



ADULT LEARNING  
INSPECTORATE



Office for Standards  
in Education

## Plumpton College

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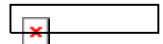
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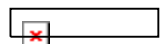
**Basic information about the college**



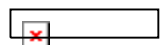
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Name of college:	Plumpton College
Type of college:	Specialist Land-based Further Education College
Principal:	Des Lambert
Address of college:	Ditchling Road Plumpton Nr Lewes East Sussex BN7 3AE
Telephone number:	01273 890 454
Fax number:	01273 890 071
Chair of governors:	Professor Fred Maillardet
Unique reference number:	130667
Name of reporting inspector:	Annella Mochan HMI
Date of inspection:	19-23 May 2003

**Part A: Summary**



**Information about the college**



Plumpton College is a specialist land-based college six miles from the county town of Lewes and 10 miles from Brighton. It was established in 1926 to serve the needs of the farming community in

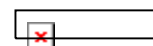
Netherfield. The area is also served by two general further education (FE) colleges and four sixth form colleges. There are seven schools with sixth forms, five maintained special schools and two non-maintained special schools with post-16 provision.

The local economy is reliant on the tourism industry and on public sector employment. Although the southeast is perceived as being prosperous, there are areas that are classified as high in educational deprivation and areas of low economic activity. These are predominantly rural areas away from the coastal fringe and the 'Gatwick corridor'.

Full-time and part-time courses are provided across a wide range of land-based subjects, including agriculture, agricultural machinery, animal care, countryside management, forestry and arboriculture, equine studies and horticulture. Work-based learning is provided for nearly 70 learners. There is franchised provision with the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers. In 1996, the college became an associate college of the University of Brighton. Higher education (HE) courses are offered in wine studies, animal science, countryside management, equine studies, forestry and arboriculture. The college is working in partnership with a local general FE college to develop a Centre of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) in rural enterprise development and training. Vocational learning opportunities are offered for pupils aged 14 to 16 through the increased flexibility programme. The college's mission is to provide excellent education and training.

Students are recruited from a wide catchment area including east and west Sussex and Kent. In 2001/02, the college enrolled 1,423 FE students. Of these, 28% were students aged 16 to 18 and 72% were aged 19 and above. Some 27% were on full-time courses, with 73% on part-time or short courses.

### How effective is the college?



Standards achieved by most students are high. Inspectors judged the overall quality of education and training to be good in equine studies, horticulture, floristry and forestry, and agriculture, countryside and machinery, and satisfactory in animal care. The college's key strengths and areas that should be improved are listed below.

#### **Key strengths**

- high retention and pass rates on most courses
- good attainment and progress of students with low prior achievements
- good use of the estate to develop students' occupational skills
- a wide range of land-based courses with good progression opportunities
- productive links with industry

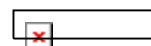
- an extensive range of enrichment activities
- strong support and guidance for students
- strong leadership and good strategic planning.

***What should be improved***

- the quality of teaching and learning
- the quality of action planning and target setting in tutorials
- the consistency of assessment and internal verification for work-based learners
- access for people with restricted mobility.

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

**Quality of provision in curriculum and occupational areas**

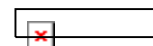


*The table below shows overall judgements about provision in subjects and courses that were inspected. Judgements are based primarily on the quality of teaching, training and learning and how well students achieve. Not all subjects and courses were inspected. Inspectors make overall judgements on curriculum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

Area	Overall judgements about provision, and comment
Equine studies	<b>Good.</b> Retention and pass rates on first diploma and national diploma courses are high. Practical teaching is good and prepares students well for the industry. Support for students is effective. Enrichment activities and links with industry are good. The teaching of theory is

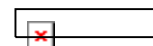
	insufficiently demanding. The management of work-based learning is weak.
Animal care	<b>Satisfactory.</b> Pass rates are high on many courses. Support for students is strong. Veterinary nursing is well managed and there is a strong emphasis on animal welfare throughout the provision. Teaching lacks challenge and variety and there are insufficient specialist resources. Students' progress on work experience is poorly monitored and there is no opportunity for students to gain additional qualifications.
Agriculture, countryside and machinery	<b>Good.</b> Retention and pass rates are high. Practical teaching is good, and effective use is made of the college estate to develop students' occupational skills. There is good progression to higher levels of study and employment and a good range of additional qualifications and enrichment activities. Achievement of key skills for modern apprentices is poor and assessment practices on National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) programmes are weak.
Horticulture, floristry and forestry	<b>Good.</b> Retention and pass rates are high on most courses. Teaching is particularly good in forestry and arboriculture. Students receive effective learning support. Work-based learning is well managed and links with employers are good. Assessment and internal verification practices on NVQ horticulture are poor. Students' progress reviews are weak.

#### How well is the college led and managed?



Leadership and management are good. There is strong leadership and curriculum areas are managed effectively. Strategic planning is good and development plans are carefully monitored. Internal communication is very good. Governors closely monitor performance at course level. Most retention and pass rates are at or above the national averages. Quality assurance arrangements have improved considerably since the last inspection. However, insufficient emphasis has been placed on improving the quality of teaching and learning. Financial management is good. Reliable management information is used well by staff. Staff are effectively and efficiently deployed. The management of work-based learning is satisfactory. The college provides good value for money.

#### To what extent is the college educationally and socially inclusive?

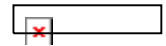


The college's response to educational and social inclusion is good. The range of provision is good and serves the needs of the land-based industries. There are clear progression routes from entry level through to level 3 and on to HE. New courses are being introduced to better meet the needs of students progressing from entry level to level 1. An increasing number of full-time students are being recruited who have not reached the minimum entry requirements for their course. The progress of these students is good. Programmes for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities enable them to 'taste' land-based work such as farming, horticulture, animal care and horse care. A good number of these students progress to mainstream courses at the college. In collaboration with care organisations, about 50 adults with severe learning difficulties attend the college and follow programmes based around practical rural experiences, including working with animals. Links with

Transport is provided to and from the college for students who are drawn from a wide catchment area. The college is effectively widening participation by attracting a significant number of adults to a diverse range of part-time programmes.

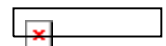
The college has a clear policy on equal opportunities and has responded to the requirements of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001. However, it has been slow to develop an action plan for its implementation and staff and governors have not received recent training on equality and diversity. In response to disability discrimination legislation, an audit has been carried out to examine the accessibility of the college. There continues to be an issue of access to some areas for people with restricted mobility. The college has some specialist equipment to support students' learning. The college has a well-developed strategy to ensure that the basic skills needs of students are met. Full-time students and work-based learners receive ongoing literacy and numeracy support to help them successfully complete their studies. There is strong support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

### **How well are students and trainees guided and supported?**



Guidance, advice and support for full-time students are very good. Pre-entry guidance and advice are good and impartial. All students benefit from effective induction programmes to introduce them to the college and their courses. Students are very well supported by their tutors. However, some tutors do not record or monitor effectively the targets they have set students to help them improve their performance. Employers give good support to work-based learners. Arrangements for the assessment and the provision of additional support are good. A broad range of specialist support is provided for individuals with particular learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Welfare services, such as counselling, and advice and guidance on matters such as accommodation, transport and finance are sound. College wardens provide good support for residential students. Appropriate careers guidance is available through the tutorial programme and advice sessions. Provision of support for students going on to HE is good and careers advice for employment is well developed.

### **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***

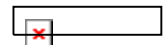
- friendly atmosphere
- good support from tutors
- enthusiastic and helpful staff

- good teaching
- good sports facilities.

***What they feel could be improved***

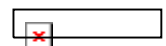
- car park security
- study facilities in the library
- facilities for teaching and social activities.

**Other information**

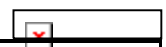


The college inspection report will normally be published 12 working weeks after the formal feedback of the inspection findings to the college. Once published, the college has two months in which to prepare its post-inspection action plan and submit it to the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The college's action plan must show what action the college will take to bring about improvements in response to issues raised in the report. The governors should agree it before it is submitted to the local LSC. The local LSC is responsible for ensuring that, where inspectors have judged there to be unsatisfactory or poor provision in a curriculum area or in leadership and management, the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) receives the college's post-inspection action plan within the stipulated two months.

**Part B: The college as a whole**



**Summary of grades awarded to teaching and learning by inspectors**



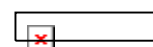
Aspect & learner type	Graded good or better (Grades 1 to 3) %	Graded satisfactory (Grade 4) %	Graded less than satisfactory (Grades 5 to 7) %
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Teaching 16-18	52	46	2
19+ and WBL*	56	38	6
Learning 16-18	44	52	4
19+ and WBL*	50	44	6

*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 provides a wide range of full-time and part-time courses and work-based learning programmes, mainly in land-based subjects. Most vocational courses lead to NVQs, first and national diplomas and national certificates. The college also offers courses leading to qualifications from the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS), the British Horse Society (BHS), the British Veterinary Nurse Association (BVNA), and the Wine and Spirit Education Trust (WSET). Courses are also provided leading to technical skills certificates, including pesticide handling, chain-saw operations, tractor driving and forklift truck operations. The courses offered are predominantly at levels 1 and 2. Nearly 6% of students are on work-based learning programmes leading to NVQ awards and to foundation and advanced modern apprenticeships.

2. In recent years, the retention rates for students aged 16 to 18 on courses at levels 1, 2 and 3 have been slightly above the national average for specialist colleges. Retention rates for adult students have been more variable. They have been consistently high at level 2, but at level 1 in 1999/2000 and at level 3 in 2000/01, they fell to below the national averages. The college's data for 2001/02 show that it has been successful in improving retention rates at level 1 to around the national average, but at level 3 retention rates remain below the national average for adults. Pass rates for students aged 16 to 18 have been above the national average except in 2000/01 on level 3 courses, when they fell below the national average. In 2001/02, the pass rates for students aged 16 to 18 on level 3 programmes rose to well above the national average. Overall, the pass rates for adults are mixed. For the four years to 2002, the pass rates for adults on part-time courses at level 3 were below the national average. Pass rates on level 2 courses are high. With the exception of 2000/01, the pass rates on programmes at level 1 are above the national average for adults.

3. At the time of the inspection, there were nearly 70 students on work-based learning programmes. The retention rate for work-based learners is high, as is the proportion gaining an NVQ qualification. Previously, learners have been slow to acquire the key skills required for their modern apprenticeship. Key skills are now integrated into modern apprenticeship programmes and the achievement of the framework has improved.

4. In 2001/02, a low number of students were entered for key skills awards in application of number and communication, and the pass rates were low. However, just over 100 students were entered for IT key skills external tests at level 1 and level 2 and about three-quarters of these students achieved the award. In 2002/03, the number of students entered for key skills examinations has increased substantially. However, many students are working towards key skills qualifications below the level of their main programme and no student has been entered for key skills at level 3 in the past two years.

5. The proportion of students progressing to further study or employment is very high. Progression within the college to higher level courses is particularly good. An increasing number of students are



progressing to HE. Students are punctual at lessons. Attendance, at 83% during the inspection week, was at the national average for land-based colleges. It was highest in agriculture, at 88%, and lowest in animal care, at 80%.

### **16 to 18 year olds**

6. Many students enter the college with low levels of prior achievements and often below the level stipulated in the prospectus. The proportion of students studying at level 1 and below has increased significantly in recent years. The college provides effective learning support for these students to help them achieve their potential. Retention rates on entry level and level 1 programmes are consistently high and pass rates are around the national average. The majority of these students progress to higher level courses. Students following the skills for working life programme in land-based work receive good support to enable them to gain practical skills and improve their literacy and numeracy. Many of these students progress to mainstream courses at the college.

7. The majority of students on level 2 courses make good progress and are well prepared for progression to further study and employment. Most students achieve high standards in practical lessons. Retention and pass rates are consistently high. First diploma courses in horse studies and forestry frequently have pass rates of 100%.

8. Overall, retention and pass rates on level 3 programmes are above the national average. On national diploma courses, such as horse studies, animal care and agriculture, the pass rates are consistently high. In all subjects, students carry out practical work with good levels of competence. Students gain in confidence and work well in teams on routine farm and yard duties. Most students successfully achieve additional qualifications which complement their main course and improve their employment prospects. Students' written work is generally good.

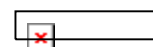
### **Adult learners**

9. Many full-time and work-based learning adult students are following the same courses as the students aged 16 to 18. A significant and increasing number of adults enrol on short courses as part-time students to gain industry-relevant technical certificates, as well as for pleasure purposes. These courses include pesticide handling, chain saw and forklift truck operations, rural crafts, garden and interior design, and wine studies. Retention and pass rates on these courses are consistently high. A small proportion of adults do not choose to take advantage of opportunities to have their achievements accredited.

10. Over the last four years, there has been a significant increase in the number of adults on level 1 and 2 programmes but a fall in the number at level 3. Overall, the retention and pass rates for adults on level 1 and 2 programmes are slightly above the national averages. However, adults on part-time courses at level 3 are less successful and the pass rate has been low each year since 1999.

11. Adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported in their studies. The college works successfully with a range of external agencies and students receive a high level of support. Students are encouraged to work towards an essential skills award. Most of these students make significant gains in personal development and progress to higher levels of study; a small number gain relevant employment.

### **Quality of education and training**



12. Teaching, learning and attainment were graded in 66 lessons. Teaching was judged to be good or better in 53% of the lessons observed, satisfactory in 44% and less than satisfactory in 3%. The

countryside and machinery, with 73% of lessons graded good or better. Overall, learning was good or better in 45% of lessons and less than satisfactory in 5%. In 56% of lessons, attainment of students was good or better and in 6% it was less than satisfactory.

13. In lessons judged to be good or better, teaching is thoroughly planned. Students make good progress in these lessons and are effectively supported by well-qualified teachers. Activities take into account the individual needs of students and their learning styles. Resources, both physical and audiovisual, are used to stimulate discussion and to illustrate theory in agriculture, forestry and arboriculture. Teaching is most effective in lessons that include a mixture of theory and practical work. Students carry out practical work to a high standard. They work enthusiastically and display genuine interest in their studies. Good attention is paid to safe working practices and to the welfare of animals.

14. In the less successful lessons, poor planning and classroom organisation lead to lack of concentration by students and slow progress. In addition, the needs of individuals are not met and resources are not used effectively to stimulate discussion. In animal care, too much teaching lacks variety and is insufficiently challenging for students. In some theory lessons in equine studies, there is little group activity and teaching does not inspire students.

15. Overall, students' learning and attainment are higher in lessons taught by part-time teachers than in those taught by full-time staff. Learning and attainment are also better in lessons for adults than in those for students aged 16 to 18. Most students work productively and make good progress. Teachers support their students well and many progress to the next level of study at the college.

16. Work-based learning in forestry and agriculture is well organised and trainees make good progress towards their NVQ qualification. The arrangements for equine work-based learners are less effective and students do not routinely use equipment that is appropriate to the level and stage of their courses. Work experience in forestry and agriculture is effective and students gain useful knowledge and skills that help them to succeed in their studies. However, work experience is less effective in animal care.

17. In 2002/03, the college improved the arrangements for managing and teaching key skills. In most curriculum areas, key skills are integrated with the vocational subjects. Key skills sessions for full-time students are taught jointly by vocational teachers and key skills tutors. The number of students gaining level 1 and 2 key skills qualifications has improved markedly in the last year. The achievement of key skills for work-based learners remains low. The majority of students' successes are in information and communications technology (ICT), where the pass rate in 2001/02 was 68%. The number of students completing application of number and communication key skills in the last two years is small. Some students are insufficiently challenged by key skills assignments and could progress to a higher level of work than is currently being demanded. For instance, no students have taken a key skills qualification at level 3.

18. Very good use is made of the college's large and varied estate. For agriculture and environmental studies, the estate offers a very good range of commercial enterprises in which students are fully involved. The centre at Ivylands Farm has been designed to enable people with mobility difficulties to gain full access to the facilities. In addition, it is used to demonstrate organic farming practices to students and the local farming community. Good practices in relation to animal welfare and the environment are promoted throughout. Specialist facilities for equine studies are comprehensive and include a covered exercise area, stabling, demonstration areas and a cross-country jumping course. Extensive use is made of the college's attractive grounds to support horticulture teaching. This includes ample opportunities to practise decorative horticulture and hard landscaping. Modern machinery and equipment for agriculture, horticulture and forestry are good. Practical facilities for animal care are cramped and there is a narrow range of animals. Some storage areas are poorly organised and untidy. Where necessary, good use is made of industry links to provide additional resources. Work-based learners and students on work experience benefit from the good resources of a wide range of employers. A good variety of social and sporting facilities are available to students.

19. The library and learning resource centre and computer suites are well used. They provide

adequate resources for research although there is a shortage of textbooks in some subjects. The learning resource centre is not a particularly pleasant study area, due to excessive noise levels and inappropriate layout. There are insufficient study spaces for students to work independently. Facilities allocated to HE courses are not always made available to all students. Although the college has made a significant investment in computers, the ratio of computers to full-time students is still quite low. Most classrooms have appropriate equipment for teaching but many lack stimulating displays. Some of the older classrooms are of poor quality. There has been a good investment in data projection equipment. With the exception of Ivyland Farm, access for people with restricted mobility is poor.

20. There are sufficient teachers who are academically well qualified. Most have relevant vocational experience and are appropriately matched to the courses on which they teach. The number of qualified teachers is improving, with around three-quarters having, or working towards, approved teaching qualifications. The proportion with assessor qualifications is similar. One-third of teachers are part time and they bring valuable current industrial and professional experience to the classroom. Staff awareness of health and safety issues is good and this is reflected in their teaching. Routine risk assessments of health and safety are carried out in the workplace and during practical sessions. Employers and supervisors involved with work-based learners are well qualified and experienced.

21. Assessment of students' written and practical work on full-time courses is regular and fair. At the start of the year, curriculum teams ensure that assignments are clear and set at an appropriate level. Standards are closely linked to the requirements of examining and awarding bodies. The grading criteria for assessments are sufficiently detailed to make clear to students the precise technical and analytical skills that are required to achieve specific grades. In most curriculum areas, evidence of competence in key skills is assessed through vocationally related assignments. Marking of assignments is mostly systematic and accurate and the written and verbal feedback provided by teachers helps students to improve their work. Most internal verification is well planned. In many areas, there are effective arrangements for sampling students' portfolios, written assignments and observations of practical assessments. Students' progress is closely monitored and generally recorded well. For most students, reviews take place twice a term but there are regular informal meetings between students and their tutors to discuss progress against predicted grades. The monitoring of students' progress on work experience in animal care is poor. The college holds parents' evenings and frequently reports on students' progress to parents and the employers of work-based learners. The quality of detail provided in written reports varies widely between curriculum areas.

22. In floristry and veterinary nursing, the standard of workplace assessment and internal verification is good. However, in other areas, assessment practice in work-based learning is poor. There is an over-reliance on witness testimonies, the range and quality of portfolio evidence are poor and there is little feedback to students on their performance in assessments. In many areas, internal verification of portfolios does not take place until the end of the programme.

23. The college offers a good range of courses to meet the diverse needs of the land-based industries in Sussex. There are clear progression routes from entry level through to level 3 and on to HE and employment. Some gaps in the provision at level 1 have been identified and new courses are being introduced to bridge them. Links with the industry and employers are strong. Membership of curriculum advisory groups reflects the breadth of the industry and meetings are well attended. Employers are highly satisfied with the support they receive from the college and in return offer work experience placements and longer-term employment opportunities.

24. Most students benefit from the extensive range of enrichment activities and additional qualifications. Equine studies students attend horse shows and organise events for the local community. Students participate in a variety of agricultural and horticulture shows and other events, including visits to various sectors of the industry. Guest speakers from the industry regularly visit the college. Students are involved in commercial trials of new practices and products, such as animal health and welfare products. At weekends, residential students appreciate, and take full advantage of, the sporting and social facilities. Students are actively involved in the college's open days and horse shows and organise much of the entertainment.

25. The level of full-time students' prior attainment is assessed before they start their course. This information is used to ensure that students start on the most appropriate course and are set predicted grades against which progress can be monitored. During induction, full-time students and work-based learners complete tests to identify the level of their basic skills and key skills, and any additional support requirements. The assessment covers literacy, numeracy and ICT. During the year, students receive ongoing support through either self-referral or being referred by teachers. Arrangements for support include individual and whole-class work with a tutor. Most students who are diagnosed as requiring learning support receive it.

26. Strong guidance and support are provided for students. Communication between teaching and support teams is effective and there is good teamwork. Effective and impartial pre-entry guidance directs students on to the most appropriate course. In March 2003, the college achieved the quality standard for Information Advice and Guidance Services. Relationships with local schools are well established. Teachers visit schools regularly to provide information on the range of career opportunities available. The information in the college prospectus and on the college web site is informative and easy to understand. The college holds regular open evenings and activity days where potential students can experience the college environment and gain detailed course information from subject specialists. Students and parents speak highly of the advice they receive at the college's well-organised open days. Interviews take place with a subject specialist and a tutor but, although students receive clear guidance about the college and the subject, sometimes the information provided about the level of commitment required to complete the course lacks detail. Little use is made of accreditation of students' prior achievements or recognition of students' practical experience. There are suitable arrangements to enable students to make changes of course during the initial weeks of term.

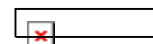
27. Induction programmes are effective. Students on pre-entry, entry and foundation level courses attend a valuable two-week summer school induction. This provides students with a thorough insight into the college and enables staff to ensure that students are directed to the appropriate level of study and additional support. Full-time students take part in a thorough induction during the first week of the course, when they receive an informative handbook about their chosen course of study and information about cross-college activities. Induction also covers training in aspects of health and safety and equality of opportunity, but there is little further development of students' understanding of equality of opportunity after this period.

28. Full-time students and work-based learners are assigned a personal development tutor. Most tutors are generous in the time they allocate to students. Students and parents greatly value the caring environment and support provided by teachers, support staff, tutors and residential wardens. The college's tutorial policy is clearly stated. Most students receive regular group and individual tutorials that provide opportunities for tutors to monitor and assess students' progress and to give careers advice and guidance as well as individual pastoral advice and support. Tutorial arrangements for some part-time students are less effective. However, tutors provide good levels of informal support to those students who need it. Lack of compliance with the tutorial policy in some areas results in tutorials being less effective. Most tutorials observed were good, but some tutors do not record the targets they have set students and, as a result, students lack a framework for improvement. The recording of progress and the setting of clear targets for improvement are poor for full-time students in agriculture and for work-based learners in horticulture. Strategies are in place to monitor punctuality, attendance and poor performance. In most cases, prompt and effective action is taken. However, the poor recording and monitoring of targets in some areas do not result in swift and successful corrective action of poor performance.

29. Support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is significant and includes the contribution of signers, personal care and dyslexia support, and the provision of specialist equipment. The college provides a wide range of welfare services. These include, help with childcare, purchase of equipment and help with transport and accommodation difficulties, as well as the support provided to students in college residences. The number of students applying to the college for financial help is high and growing. Funding is distributed with care and imagination to enable a significant number of students to overcome difficulties in attending college and complete their courses successfully.

30. Provision of support for students going on to HE is good and careers advice for employment is well developed. The college has strong links with the local Connexions service. A personal adviser visits the college each week to provide specialist support. In addition, teachers, who are experts in their own field, provide a significant proportion of the advice on careers and HE opportunities, and provide effective support for students writing personal statements, making applications and attending interviews. The survey of students' views reveals that some students have not received careers advice and that satisfaction with the service varies widely between curriculum areas.

## Leadership and management



31. Leadership and management are good. The college has successfully addressed most of the weaknesses identified at the last inspection. Leadership is strong. A clear direction for the college is expressed in the strategic aims. These aims are communicated clearly to staff. The college is well organised and staff have a good understanding of their roles. Senior managers and curriculum managers work closely together through well-structured meetings which have clear and appropriate agendas. Staff express confidence in the management and feel able to consult them on any matters of concern.

32. Governors demonstrate high levels of commitment to the college. They are well informed about the issues facing the college. The introduction of a link governor scheme has increased governors' understanding of the curriculum. Governors' meetings routinely start with a presentation from a curriculum area to improve their knowledge further. The committee structure has been changed to reduce the number of committees and to make them more effective. Governors are appropriately informed about the college's financial and academic performance. They receive detailed course-level reports, which they scrutinise closely. However, it is only recently that they have been provided with information on the overall performance of the college against national averages. Governors have recently introduced measures to assess their own performance and have started to evaluate the effectiveness of each committee and each meeting. Training needs are identified and appropriate training provided for existing and new governors.

33. Governors and staff are fully involved in setting the strategic direction of the college. The one-year operating plan and development plans are effectively linked to the strategic plan. Several actions in the operating plan are not sufficiently specific. Development plans are carefully and regularly monitored through a comprehensive database which draws together all college action plans. Realistic and challenging targets for recruitment, retention and pass rates are set at course level and take account of national averages. They are discussed in detail with senior managers and governors before being finally agreed. However, targets for retention and pass rates are not aggregated to give targets for the whole college.

34. The management information system is reliable. Curriculum managers have had appropriate training and use the system well. Appropriate and timely reports are produced. All data are carefully checked and are easily accessible to all staff.

35. Curriculum management is generally good. Curriculum managers have a significant workload. The performance of curriculum areas is carefully monitored by the senior management. Curriculum and support managers draw up detailed reports which are discussed each term with the senior management team and the governors' academic committee. The reasons for poor performance are explored and appropriate actions taken. Annual programme reviews are effective. Students' feedback is analysed at course level but it is not drawn together to identify trends across the college. The college is quick to respond to issues raised by students. Overall, the management of work-based learning is satisfactory. The franchise provision with a national conservation organisation is well managed.

36. The college's approach to self-assessment is thorough and involves all staff. The advisory

panels are asked to comment on the curriculum area reports. Governors also examine the report and contribute to their own self-assessment. However, not all governors responded to a questionnaire seeking their views. Overall, the self-assessment report is self-critical and mostly accurate. Development plans are in place to address the issues identified in the self-assessment report.

37. Communication within the college is very good. In addition to a regular newsletter, there is a college diary and minutes of all meetings are available on the intranet. The staff handbook is comprehensive. The principal meets regularly with a staff committee. Staff are well informed about issues facing the college and feel involved. There are very good links with employers and industry bodies. All curriculum areas have advisory panels which provide good guidance on new proposals and suggest new developments. The college is well regarded by employers and the community. Collaborative links are being forged with local colleges and there is a strong link with the local university.

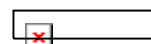
38. Quality procedures are comprehensive, with clear service standards for support areas. Staff have a good understanding of the quality assurance arrangements. However, insufficient emphasis is given to improving the quality of teaching and learning. Tutorials are not included in the observation programme. Teaching that is less than satisfactory is not always followed up quickly enough. Outcomes from lesson observations are entered on a database and good practice is shared. The college does not aggregate grades to give an overall profile so that the effectiveness of college-wide improvement measures can be judged.

39. The system for appraisal is generally effective. All appraisals are considered by the principal. Staff appraisals do not always take account of the outcomes from lesson observations. Although appraisal results in the identification of development needs in curriculum areas, there is no overall development plan that draws together the needs of the whole college. Staff have ample access to staff development opportunities. There is good evaluation of individual staff development. Support for new staff is good and those without teaching qualifications are required to take a course on instructional techniques in their first term.

40. Financial management is good. There are regular and clear reports. Income and expenditure are monitored carefully by the senior management team and governors and best value is sought. Capital bids are evaluated carefully against strategic aims. The college has had a slight deficit in the last few years but is now showing a small surplus. There are sufficient staff who are generally well qualified and well deployed. The college provides good value for money.

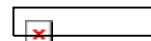
41. The college has a clear equal opportunities policy which includes race relations. However, there is no plan for its implementation. The college has yet to carry out a full analysis of its academic performance in relation to different groups. There has been no recent formal training on equal opportunities for staff or governors. Students' induction covers equal opportunities but there is little subsequent reinforcement. College publicity material includes images chosen to counter gender stereotyping and teaching observations include the monitoring of equal opportunities. Procedures for dealing with harassment and complaints are appropriate. Careful consideration is given to disability discrimination. A survey on college accommodation has been carried out to assess its accessibility for students with disabilities.

## **Part C: Curriculum and occupational areas**



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### **Equine studies**



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

### ***Strengths***

- high retention and pass rates on first diploma and national diploma courses
- good practical teaching preparing students well for industry
- extensive and effective enrichment activities
- strong and productive industry links
- good personal and academic support.

### ***Weaknesses***

- lack of challenge in most theory lessons
- weak management of work-based learning.

### ***Scope of provision***

42. The college offers a good range of full-time, part-time and short courses in equine studies. Courses lead to first diploma, national diploma, national certificate, NVQs, and BHS qualifications from basic practical horse management to advanced riding instruction. Specialist options are available in stable and field-shelter maintenance and fence and paddock maintenance. There are 16 full-time students on the first diploma in horse studies and 39 on the national diploma in horse studies. Most full-time students are aged 16 to 18. Eight work-based learners are on programmes leading to the foundation modern apprenticeship and five learners are enrolled on NVQ level 3 horse care. Work-based learners attend the college one day each week for vocational and key skills training and some assessment and portfolio work.

### ***Achievement and standards***

43. The retention and pass rates on the first diploma and the national diploma are high and over the last three years have been consistently above the national averages. The achievement of the full framework for foundation modern apprentices in horse care is good. Short courses show good retention rates but there have been wide variations in the pass rates over the past four years. The

pass rates on short courses at level 2 show an improving trend and are now above the national average.

44. Students develop good teamworking and problem-solving skills. Routine yard duties provide a realistic working environment. Students work at an appropriate pace and to commercial standards, which prepares them well for employment. Students develop in confidence and they attain a good level of practical riding and stable management skills. Written work is generally of a good standard. Assignments are well researched and show a good understanding of the subject. Students are encouraged to gather evidence for their key skills portfolios but their achievement of key skills qualifications is slow. Students are punctual and attendance at lessons is good. A high proportion of students progress from level 2 to level 3 courses and then on to HE or employment.

***A sample of retention and pass rates in equine studies, 2000 to 2002***

<b>Qualification</b>	<b>Level</b>	<b>Completion year:</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2002</b>
Horse knowledge and care	1	No. of starts	28	42	39
		% retention	89	93	100
		% pass rate	24	64	54
First diploma in horse studies	2	No. of starts	15	21	26
		% retention	93	86	88
		% pass rate	100	100	91
Horse knowledge and care	2	No. of starts	28	14	37
		% retention	89	86	100
		% pass rate	60	42	76
National diploma in horse studies	3	No. of starts	11	9	24
		% retention	100	100	87
		% pass rate	100	89	100

Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

***Quality of education and training***

45. Practical teaching is good. The specific yard areas for practical teaching are effectively used. The best practical teaching is fun and interesting and students are enthused and learn well. In a lesson on travelling equipment, the teacher gave a brief demonstration of how to prepare a horse for transport. Each student selected a piece of equipment and the group then worked together to prepare the horse in the correct sequence. This resulted in a lively debate and students worked well together and prepared the horse with confidence. Lessons are well managed. In the better lessons, teachers check on students' understanding from previous lessons through good oral questioning. They then allocate time for the students to reflect and ask questions to satisfy themselves that they completely understand before moving on to new topics. At the end of lessons, teachers effectively introduce links to the next lesson. Riding groups are helpfully split into ability levels for teaching. The teaching of riding skills is satisfactory but there is a lack of imaginative teaching of basic riding techniques. This leads to students repeating a range of similar exercises, which results in their inability to work independently at level 2. Much teaching at this level is in drill formation, with little instruction on improving the students' ability to balance the horses. Tutors have appropriate vocational and teaching expertise together with good communication skills.

46. Much of the theory teaching is uninspiring. Many of these lessons are poorly planned and the range of teaching activities is narrow. There is insufficient use of visual aids in some lessons. Teachers place an over-reliance on the use of overhead transparencies and handouts. Groups of students for theory lessons have a wide range of ability and teachers do not differentiate in their



teaching to meet the needs of all students in the lesson. This often results in the more experienced students being insufficiently challenged and they become bored. Some students are working towards key skills awards at too low a level relative to their prior attainment.

47. Assessment planning is good and is linked to course requirements. Assignments are used effectively as part of the teaching programme. Internal verification procedures are used effectively and include grade moderation. Marking of students' work is accurate. Helpful feedback is given to students on how they can improve their performance. The assessment arrangements for work-based learners are poor. Few assessments are carried out in the workplace and many are simulated at the college. All NVQ units are worked on at the same time and, at reviews, students cannot identify the units they have achieved. Some students lack motivation, as they cannot see how much progress they have made towards achieving their qualification. Students are unable to gain unit accreditation if they leave the programme early.

48. The specialist resources meet the needs of the programmes on offer. The college has stabling for 43 horses in both traditional stables and an American barn system. There is a covered school with a viewing gallery, an outdoor school with floodlights, a horse-walker and two full sets of show jumps. A permanent grass field is used for show jumping and a recently installed jump-cross course gives good variety of terrain. The local soil conditions limit the amount of outside riding lessons available and some students get insufficient experience of riding outside. A good variety of horses are available for students to improve their riding skills. There is a range of equipment that allows students to raise their awareness of items commonly found in the industry. A tutorial is timetabled at the end of a student's two-week yard-routine duty to discuss performance and highlight areas for improvement. Action plans are successful in improving students' performance. There are strong and productive links with industry for students' work experience. The equine studies advisory group has members representing different aspects of the industry and they help inform curriculum planning.

49. Sound and appropriate advice is given at interview to allow students to make an informed decision about which course to choose. Taster days are offered to prospective students and these are a valuable way of getting an insight into the college courses. They are well attended and many students progress to courses at the college.

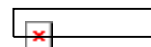
50. Enrichment activities prepare students effectively for the industry. The diverse range of activities enables students to put into practice many of the skills they learn during their time at college. Students organise winter shows, a car-boot sale and the college's annual horse show in May. Students learn how to plan and manage events, from advertising, to liaising with the local police, to dealing with the general public. They are involved in research programmes with a local business and write evaluative articles for a local newspaper. Interesting visits, which highlight different aspects of the industry, are undertaken throughout the year. Evening activities for residential students are well attended.

51. Tutorials are good and staff are very supportive. Realistic achievement targets are set for students. Students' progress is monitored effectively. Thorough student reviews are undertaken which include the use of an effective system for students to assess their own progress. This provides students with a clear view of their progress on a range of skills throughout the course. End-of-term reports help inform parents of students' progress. Career guidance for most students is appropriate. Students with specific ambitions are well supported. However, students with no specific career direction are not given sufficient guidance to make an informed decision.

### ***Leadership and management***

52. Leadership and management of equine studies courses are good. There is a strong team with a culture of self-assessment and continuous improvement. However, there is insufficient effective monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning to bring about improvements. The team is able to continue managing the courses well in the absence of the curriculum team leader. Good operational systems are in place. Insufficient emphasis was placed on the management of key skills but this is now improving. Management of the work-based learning provision is weak. The monitoring of facilities, especially for level 3 work placements, is inadequate.

## **Animal care**



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

### ***Strengths***

- high pass rate on the national diploma course
- good development of students' awareness of animal welfare
- good range of provision with clear progression routes
- strong support for students
- well-managed veterinary nursing provision.

### ***Weaknesses***

- insufficient challenge and lack of variety in teaching
- insufficient specialist facilities and resources
- poor monitoring of students' progress on work experience
- lack of opportunities for students to gain additional qualifications.

### ***Scope of provision***

53. The college offers a range of full-time and part-time courses from level 1 to level 3, which provides good progression routes. Full-time courses include the GNVQ foundation introduction to

animal care, first diploma in animal care and the national diploma in animal management. Part-time courses lead to NVQ level 1 and level 2 animal care, foundation modern apprenticeship in animal care, pre-veterinary nursing and veterinary nursing level 2 and level 3. In addition, part-time college certificate courses are offered in dog grooming and pet care. Some 118 full-time students and 45 part-time students are enrolled on animal care courses. There are four students on the pre-veterinary nursing course and 32 work-based learners on the veterinary nursing certificate.

### ***Achievement and standards***

54. Pass rates on the national diploma are consistently high. In the first year that the GNVQ foundation course was offered, the pass rate was 100%. In 2001/02, the retention and pass rates on the first diploma fell to below the national averages. Retention rates on the veterinary nursing certificate fluctuate and in 2001/02 were slightly below the national average. The pass rate is good when compared with the low national figure. The standard of students' written work is satisfactory. Better examples show extensive research and excellent presentation, but in many weaker examples this is lacking. Veterinary nursing portfolios, at both level 2 and 3, are good. Most students demonstrate a satisfactory level of practical skills, are confident in handling animals and demonstrate good teamwork. There is good progression to the next level of study and to employment. In 2002, approximately half of all full-time students progressed to the next level of course and all veterinary nurses gained full-time employment. A high proportion of national diploma students progress to HE. A significant number of students require additional support. For these students, strong tutor support helps them to develop their personal and learning skills. Animal care students are not offered the opportunity to gain any additional qualifications.

### ***A sample of retention and pass rates in animal care, 2000 to 2002***

<b>Qualification</b>	<b>Level</b>	<b>Completion year:</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2002</b>
GNVQ foundation science (introduction to animal care)	1	No. of starts	*	*	15
		% retention	*	*	80
		% pass rate	*	*	100
First diploma in animal care	2	No. of starts	35	37	19
		% retention	86	89	84
		% pass rate	87	88	75
NVQ veterinary nursing	2	No. of starts	*	14	16
		% retention	*	100	88
		% pass rate	*	86	79
National diploma in animal care	3	No. of starts	18	18	29
		% retention	89	72	74
		% pass rate	100	92	95

*Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)*

*\* course not offered*

### ***Quality of education and training***

55. Most teaching is satisfactory. All teaching is well planned, with clear schemes of work and lesson plans. There is some good teaching. For example, in one lesson, students made models of animal body systems. These were evaluated by their peers and compared to laboratory models. This effectively developed students' analytical and critical thinking skills. One tutor made good use of powerpoint presentations and student-led exercises to enhance learning of animal first aid. However, most teaching tends to be uninspiring, relying on too many overhead transparencies and gapped

handouts. Many lessons do not fully motivate students and learning is not reinforced. Teaching rarely involves students in analytical discussion, peer assessment or self-assessment. Practical instruction does not acknowledge students' previous experience and is often unchallenging. Lessons are planned carefully to take account of general routines and caring for animals. Staff place particular emphasis on developing students' understanding of animal welfare and the enrichment of the environment for animals.

56. The animal care unit has recently undergone some development with new teaching rooms but it is too small to cope with the increase in the number of students in the curriculum area. Some general classrooms are cramped, with poor lighting and inadequate teaching resources. There is a narrow range of animals but they are adequate in number. Overall, there are an insufficient variety of animals and environments. The college farm is used to help develop students' practical skills but no use is made of the equine studies unit. The veterinary nurses use the same room for theory and practical lessons and there is no separate theatre area and treatment room.

57. The college has long-standing links with a wide range of work placements, including veterinary practices, riding establishments, pet shops, dog grooming parlours and rescue organisations. Formal links between the college and work placement providers are weak. All new and some existing placements are visited but no formal record of the facilities, resources and outcomes of the visit is kept. All placements complete an annual safety audit but this is not sufficiently rigorous. Work experience providers complete an evaluation of the students. There is only one form for all courses and this does not reflect the different needs of the groups and the progression between courses and years. There is no formal tracking of the training received on work placement and minimal monitoring of any health and safety issues and the student's learning and progress.

58. A wide range of appropriate assessment methods is used, including practical, individual and group presentations, reports and tests. All assessment briefs and a sample of marked assignments are internally verified but the process lacks rigour.

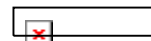
59. There is a good relationship with veterinary training practices. Students' reviews and verification visits are well organised and the completion of the paperwork is thorough. Work-based assessment is good and there is constructive feedback to students to help them progress. Students' reviews take place on schedule and the students are well supported. Prompt action is taken on problems identified at review meetings. The off-the-job training is well organised.

60. There is strong support for students. This starts when potential students express an interest in an animal care course and continues through to careers advice before they leave the college. All applicants and continuing students receive an animal care newsletter. There is a summer school to help with the transition from school to college and introduce new students to handling animals. Students have effective personal support to help them complete their course, including access to specialist support services. Tutors know their students well and are sensitive to the needs of individual students. Tutorials are recorded but the actions identified and targets set are not specific enough.

### ***Leadership and management***

61. Leadership and management of the area are generally good. Course teams work well together and continued to manage courses well in the absence of the curriculum team leader. Full-time student numbers have grown rapidly and new staff have been recruited. New teachers receive effective induction, training and support. There are weekly team meetings and communication is effective. The self-assessment report is realistic. Some of the success criteria and targets in the development plan are not easily measurable. The plan for improvements to the animal care unit is detailed and clearly identifies the necessary changes, but it does not contain a target date for completion or a budget.

### **Agriculture, countryside and machinery**



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

### ***Strengths***

- high retention and pass rates
- good practical teaching
- effective use of the college estate to develop students' occupational skills
- good progression to higher levels of study and employment
- good range of additional qualifications and enrichment activities
- productive links with employers.

### ***Weaknesses***

- poor achievement of key skills for modern apprentices
- weak assessment practice on NVQ programmes.

### ***Scope of provision***

62. There are 99 full-time and 36 part-time students studying agriculture, countryside and machinery; 10 full-time and 19 part-time students are aged over 19. Some 12 students are on work-based learning programmes with five of these on foundation modern apprenticeships. In agriculture, full-time courses include a first and a national diploma in agriculture and a national diploma in rural mechanisation. Work-based and part-time courses include NVQ level 2 mixed farming and NVQ level 1 land-based operations. In machinery, there are full-time courses in agricultural mechanics at level 2 and metal smithing at level 3. In countryside, there is a full-time first diploma and, for work-based and part-time students, an NVQ level 2 environmental conservation.

### ***Achievement and standards***

63. Retention and pass rates on all courses are high. They have been consistently above the national averages for the past three years. All students on full-time courses can take additional qualifications in subjects such as tractor driving, pesticide handling, chain-saw operation and forklift truck operation. There is good take-up of these qualifications. Many agriculture students take up to five proficiency tests in subjects such as dairy husbandry and sheep husbandry to obtain craftsman status before leaving the college. These and other additional qualifications improve students' employment prospects and are well received by the industry. Assessed and practical work is completed to a high standard and, by the end of the course, students attain a high level of practical ability. All of the agriculture diploma students leaving in 2002 achieved a merit or higher grade. Countryside students develop a high level of skill during practical sessions on the college estate. This includes bridge building, footpath construction, coppice work and general woodland maintenance. All of these projects are completed to a high standard and used regularly by the public. Personal development is enhanced by many enrichment activities, for example, agriculture students show cattle at local shows. Students are always punctual for lessons and attendance is very good. Most modern apprentices gain their NVQ qualification but only about one-third achieve key skills accreditation. The college has recognised this and recent developments have led to a rise in the number of students completing the apprenticeship framework.

***A sample of retention and pass rates in agriculture, countryside and machinery, 2000 to 2002***

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
NVQ environmental conservation	2	No. of starts	13	27	23
		% retention	100	76	65
		% pass rate	100	72	93
First diploma in agriculture	2	No. of starts	24	18	20
		% retention	92	89	80
		% pass rate	95	94	94
Tractor driving	2	No. of starts	22	33	11
		% retention	100	100	100
		% pass rate	0	94	100
Pesticides foundation module	2	No. of starts	148	88	94
		% retention	100	100	100
		% pass rate	54	72	69
National diploma in agriculture	3	No. of starts	22	30	19
		% retention	95	90	84
		% pass rate	95	88	93

Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

***Quality of education and training***

64. Practical teaching is good. Practical tasks and classroom work are completed to a high standard, as are the majority of assignments and assessments. Lessons are well planned and teachers use a wide variety of teaching methods including powerpoint presentations, videos, slides, and individual and group work. Students participate fully in all class activities. Practical lessons are particularly well planned to ensure that all students are fully engaged. In one case, a group of environmental conservation students built a bridge over a small stream. The bridge was designed by the group and one student acted as supervisor for its construction. Key skills are integrated into vocational studies and teachers have cross-referenced vocational assignments to identify key skills evidence. There is a good emphasis on health and safety and animal welfare issues in all classes.

65. Good use is made of the college estate for teaching and learning. The majority of agriculture practical classes take place on the college farm. Equipment and machinery are sufficient for the needs of courses and the majority are up to date and reflect current industrial practice. Student routines are well organised and farm staff are very sympathetic to the needs of students while still trying to instil commercial speed and values.

66. There are productive links with employers. Students' work placements are well matched to individual needs and offer good learning opportunities. The college benefits from these good links by accessing for students' practical sessions expensive machinery that it could not justify owning. In environmental conservation, there is a particularly productive link with the local authority park ranger service to develop skills for unemployed adults.

67. On full-time courses, assignment briefs are clear and feedback gives students helpful guidance on how they can improve their grades. There is insufficient direct observation of performance in the workplace for NVQ assessments and an over-reliance on witness testimony and use of the students' own practical records. NVQ assessment lacks rigour and feedback to students gives little indication of how the student can improve performance. Overall, internal verification is satisfactory but does not include sufficient observation of assessors. For work-based learners, progress reviews are satisfactory, with some good examples of target setting.

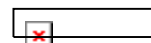
68. There is good progression from entry level through FE and on to HE. A high proportion of students progress through this route. Although there is no level 1 provision, many students progress successfully from entry level programmes directly on to the first diploma course. Progression to employment is very good. In 2001/02, all of the agriculture students leaving the college obtained employment.

69. Students receive good pre-entry advice and guidance at careers events and through course publicity leaflets. All students have an initial assessment for basic skills and appropriate support is put in place, including classroom assistants for students with severe difficulties. Vocational teachers are very supportive of students and give sound advice on progression routes and personal issues. Tutors provide support to assist students with both their personal problems and to ensure that academic studies and assessments are completed on time. Action planning from these sessions is weak.

### ***Leadership and management***

70. Management of this area is good. Weekly team meetings ensure that staff are kept informed of developments. Course reviews inform the curriculum area self-assessment report. Development plans are closely monitored to bring about improvements. Targets for retention and pass rates are set, based on previous performance and in relation to national averages. Progress towards these targets is monitored by programme leaders and the senior management team. The college acknowledges that the agriculture industrial liaison group needs to become more active. There is little reinforcement of equal opportunity issues after induction. The management of work-based learning is satisfactory.

### **Horticulture, floristry and forestry**



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

#### ***Strengths***

- high retention and pass rates on most courses

- good teaching in forestry and arboriculture
- effective use of practical training facilities
- well-managed work-based learning
- very good learning support for students
- good range of provision and progression opportunities.

### ***Weaknesses***

- poor assessment and internal verification practices for NVQ horticulture
- some inadequate reviews of students' progress.

### ***Scope of provision***

71. The college offers a wide range of courses from entry level to degree level to meet the needs of students with widely differing levels of ability. Full-time courses offered include the national award and diploma in forestry and arboriculture, national diploma in arboriculture mechanisation, national award in horticulture garden design, first diploma in horticulture and national diploma in amenity horticulture. Part-time provision includes NVQ level 2 and 3 floristry and practical craft skills certificate in floristry, NVQ level 1 to 3 amenity horticulture, general and advanced certificate in horticulture, higher national certificate in garden design, and amateur gardening and tree surgery. There is also work-based learning provision in floristry, forestry and horticulture. NVQ level 1 land-based operations is provided through a franchise with a national conservation organisation. In horticulture and forestry, there are 500 students. Of these, 113 are full time and 363 part time. There are 24 work-based learners.

### ***Achievement and standards***

72. Retention and pass rates on most horticulture, floristry, forestry and arboriculture courses are high. The pass rate on the first diploma in forestry was 100% for the past two years and on NVQ level 2 floristry was 100% in two of the last three years. Retention rates for work-based learners are good. Although many work-based learners achieve their NVQ, very few achieve key skills and meet the full requirements of the modern apprenticeship framework. Students produce work of a good standard and make good progress, particularly in the development of practical skills. Horticulture



students on a first diploma course working with grounds maintenance staff were highly motivated and quickly acquired skills to a high level. Adult students on a tree-surgery course made good progress in tree climbing after only two days training. Many students who have low levels of prior achievement or non-standard entry requirements make good progress. Attendance at lessons is high.

***A sample of retention and pass rates in horticulture, floristry and forestry, 2000 to 2002***

<b>Qualification</b>	<b>Level</b>	<b>Completion year:</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2002</b>
Certificate in gardening	1	No. of starts	33	46	75
		% retention	97	100	97
		% pass rate	72	70	68
Chain-saw and related operations	2	No. of starts	115	96	135
		% retention	98	100	100
		% pass rate	95	77	79
NVQ floristry	2	No. of starts	16	12	42
		% retention	81	92	88
		% pass rate	100	100	97
General examination in horticulture	2	No. of starts	28	35	33
		% retention	68	74	73
		% pass rate	86	85	88
NVQ amenity horticulture (all operations)	2	No. of starts	46	53	45
		% retention	78	73	91
		% pass rate	74	70	68

Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

***Quality of education and training***

73. Students receive a well-balanced mix of theory and practical teaching. Teaching in forestry and arboriculture is particularly good. All theory lessons and practical training in forestry and arboriculture includes good teaching of health and safety practices. In a theory lesson on pests and diseases, a wide range of teaching methods was used including a practical demonstration with strong emphasis on the safe use of pesticides. Some practical and theory lessons in horticulture are poorly planned and structured. In a lesson involving calculations for soil storage, there were insufficient calculators and some students were unable to carry out the work. In many theory lessons in horticulture, the range of teaching and learning methods used is narrow. The practical teaching on the franchised NVQ level 1 is well organised, with students quickly gaining confidence and skills. Off-the-job training for work-based learners in floristry is closely linked to their workplace.

74. Resources for practical teaching at the college and on work placements are good. They include industry-standard glasshouses, large woodlands and forestry workshops, which are used extensively and effectively for training purposes. Staff are well qualified and have extensive vocational experience. The resource centre has a comprehensive collection of books, videos and CD-ROMs, as well as good access to the Internet. Some teaching rooms lack display materials and visual aids to further develop students' subject knowledge. Resources at employers' premises and the franchise provision are good and fully meet the requirements of the training programmes.

75. Assessment practices for work-based learning are good, with the majority of assessments taking place in the workplace. Assessment and verification on NVQ floristry courses is well planned. On

full-time courses, a good range of assessment methods is used and constructive feedback is given to students to help them improve. Some assessment methods on NVQ horticulture are inappropriate. Some assessments are not completed until the end of the programme. Many portfolios for NVQ horticulture are poorly structured. In some portfolios of students nearing the end of their course, no work has been assessed. There has been insufficient internal verification on NVQ amenity horticulture courses.

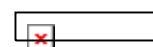
76. The wide range of courses provides good progression routes to FE, HE and employment. A large number of students progress directly to employment or self-employment. Students are offered appropriate additional qualifications in chain-saw operations and pesticide handling, which help improve their employment prospects. Students take part in interesting enrichment activities mainly related to their main course of study. Some courses continue to be offered even though they attract low numbers of students. There is no full-time level 1 provision.

77. There is very good support from enthusiastic staff for students' pastoral and learning needs. Tutors provide good individual support to students. Students who are in danger of leaving their course are provided with the necessary support to enable them to continue and many ultimately gain their qualification. Students value the efforts made by staff to support them. Some student reviews in arboriculture and horticulture do not set sufficiently rigorous targets for student to achieve between each review. Full-time students are given regular reviews with targets to achieve, but written records of the reviews are insufficiently detailed. Students do not always receive a copy of the targets agreed. Workplace reviews in floristry are rigorous and effective.

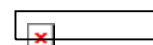
### ***Leadership and management***

78. Management of the curriculum area is good. Staff have a good awareness of cross-college issues and the strategic direction of the college. Communications between curriculum areas and with college managers are good. Course reviews are rigorous and good use is made of data to set targets for improvement. Staff benefit from a wide range of staff development opportunities, including curriculum and technical updating, some of which is linked to course development. Some sharing of good practice in teaching and learning takes place, but this is not systematic. Links with industry and employers are very good and work-based learning is well managed. The franchise provision is well managed. Quality assurance arrangements are good and include unannounced quality assurance visits by an agent acting on behalf of the college, regular monitoring of the technical quality of training by college staff and the rigour of internal verification by the franchise partner.

### **Part D: College data**



**Table 1: Enrolments by level of study and age 2001/02**



Level	16-18	19+
1	26	23
2	37	42
3	28	17
4/5	0	0
Other	8	18

<b>Total</b>	<b>100 *</b>	<b>100</b>
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Source: provided by the college in Spring 2002

\* figures have been rounded so do not add to 100%

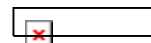
**Table 2: Enrolments by curriculum area and age 2001/02**

<b>Curriculum area</b>	<b>16-18 No.</b>	<b>19+ No.</b>	<b>Total Enrolments % *</b>
Science and mathematics	18	63	4
Land-based provision	553	1,114	73
Construction	0	0	0
Engineering, technology and manufacture	36	73	5
Business administration, management and professional	0	32	1
Information and communication technology	34	59	4
Retailing, customer service and transportation	0	0	0
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	4	58	3
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	0	0	0
Health, social care and public services	0	31	1
Visual and performing arts and media	4	37	2
Humanities	0	0	0
English, languages and communication	7	3	0
Foundation programmes	111	32	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>767</b>	<b>1,502</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: provided by the college in spring 2003

\* figures have been rounded so do not add to 100%

**Table 3: Retention and achievement**



Level (Long Courses)	Retention and pass rate	Completion year					
		16-18			19+		
		1999	2000	2001	1999	2000	2001
1	Starters excluding transfers	191	151	61	65	69	63
	Retention rate (%)	94	97	92	89	80	95
	National average (%)	88	89	87	85	87	85
	Pass rate (%)	88	65	76	90	71	47
	National average (%)	63	67	70	63	66	70
2	Starters excluding transfers	158	169	171	102	130	173
	Retention rate (%)	87	87	90	84	80	82
	National average (%)	85	83	83	80	81	81
	Pass rate (%)	93	84	82	80	72	68
	National average (%)	76	76	73	69	71	69
3	Starters excluding transfers	109	88	116	82	69	87
	Retention rate (%)	80	91	94	77	88	75
	National average (%)	83	84	81	80	82	82
	Pass rate (%)	79	82	73	60	58	44
	National average (%)	80	80	80	64	63	68

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

*Sources of information:*

1. *National averages: Benchmarking Data 1997/98 to 1999/2000: Retention and Achievement Rates in Further Education Colleges in England, Learning and Skills Council, September 2002.*

2. *College rates for 1997/8-1998/9: Benchmarking Data 1997/98 to 1999/2000: Retention and Achievement Rates, produced by the Further Education Funding Council, September 2000.*

3. *College rates for 1999/2000: provided by the college in spring 2001.*

**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)	49	45	6	33
Level 2 (intermediate)	54	46	0	24
Level 1 (foundation)	57	43	0	7
Other sessions	100	0	0	2
<b>Totals</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>66</b>

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