred training provider.

21. The enrichment programme includes sports, additional vocational qualifications, social activities and fund-raising events. Curriculum areas also provide an extensive programme of visits, external speakers and study tours that is highly regarded by the students.

22. The college is working effectively with a number of local partnerships and voluntary organisations to attract non-traditional students. As part of the Cheshire Learning Partnership, it has carried out market research in one of the most deprived wards in the area resulting in a programme of successfully tailored short courses that are tempting adults back into education. Taster courses offered in partnership with voluntary organisations, such as the Alzheimer Society, have given carers the confidence to join further college programmes. An expanding programme of vocational courses enhances the Key Stage 4 studies of pupils from local schools who attend the college for one day a week. There are 9 schools and 80 pupils currently involved and an increasing number of students from feeder schools are progressing on to college courses as a result. Work-based qualifications are successfully offered to employees from industries such as food processing, engineering and construction where workers have few or no formal qualifications and an adult apprenticeship scheme is enabling employees at an engineering company to gain advanced qualifications.

23. Strong guidance and support are provided for most students. Students and parents greatly value the caring environment and support provided by lecturers, support staff, tutors and residential wardens. There is a clearly stated cross-college tutorial policy, which is adapted to suit the requirements of individual course teams. Students receive regular one-to-one tutorials that monitor progress and provide pastoral advice and support where required. Lack of compliance with the tutorial policy in some areas results in tutorials being less effective. In agriculture, for example,

reviewing and monitoring of students' progress are poor.

24. Strategies have recently been introduced to monitor punctuality and attendance, and to take action where necessary. In particular, it has appointed a support officer who works with intermediate level students to raise attendance, retention and pass rates. Early indications show a 6% increase in overall attendance.

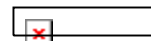
25. The college offers good pre-entry advice and guidance. It has a well-established relationship with local schools. Staff visit the schools regularly to provide information on the range of career opportunities available. The information in the prospectus and on the web site is clear, informative and easy to understand. The college holds regular open evenings and activity days where members of the public can experience the college environment, see the resources and facilities, and gain detailed course information from subject specialists. Interviews take place with a subject specialist and students receive clear guidance about the college and the subject.

26. A rigorous and effective induction programme is provided. Students on pre-entry, entry and foundation level courses and some level 2 students attend a valuable five-day, summer school induction. This provides students with a thorough insight into the college and enables staff to ensure that students are directed to the appropriate level of study. Full-time students take part in a thorough induction during the first week of the course when they receive information about cross-college activities, such as student services, student union activities and enrichment opportunities. They are also given an informative course handbook and a comprehensive introduction to their chosen course of study.

27. During induction, full-time students and work-based trainees complete a diagnostic test to identify the level of their key skills and any additional learning support requirements. Further opportunities exist to identify any needs for additional learning support at interview, following the first course assignment and thereafter on the basis of ongoing staff or personal referral. A small team of dedicated staff provides additional learning support. Some of the paper-based resource material in the learning support workshop is in need of updating.

28. The college has strong links with the local Connexions service. A personal adviser (education) and a personal adviser (community) are based at the college for part of the week to provide specialist support. In addition, teaching staff, who are all experts in their field, provide a significant proportion of the advice on careers and HE opportunities. Some students wishing to apply to HE are not fully supported through the UCAS process and staff fail to emphasise the importance of timely UCAS applications.

Leadership and management



29. Leadership and management are good. The college benefits from the effective leadership of governors, the principal and senior managers. The members of the college management group are experienced in their roles and carry them out effectively. The strategic-planning process is effective and consultative. It pays careful regard to national and local priorities. The principal initiates the process and governors make an early input and subsequently carefully review the final draft. Strengths of the process include the extensive discussion process within the college and wide consultation with representatives of relevant industries. Communications within the college and those with a wide range of stakeholders, including representatives of land-based and other industries are good. The college benefits from its extensive and widely participative committee structure.

30. Governors and senior managers used the cancellation of the last Further Education Funding Council inspection as an opportunity to restructure the middle management of the college from the start of the 2001/02 academic year. A new vice principal was appointed and the number of

academic managers and re-designated programme directors reduced by one. Seventeen programme leaders for groups of related courses were appointed to lead academic developments and promote teaching improvements. Some of these programme leaders are insufficiently aware of the focus of their new roles. At the time of the inspection, there were variable practices in the way programme leaders and some course managers were carrying out their management and quality assurance functions. Some aspects of the management of work-based learning are weak.

31. The quality assurance framework is well supported by staff. Aspects of its implementation have been strengthened since the last inspection. Course teams, with both student and industrial representatives, meet at least termly and use these meetings as opportunities to initiate early responses to an analysis of the students' evaluation of their courses. Course managers and their teams effectively carry out annual course reviews. Targets and performance indicators such as retention, pass and progression rates are carefully evaluated. Teaching and learning is systematically reviewed against the aims stated in the college's learning policy. Students' perceptions and the outcomes of lesson observations carried out by a team of senior staff are used in the process. In the years 1997 to 2000, retention and pass rates were largely above national averages for all levels of courses. There was, however, a decline in overall retention and pass rates in 2000/01. The college has extensively analysed these data to determine the effects of the foot-and-mouth outbreak and implementation of the new key skills qualifications on retention and pass rates.

32. A wide range of staff and stakeholders participated actively in the newly developed process for self-assessment, which is a positive outcome from the extension of the quality assurance procedures to all aspects of provision. Course managers, working with programme leaders evaluate their provision against 166 generic standards. These have been developed from the college learning policy, the equal opportunities policy, the students' charter and other sources, many of which are linked to the Common Inspection Framework. Despite the potential strength of the process and its enthusiastic implementation by staff, the resulting self-assessment report requires further development. Inspectors judged that provision in one of the six curriculum areas inspected was outstanding, good in three and satisfactory in two. Of the six curriculum areas inspected, inspectors agreed with two college grades, considered two to be lenient and two to be too severe. They agreed with the college's two assessed grades for work-based learning. The self-assessment process links well with the college's planning and reporting cycle.

33. Quality audits are carried out under the supervision of the academic standards committee, which is a working group of the academic board. Where variable practice or lack of compliance are found, evaluative reports are used as a basis for staff development. The college acknowledges that it is more difficult to monitor some service functions because of the lack of development of service standards.

34. Until this academic year, management information was supplied by a system developed in the college. Despite some limitations acknowledged by the college, the system has served managers and external stakeholders relatively well, but lacked potential for further development. A new commercial system has been purchased and, despite a relatively short installation period, is already providing timely information to the funding body. Currently, most reports are provided to managers by management information systems staff, but online facilities are being developed and training is being given to enable managers to access the new system directly.

35. Since the last inspection, the college has significantly extended its curriculum and marketing activity to widen participation and promote inclusiveness. A range of foundation programmes successfully attracts students to the college, many from areas of deprivation. A successful partnership with social services provides additional training for college staff and enhances support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The college also promotes equality of opportunity at all levels, though some promotional material still shows signs of gender stereotyping.

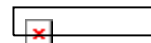
36. Governors are actively involved in effectively setting the strategic direction of the college. They contribute to the strategic-planning process early in the year to determine the key priorities for the college. Subsequently they finalise the strategic plan and receive regular reports on progress against the associated development plans. There is regular, close monitoring of the academic and

financial performance of the college by governors. Each governor is linked with a college curriculum area, attends events and meets students and staff from that area at least twice a year. Since the last inspection, the search and board development committee of the corporation has been successful in its objective to further broaden the professional and representative experience base of the governing body. The clerk, college managers and external organisations provide an effective programme of induction for new governors and appropriate training for them and for experienced governors.

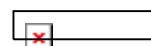
37. Teachers are appraised annually and development needs established. A small group of trained staff observe each teacher at least once every two years and provide line managers with feedback on graded lesson observations. The frequency of observations is greater for new staff and for the few teachers identified as requiring additional support. In addition teachers make ungraded observations on colleagues' lessons, often in a closely related discipline. Perceptions are shared in order to promote the dissemination of good practice. Staff development is extensive and well managed. The staff development committee, chaired by the assistant principal directs and monitors carefully how the college mission and objectives are furthered by activities and ensures that standards fund money is used to support these aims. The college has not yet put in place an appropriate programme to support newly appointed middle managers in their roles.

38. Staff at all levels work successfully to fulfil the element of the college's mission that seeks to continue to improve the strong financial position and to deploy funds with probity to achieve best value for money. The college monitors its financial position closely and acts appropriately. It has successfully developed a range of income streams. Programme directors are set income generation targets. When these targets are exceeded, a proportion of any such surplus can be invested to improve facilities for the students in that area of the college.

Part C: Curriculum and occupational areas



Agriculture and countryside



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

Strengths

- Well-planned courses
- much good theory teaching
- good pass rates on NVQ level 3 agriculture and national certificate courses
- good use of the college farm and local estates for teaching.

Weaknesses

- insufficient monitoring of students' progress in tutorials
- poor integration of key skills into some agriculture courses
- low completion rate of modern apprenticeship frameworks
- shortcomings in courses management
- insufficient action to complete the 2001 first diploma in agriculture.

Scope of provision

39. There is a good range of full-time and part-time courses at levels 2 to 3 in agriculture and levels 1 to 3 countryside management. Some 145 students are enrolled, 82% of whom are aged 16 to 18. Full-time courses include first and national diplomas in agriculture, national certificates in agriculture and in countryside-related studies and the advanced national certificate in countryside-related studies. The first diploma in agriculture did not run in 2001/02 due to low recruitment. Part-time courses include an advanced national certificate in dairy herd management and an extensive programme of short courses aimed at people working in industry. There are 31 foundation and advanced modern apprentices working towards NVQ levels 2 and 3 in agriculture and key skills. Good progression routes are available for most students, but there is no level 1 programme in agriculture.

Achievement and standards

40. Retention rates on the advanced national certificate courses in agriculture and countryside-related studies and pass rates on the national certificate courses and NVQ level 3 agriculture are good. No students achieved the first diploma in agriculture in 2000/01, partly as a result of the impact of the foot-and-mouth outbreak. The college has taken insufficient action to enable students to complete the programme. Most students, apart from those on the national certificate in countryside-related studies, are offered a range of additional vocational qualifications. Where these are taken, pass rates are good.

41. Students' achievement in some practical classes is below the level expected relative to the stage of the course. Students on NVQ programmes make good progress and achieve well in lessons.

42. Over the last three years, NVQ pass rates for modern apprentices within the contracted period are good, but achievement of the full framework is poor as key skills qualifications have not been achieved. In March 2002, 3 apprentices achieved the full advanced apprenticeship framework and a further 14 are awaiting accreditation.

A sample of retention and pass rates in agriculture and countryside, 1999 to 2001

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
National certificate in countryside-related studies	2	No. of starts	32	23	17
		% retention	88	91	76
		% pass rate	100	86	92
National certificate in agriculture	2	No. of starts	29	17	12
		% retention	86	82	83
		% pass rate	92	86	100
NVQ agriculture	2	No. of starts	38	52	19
		% retention	89	92	89
		% pass rate	79	67	76
NVQ agriculture	3	No. of starts	73	38	59
		% retention	90	84	86
		% pass rate	52	94	84
Advanced national certificate in agriculture	3	No. of starts	18	12	10
		% retention	94	92	100
		% pass rate	100	91*	90
Advanced national certificate in countryside related studies	3	No. of starts	11	14	15
		% retention	100	93	100
		% pass rate	100	62	87

Source: ISR (1999 and 2000), college (2001).

* college data

Quality of education and training

43. Much of the theory teaching is good. Teachers use their industrial experience to good effect in both practical and theory lessons. In the best lessons, teachers use a wide range of techniques in order to involve all students and meet individual students' needs. In an outstanding countryside management lesson on environmental interpretation, the teacher used a range of teaching styles to ensure that all students fully understood the range of interpretation methods available and that the different views of a minority of students were discussed by the group and their value emphasised. In poorer lessons, students' prior achievement and knowledge are not taken into account. Whilst particular students' learning needs are identified on some lesson plans, these needs are not met through the lesson. Whilst in countryside-related studies, key skills are generally well integrated, teaching of key skills is poorly integrated into some agriculture classes resulting in a lack of coherence and poor achievement. Some staff and students have a poor understanding of what is required to achieve key skills qualifications.

44. Good use is made of the college farm and other local estates for teaching purposes. The college estate takes part in the Countryside Stewardship Scheme that enhances the value of the estate as a learning resource for students of agriculture and countryside-related studies. There are well-equipped stores and workshops and students have access to sufficient specialist equipment and resources. The introduction of the multiple-ovulation, embryo-transplant (MOET) dairy herd has enhanced students' experience of managing high yielding dairy herds. Additional use of off-site locations is, however, required to enable students to use commercial dairy records. Students make

good use of the well-stocked learning resource centre. Staff have good industrial experience and this is incorporated well into teaching. Poor design and layout of some classrooms hinder effective learning.

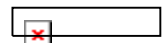
45. On entry, students are assessed for basic skills, key skills and, in some cases, technical ability. However, this information is not used effectively in the planning of teaching or assessment. Induction also includes initial assessment for learning support needs, but the outcome from this is not communicated effectively among staff teams. A good assessment policy is in place, but procedures are not always followed. Some grading criteria on assignments and practical assessments are not clear and in many assignments a higher grade is awarded simply for providing a greater volume of work rather than for demonstrating higher levels of knowledge, understanding and analytical skills. Work-based learners often do not understand the standard required to achieve competence in practical assessments. Insufficient evidence from the workplace, including witness testimony, is used to support assessment. Internal verification is weak and does not identify weaknesses effectively in assessment practice such as the lack of diverse evidence in students' portfolios.

46. There are good links with industry. Full-time students take part in a range of additional activities, including a study tour to Ireland. Part-time students have less access to additional activities. Some tutorial practice and monitoring of the progress of work-based learners is poor, with little use of rigorous target setting and review. Information about the progress of individual students is rarely shared amongst staff at team meetings.

Leadership and management

47. Leadership is satisfactory and creates a good team spirit. Staff teams are involved in course target setting and monitoring. Courses are well planned, but some aspects of course management are poor, with incomplete documentation and ineffective communication with students. Poor communication between college staff and some employers results in weak links between off-the-job training and activities in the workplace for work-based learners in agriculture. Re-enforcement of health and safety issues in some classes is inadequate.

Agricultural engineering



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

Strengths

- high pass rates
- very good retention rates
- very good teaching
- wide range of high quality equipment

- good work by students
- clear progression routes
- strong industrial links.

Weaknesses

- some inappropriate classrooms.

Scope of provision

48. A good range of full-time courses is provided from level 1 to level 3. There are 77 students on full-time courses; 58 are aged 16 to 18. A level 2 agricultural mechanics certificate programme is available and a three-year programme leading to a national diploma in land-based technology. The diploma replaces an advanced GNVQ engineering course that ran until July 2001. The three-year programme includes 12 months of work experience. During the inspection, 18 of the 77 full-time students were on work experience.

49. A level 1 foundation engineering course is provided as part of the cross-college foundation programme and HE programmes are available through an agreement with a local university college. Level 2 students are able to move into the second year of the level 3 courses after completing a short bridging studies programme. There are no work-based learning programmes managed directly by the college although off-the-job training is provided for a number of local companies on a sub-contract basis.

Achievement and standards

50. Pass rates are good and well above national average on all courses. The Open College Network (OCN) mechanisation certificate course has had a 100% pass rate for the last two years. In 1999/2000, there was a 95% pass rate on the three-year GNVQ advanced course in engineering and a 100% pass rate on the GNVQ foundation course. Current students' work is of a very high standard and progress toward qualifications is very good. Retention rates on all of the programmes have been around or above national averages for the last three years and current courses have had very few early leavers.

A sample of retention and pass rates in agricultural engineering, 1999 to 2001

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
GNVQ foundation in engineering	1	No. of starts	14	29	22
		% retention	93	83	86
		% pass rate	77	68	100

OCN mechanisation certificate	2	No. of starts	35	14	17
		% retention	81	100	82
		% pass rate	90	100	100
NVQ engineering manufacture *	2	No. of starts	12	8	9
		% retention	100	100	100
		% pass rate	100	100	89
GNVQ advanced engineering (3 year) *	3	No. of starts	20	23	20
		% retention	80	87	100
		% pass rate	69	70	95
GNVQ advanced engineering (2 year)	3	No. of starts	18	19	13
		% retention	89	81	85
		% pass rate	100	100	86

Source: ISR (1999 and 2000), college (2001).

* **ISR data adjusted to remove non-funded students**

Quality of education and training

51. Teaching is very good. Staff are all well qualified, have relevant occupational experience and inspire the students to perform to their maximum potential. Lesson plans are clear with detailed aims and objectives. Teachers use a variety of teaching methods including lectures, group work, individual work, case studies and self-directed learning. Lessons are well planned and build up from simple concepts to the more complicated tasks of actual construction and operation of machines and equipment. Good use is made of the introductions to recap previously learned knowledge and to link to associated practicals and other related lessons. Visual aids are used to good effect and where possible teaching staff use real parts and equipment to demonstrate construction and operation.

52. High emphasis is put on students' learning. Often the teacher acts as facilitator, setting the students a task and only offering assistance to the students when asked. This encourages students to think through problems and identify solutions. In one lesson, students, supported by the teacher, worked from clear worksheets successfully to dismantle an engine, measure engine wear and rebuild it. Students are encouraged to work at their own pace and in many cases there are a variety of tasks being performed by the students in one class. In an engineering drawing class, students who completed the set tasks quickly were given more challenging tasks.

53. There are sufficient high-quality materials and equipment for all students to be fully occupied during practicals. The college has built up strong links with industry, both locally and nationally, which have enabled them to obtain a large selection of equipment including whole and part machines that are used very effectively. This equipment is often donated by the companies which has enabled the college to keep its stock up to date.

54. An increase in student numbers, particularly on bespoke courses for industry has led to some pressure on classroom space. In one lesson, a group of 20 students was timetabled into a room that has a capacity of 14. The group carried out science experiments in this room, which is not a laboratory, in very cramped conditions.

55. Assessments are well planned and the assessment schedule is given to students during induction. Assignment briefs are well prepared, marked work is returned promptly and feedback to the students is relevant and meaningful. Students receive tutorial reviews three times during the year and, although action planning and target setting are not always clear, students are kept well

informed of their progress.

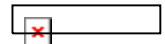
56. Staff are active within the industry and work closely with awarding bodies to ensure that programmes meet the needs of both students and industry. The college chairs the consortium for the national diploma in land-based technology that is working on re-writing this course. Results from course reviews and employer surveys are routinely used to ensure the programmes are relevant and appropriate.

Leadership and management

57. Recent changes to the college management structure have been implemented smoothly in this area. Staff have been well supported in their new roles. There is a clear direction within the section. The college provision is focused on full-time courses, with work-based programmes either provided on a sub-contract basis to other providers or as bespoke courses commissioned by industry at full cost. This clear direction has helped to ensure that the engineering provision is of a consistently good quality that is well regarded and supported by the industry. The biennial industrial consultation meetings are well supported and the industrial members of the course teams are active in making comments and suggestions.

58. The section complies with the college quality assurance systems and makes good use of them to ensure that standards are maintained. Course review and employer feedback are used to improve courses. For example, field operations have been re-introduced into the programmes following requests from work-experience employers.

Animal care



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

Strengths

- good retention rates on first and national diploma courses
- much good teaching
- high standard of animal care resources
- good opportunities for progression
- strong industrial links.

Weaknesses

- declining pass rate on the national diploma in animal care
- poor assessment practice
- weak tutorial practice
- insufficient focus on quality assurance.

Scope of provision

59. The college offers a range of courses in animal care from level 1 to level 4. Full-time programmes are available from level 1 to level 3 and include first and national diplomas and national certificates. These can also be attended on a part-time basis. Most enrolments are on to national diploma and national certificate courses. Students on full-time programmes have the opportunity to achieve additional qualifications in animal care and pet store management. These qualifications are also available by part-time study.

Achievement and standards

60. Pass rates for most programmes are declining, although the majority remain above or around the national average. The pass rate on the national diploma declined to significantly below the national average in 2001. Retention rates are generally above national averages: they are consistently high on first and national diploma courses.

61. Student attainment is generally satisfactory or better, although the standard of work in student files is highly variable. Some assignment work is good. Student attendance and punctuality are effectively monitored, but the average attendance, 79%, at animal care classes during the inspection, was significantly below that observed in the rest of the college. The accreditation of students' previous achievements is well managed. Many students progress successfully to higher level programmes. There are good rates of progression to employment from the national diploma programme.

62. Students' personal and learning skills are not systematically developed, although sessions for learning support are timetabled within each full-time course. Students are encouraged, but not required, to attend these sessions. All full-time students work towards key skills qualifications, but key skills pass rates range from good to poor.

A sample of retention and pass rates in animal care, 1999 to 2001

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
CENTRA animal care (small animals) level 1	1	No. of starts	*	*	53
		% retention	*	*	87

		% pass rate	*	*	78
First diploma in animal care	2	No. of starts	34	41	36
		% retention	94	88	89
		% pass rate	94	100	84
CENTRA animal care (small animals) level 2	2	No. of starts	*	15	123
		% retention	*	80	89
		% pass rate	*	92	84
National certificate in animal care	3	No. of starts	*	*	31
		% retention	*	*	71
		% pass rate	*	*	77
National diploma in animal care	3	No. of starts	36	31	47
		% retention	75	90	85
		% pass rate	100	92	79
Pet store management certificate	4	No. of starts	17	28	11
		% retention	94	89	100
		% pass rate	75	25	45

Source: ISR (1999 and 2000), college (2001).

*** course did not run**

Quality of education and training

63. Much of the teaching is good. Most lessons are well planned with clear learning outcomes, although these are not always shared with the students. In most lessons, question and answer techniques are used effectively to establish the initial knowledge of students, reinforce key concepts, draw out personal and work experiences and extend learning. In an outstanding communications key skills class, students benefited from taking part in a range of activities, including assessment of each other's presentations. Some theory teaching, however, is uninspiring and fails to challenge students sufficiently. In the less effective lessons, the narrow range of learning activities limits their value in meeting the needs of all students and enabling teachers to check the progress of individuals. In one pet store management class, in which open questions were used, a small number of students were allowed to dominate the responses, leading to most students being insufficiently involved in the lesson. Little use is made of ICT in vocational lessons.

64. Resources are of a high standard. Students have access to an extensive range of animals which are more than adequate to support student numbers and the needs of programmes. The range of exotic species is particularly wide. Animal breeding programmes are significant and access to environmentally controlled rooms enables comparative behaviour studies. Limited kennel facilities on site are supplemented by access to local privately owned facilities for practical tasks. Other industry-based facilities are also used effectively to supplement on site resources. Some opportunities to utilise practical facilities are missed. A limited number of students complete routine duties and the facilities are not always well used to support theory teaching. Little use is made of the college's farm livestock and equine units in animal care classes.

65. Staff are well qualified, enthusiastic and have a diverse range of industrial experience and interests. There are sufficient technical staff who also contribute to the teaching programme. All staff advise on the design and use of the practical facilities. Staff make good use of professional development opportunities and use industrial links effectively to maintain their current knowledge of the industry.

66. Assessment practice on some full-time courses is weak. Arrangements for planning assessment; communicating arrangements to students; returning marked work promptly and collating grades to monitor students' progress are inadequate. These weaknesses resulted in a high number of late completions on the national diploma programme in 2000/01. The assessment process for key skills is not well understood by staff and students. Internal verification systems for setting and marking of assessments are systematically implemented. Arrangements for reporting to parents are good and supplemented by appropriate additional contact by tutors.

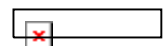
67. Opportunities for students to progress are good. The range of courses is broad in terms of level and mode of attendance and further courses are under development. All full-time students undertake work experience. Strong industrial links enhance both the curriculum and the availability of resources. Some opportunities for the development of industry-specific courses are being explored. Appropriate additional qualifications are offered to students. There is a limited programme of additional activities which staff are currently working to extend.

68. Course managers provide students with high levels of informal support. Formal tutorial practice, however, is weak and fails to comply fully with the college policy. Tutorials are inconsistent in frequency and content. Students who miss tutorials are not always followed up. Action planning is ineffective and few targets are set. Careers education, promotion of equal opportunities and development of other personal and learning skills are not systematically provided.

Leadership and management

69. The leadership and management of the curriculum is not yet well established following the recent management restructure. Team meetings focus on resource management and there is insufficient emphasis on curriculum management and quality improvement. Communication within the staff team and between staff and students is good, but information about college policies and procedures is not always effectively communicated to all staff. Quality assurance is underdeveloped. Staff understanding of and involvement in the self-assessment process are limited. Action plans at course and team level are not systematically reviewed. The implementation of cross-college systems is variable, although course managers maintain comprehensive course files in accordance with college guidelines.

Equine studies



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

Strengths

- good pass rates and retention rates in first diploma and additional qualifications
- effective theory teaching
- high standard of resources and equipment

- strong industrial links
- well-managed courses.

Weaknesses

- low pass rates on national diploma
- poorly organised practical-riding lessons.

Scope of provision

70. The college offers a range of equine courses from level 1 to level 3. Full-time courses include first and national diplomas and a national certificate. NVQ level 1 in horse care is offered on a part-time basis. Full-time students can study for a range of BHS awards as additional qualifications. Most of the 60 equine students are aged 16 to 18 on full-time courses. Five work-based learners are following a foundation modern apprenticeship programme in horse care. Horse owner certificates are available to students on short, part-time courses.

Achievement and standards

71. Retention and pass rates on the first diploma in horse studies and additional BHS examinations are good. For the past three years, pass rates on the national diploma have been well below the national average. The national certificate in horse studies was introduced in 1999 as an alternative to national diploma for students with less prior experience with horses. This was part of a strategy to improve retention and pass rates on the national diploma. Retention rates on the national diploma have improved as a result but pass rates have remained low. Despite 100% retention, the pass rate on the national certificate was low in 2000/01.

72. Students achieve high standards of work on the equine yard, but do not work at a rate comparable with industrial standards. Not all national diploma students are given the opportunity to develop supervisory skills through supervision of other students' practical duties. Students have the opportunity to develop their skills and experience by attending horse shows at the college as well as field trips and study tours. Progression to FE, HE and employment is good.

A sample of retention and pass rates in equine studies, 1999 to 2001

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
NVQ horse care (additional qualification)	1	No. of starts	22	18	16
		% retention	77	94	94
		% pass rate	100	100	83
BHS stage 1 horse	1	No. of starts	13	19	28

knowledge and riding (additional qualification)		% retention	100	89	96
		% pass rate	100	71	88
First diploma in horse studies	2	No. of starts	22	17	14
		% retention	77	88	93
		% pass rate	100	87	92
BHS stage 2 horse knowledge and care (additional qualification)	2	No. of starts	9	12	2
		% retention	100	92	100
		% pass rate	89	89	100
National certificate in horse studies	3	No. of starts	*	14	13
		% retention	*	93	100
		% pass rate	*	92	77
National diploma in horse studies	3	No. of starts	23	20	20
		% retention	65	40	85
		% pass rate	73	88	71

Source: ISR (1999 and 2000), college (2001).

* course did not run

Quality of education and training

73. Theory teaching is good. Teachers use a wide range of classroom activities to stimulate students' learning and enhance their studies. In the best lessons, teachers employ question and answer techniques to involve all students and check learning. In one first diploma lesson, a word-search exercise effectively involved all the students in finding out about the work of a leading equine industry organisation. Teachers establish good links between theory and practical applications. They also draw on their extensive industrial experience and the college's close links with the industry. Teachers make effective use of the college equine yard across the range of courses to promote learning.

74. Practical equitation teaching is poorly organised. Although health and safety awareness is good, teachers miss opportunities in lessons to interact with students and check their knowledge and understanding. One first diploma riding lesson started 10 minutes late. Students who were on time had to wait for the others to arrive. During the lesson, those who were not taking part in the exercise talked with each other and were not encouraged to observe and comment on their peers' performance.

75. Teaching of key skills is effective. Teachers work closely with students to ensure they are working towards appropriate level of key skills. In one application of number lesson, students worked well in pairs to discuss a problem constructively. All students were fully involved in learning and found the exercise fun. The assessment of key skills is well linked to practical teaching.

76. Teachers are well qualified and industrially experienced. Students value the experience of the staff. There are good classrooms and an on-site veterinary centre from which students can benefit. The equine centre is well designed with good facilities, although the absence of an indoor riding arena means that opportunities to ride can be limited during poor weather. Ample, good materials are available to support learning. For example, in a lesson on signs of ill health in horses, each student had access to their own thermometer.

77. Assignments are set on a regular basis and develop learning well. Assessment of written work is fair and accurate and is well linked to course objectives. Teachers give constructive feedback and

internal verification procedures are effective. Practical assessments on full-time courses are generally well planned and assessment procedures are well established.

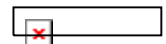
78. Good additional support is available in both theory and practical lessons. Tutorials are effective and are used to review students' progress and identify where improvement is required. Information on students' progress is discussed at staff meetings. Students can receive impartial careers advice from teachers and college career advisors. Links with work providers and the industry are very strong and students receive very good work-experience reports. In the summer, the college organises week-long, work experience placements for potential students. These are well attended and a high proportion of the students progress to a course at the college.

Leadership and management

79. Leadership of the programme area is good and staff work well as a team. Programme managers are effective and regularly liaise with subject teachers to discuss students' progress and course planning. Staff have clear roles and responsibilities. There are strong links with industry. Industrial representatives attend course team meetings and make a valuable contribution to course planning through attendance at biennial industrial conferences.

80. Work experience for full-time students is managed effectively. Employers are made aware of their roles and responsibilities. All aspects of health and safety are checked by college staff before students attend work experience. There is good communication between staff, students and employers.

Horticulture



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

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

Strengths

- good retention and pass rates on full-time courses in horticulture
- high standards of students' work
- excellent physical resources
- frequent celebration of success
- good initiatives to widen participation

- extensive use of external visits and relevant additional qualifications to enhance learning
- well-managed courses.

Weaknesses

- poor rate of completion of modern apprenticeship framework
- low retention rates on NVQ level 2 programmes
- insufficient work-place assessment in work-based learning in horticulture.

Scope of provision

81. A good range of full-time and part-time courses from level 2 to level 4 is available in amenity and commercial horticulture and floristry. Courses include first and national diplomas, a national certificate and NVQs. Diploma and certificate courses can be studied full time or part time. Entry and foundation level courses in horticulture are provided as part of the cross-college foundation programme. Within amenity horticulture, there are options in decorative horticulture, sports turf and arboriculture. A total of 764 students are enrolled; 100 on full-time courses, 258 on part-time courses and 63 work-based learners are on foundation and advanced modern apprenticeships. Others attend short courses provided for industry and for leisure interest including pesticide application, amateur gardening, garden design, floristry and flower arranging. All courses have a mix of students aged 16 to 18 and adult students. Learners on work-based programmes and students aged 16 to 18 on full-time courses study for key skills qualifications as do many adult students. Clear progression opportunities are available at all levels and students can progress to HE at the college. A wide range of additional qualifications is available to full-time and part-time students. These qualifications include floral art for florists and courses to meet legislative requirements in horticulture.

Achievement and standards

82. There are good retention and pass rates on full-time horticulture courses. Retention rates for the first and national diplomas in amenity horticulture have been above the national average for the last three years. The pass rates for the national certificate in horticulture have been consistently high. Many additional qualifications are gained including first aid, manual handling and pesticide application. Retention rates on NVQ level 2 programmes in both horticulture and floristry are low. Strategies to improve retention rates on NVQ programmes have been introduced this year and are starting to have a positive effect.

83. Attendance at classes is high, with attendance of over 92% during the inspection. Students arrive promptly for the start of the lesson and any non-attendance is challenged. Students participate enthusiastically and positively in lessons and manage their assignment work well.

84. Few modern apprenticeship frameworks are completed by work-based learners. Assessment has been focused on knowledge and understanding and there has been insufficient emphasis placed on assessing competence in the workplace. This has delayed the completion of NVQs. The college has recently started to address this by the appointment of several appropriately qualified part-time assessors to assess apprentices in the workplace. Three apprentices have recently completed the full framework following improvements in the pass rate in key skills.

85. The standard of students' work is high. Portfolio work demonstrates a good level of knowledge and understanding. Practical projects carried out by students in both horticulture and floristry are completed to high standards. Floristry students regularly achieve excellent results in national competitions and take pride in the quality of work they produce which includes decoration of the marquee for the college's award ceremony.

A sample of retention and pass rates in horticulture, 1999 to 2001

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
			No. of starts		
First diploma in horticulture	2	No. of starts	21	31	24
		% retention	95	90	88
		% pass rate	95	100	86
National certificate in horticulture	2	No. of starts	18	18	23
		% retention	78	89	74
		% pass rate	79	100	88
NVQ floristry	2	No. of starts	39	36	39
		% retention	69	83	62
		% pass rate	85	86	74
NVQ amenity horticulture (sports turf)	2	No. of starts	55	48	44
		% retention	58	65	61
		% pass rate	60	61	78
NVQ amenity horticulture (decorative horticulture)	2	No. of starts	83	104	35
		% retention	70	77	64
		% pass rate	87	58	47
National diploma in amenity horticulture	3	No. of starts	23	23	17
		% retention	65	78	82
		% pass rate	87	95	93

Source: ISR (1999 and 2000), college (2001).

Quality of education and training

86. The curriculum is well structured and presented effectively to students. Courses are well organised and assignments are planned so that students have manageable work loads. Lessons are well planned and teachers use a wide variety of strategies to engage students' interest. Teachers adopt a flexible approach and adjust their teaching style to meet the needs of different groups of students and individuals. Handout materials and workbooks developed by college staff are good and contain up-to-date information. Learning support tutors provide effective and unobtrusive support for students who need additional help with literacy and/or numeracy during vocational lessons. Well-organised team teaching is used in integrated theory and practical lessons where group sizes are large. A lesson on the theory of colour and design led into a practical session

in which students used their earlier learning to design and make hanging baskets. In some horticulture lessons, teachers did not enable students to develop problem-solving skills for themselves so that they could fully benefit from otherwise well-planned practical assignments. In some horticulture classes, insufficient use was made of visual aids to illustrate points made by the teacher.

87. Staff are well qualified and experienced and most have teaching and assessment qualifications. They make good use of the extensive and well-maintained grounds as a learning resource. The excellent collection of well-maintained plants includes a national collection. The grounds are used widely for many lessons including garden design and plant identification. Students in sports turf management benefit from practical work carried out on the college's own golf course and use up-to-date tools and equipment. In a lesson on sports turf, the college's golf greens were top dressed using modern commercial machinery. The college's commercial horticulture facilities include well-stocked glasshouses and well-equipped production areas for nursery stock. Practical projects undertaken in the college grounds include attractive landscape features and work is completed with imagination and to high standards.

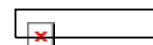
88. The curriculum is enhanced by effective use of visits both in Britain and abroad. These visits are well planned and integrated into teaching and assessment schemes to provide good opportunities for students to gain knowledge and experience of their chosen vocational area. For example, sports turf students were involved in turf restoration work at a prominent sports stadium in preparation for an international football match. Work placements for both full-time students and work-based learners are good and provide students with relevant practical training.

89. The wide range of courses is offered flexibly to enable students to study in the most appropriate way. Initiatives to widen participation include attendance by prisoners on full-time courses and close links with organisations, such as social services, which enable students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to attend the college. The students' success is celebrated in the college newsletter, in press releases and in the profiles of students that are used in the college's promotional material.

Leadership and management

90. Course teams are well managed and led by enthusiastic occupationally experienced staff. There is an open and constructive style of management and staff share good practice. Internal communication is aided by an open-plan office and use of the college intranet. Course management is good. Staff are deployed effectively and suitable arrangements are in place to cover any staff absence. Health and safety management is good with risk assessments for all practical work. Internal verification on full-time courses is satisfactory. Improvements have recently been made to internal verification for work-based training. Staff development needs are identified by appraisal for part-time and full-time staff. Staff development includes attendance at relevant conferences away from the college. Staff work closely with industry and professional bodies and some staff have prominent national roles within organisations such as awarding bodies.

Foundation (supported learning)



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

Strengths

- high retention rates for foundation programme

- good progression rates on all programmes
- high standard of teaching
- excellent range of practical activities effectively linked to the husbandry of animals and plants
- very good pastoral and learning support
- highly effective programme team.

Weaknesses

- poor individual learning plans
- no structured ICT teaching for entry level students.

Scope of provision

91. Three main programmes offer either full-time or part-time courses for young people and adults. Foundation programmes are designed for students who need to improve their literacy and numeracy skills in order to progress to level 2 courses. Programmes are full time and usually last for one year, although some students attend for longer. Students work towards NVQ level 1 or other appropriate level 1 qualifications, improve their basic skills and gain key skills qualifications at level 1. Courses are offered in animal care, amenity horticulture, equine studies and engineering. Students also take part in planned work experience. There are currently 60 students on these programmes.

92. The entry programme is full time and enables students to improve their basic skills whilst taking part in a range of practical learning activities. Students work in animal care, horticulture, engineering, agriculture and countryside and also develop independent living skills. Achievement is accredited through the National Proficiency Test Council vocational foundation scheme. The length of programme varies from one to three years depending on the needs, abilities and progress of students. There are currently 21 students on the programme.

93. The pre-entry programme is part time with attendance of up to three days a week for up to three years. It is designed for young people and adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and takes place at college and at three other centres in Cheshire. The programme provides vocationally focused learning opportunities, designed to improve skills that will help with independent living.

Students have the opportunity to work with animals, plants and machinery on the college campus and at the other centres. There are currently 61 students on the programme.

Achievement and standards

94. Many students progress to higher level courses on completion of their time on these programmes. In 2000/01, 90% of entry level students progressed on to other programmes at the college, while the remaining 10% progressed to another college. Also in 2000/01, 62% of foundation students progressed to other programmes at the college and 17% went into employment. Retention rates are high on the entry and pre-entry programmes. The retention rate in 2000/01 was 77% for the pre-entry students, 86% for entry students and 93% for foundation students. In 2000/01, 74% of foundation students gained their level 1 award and 90% of the entry programme students achieved their main qualification. Foundation students undertake a period of six weeks work experience towards the end of their programme. Entry level students are encouraged to undertake work experience during the summer holidays if staff feel that they will benefit. Some students are able to take their work experience tasters at the college. Students and tutors recognise and appreciate the benefits of this initiative.

Quality of education and training

95. The standard of teaching is good in both theory and practical classes; 87% of sessions observed were good or better. All sessions are well planned and relevant to the curriculum area and the students' learning goals. Most sessions are set at a level to suit students' abilities. Tutors ensure that sessions are suitable for the wide range of abilities within their groups. They use an active approach to learning that makes lessons interesting and stimulating. Learning resources are good and students have access to a wide range of hand tools for the practical work. However, some paper-based learning materials are poor and the content of some is not relevant to the students' experience at college.

96. Practical sessions are particularly good. Students are able to take part in real practical activities, linked to the husbandry of animals and plants. One group of students, for example, weighed pigs and recorded their weight gain whilst another group learnt how to handle and groom dogs in a professional manner. Information recorded during these sessions is used in key skills and basic skills classes. Students compile portfolios of their work which are generally good and show the comprehensive range of work undertaken at college. There is good use of photographs as additional evidence in portfolios. Tutors also provide learning support and share teaching at the other centres.

97. Pre-entry and foundation students have timetabled sessions in the ICT suites, but entry level students do not. Entry level students are able to use the learning resource centre and ICT suites outside of scheduled times, but lack of planned ICT teaching limits their ability to develop IT skills to improve both the quality of content and presentation of their portfolio work. The pre-entry group does not have a dedicated classroom to use as a base for both theory and practical sessions. They are not able to display their work or store their resources where sessions take place.

98. Pastoral and learning support for students are very good. Learning support staff are present in all theory lessons and many practical classes. Social services staff also support students during pre-entry programme sessions. Staff are able to draw on support from the college student services and, from the start of this academic year, a Connexions personal adviser (community) based at the college. Tutors have been able to provide advice for students on a number of issues including drug abuse, bullying, bereavement counselling, and anger management. Tutors are also able to use signers for deaf students.

99. Most students take part in a summer school prior to starting their programmes. The summer school aims to build confidence before starting the course; assess basic skills needs; identify the correct programme at the most suitable level; and initiate the development of an individual learning plan. Summer schools are timetabled and students complete assignments and present these both individually and as a group.

100. All students have an individual learning plan, but these plans focus on primary learning goals only and do not record all the activities undertaken by students. Initial assessment is narrowly focused and consists of an initial assessment of basic skills needs using a key skills diagnostic test. There is little detail within individual learning plans of any additional support requirements that have been identified at interview; through attendance; at the pre-course summer school; during the first few days of attendance; or from contact with schools and the Connexions service. Individual learning plans lack clearly defined learning goals and realistic targets and many are not kept up to date. Reviews are also sometimes recorded in too much detail and are difficult for students to understand.

Leadership and management

101. The management structure of the entry, pre-entry and foundation programmes was changed at the beginning of 2001/02 and responsibility for managing these programmes is now with the supported learning unit. The foundation programmes were previously managed within curriculum areas with learning support brought in where required. The new structure has the advantage that responsibility for all foundation courses is with a single programme leader who teaches in the programme area and who has the support of a cohesive team. Students now have continuous support as they progress through these programmes and build good relationships with members of staff. Staff work closely together and share roles of tutor and learning support assistant in some cases. Staff are experienced and qualified and are able to bring a range of practical and theoretical skills to the programmes. Good links have been made with social services which has led to increased numbers of young people and adults applying to join the programmes.

Part D: College data

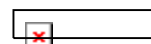
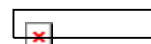


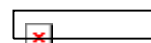
Table 1: Enrolments by level of study and age



Level	16-18 %	19+ %
1	25	9
2	40	27
3	26	23
4/5	7	39
Other	2	2
Total	100	100

Source: Provided by the college in spring 2002.

Table 2: Enrolments by curriculum area and age



Curriculum area	16-18	19+	Total
	No.	No.	Enrolments %
Science *^	526	149	13
Agriculture	901	1,452	46
Construction ^	125	98	4
Engineering	293	183	9
Business	17	32	1
Hotel and catering ^	39	308	7
Health and community care	0	1	0
Art and design	0	22	0
Humanities *	810	254	20
Basic education	0	0	0
Total	2,711	2,499	100

Source: Provided by the college in spring 2002.

* includes enrolments for key skills awards

^ includes enrolments for 204 learners on some animal care and equine courses

Table 3: Retention and achievement

Level (Long Courses)	Retention and pass rate	Completion year					
		16-18			19+		
		1997/ 98	1998/ 99	1999/ 2000	1997/ 98	1998/ 99	1999/ 2000
		1	Starters excluding transfers	195	150	385	45
	Retention rate (%)	85	91	88	80	77	86
	National average (%)	86	88	88	82	83	84
	Pass rate (%)	91	94	90	76	83	83
	National average (%)	73	66	69	69	69	65
2	Starters excluding transfers	484	500	427	263	216	310
	Retention rate (%)	82	83	86	83	80	84
	National average (%)	85	85	84	77	79	82
	Pass rate (%)	91	82	81	85	86	82
	National average (%)	82	79	77	82	78	75

3	Starters excluding transfers	240	207	294	141	138	137
	Retention rate (%)	91	83	85	87	84	84
	National average (%)	80	81	83	79	81	83
	Pass rate (%)	89	89	83	55	86	77
	National average (%)	85	86	81	77	73	67
4/5	Starters excluding transfers	14	23	23	37	46	55
	Retention rate (%)	93	87	87	81	74	84
	National average (%)	*	*	*	76	81	81
	Pass rate (%)	46	65	13	37	27	95
	National average (%)	*	*	*	81	77	80

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 (1997/98) to (1999/2000): Retention and Achievement Rates in Further Education Colleges in England, The Further Education Funding Council, September 2000.

2. College rates for 1997/98 - 1998/99: Benchmarking Data (1997/98) to (1998/99): Retention and Achievement Rates, produced by the Further Education Funding Council, September 2000.

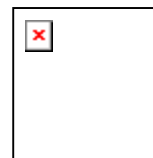
3. College rates for (1999/2000): Provided by the college in 2001.

* data not available

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)	71	25	4	45
Level 2 (intermediate)	75	25	0	28
Level 1 (foundation)	91	9	0	11
Other sessions	86	14	0	7
Totals	76	22	2	91

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