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Ms Anne Constantine  
Principal  
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Dear Ms Constantine

Ofsted Subject Survey Programme 2006/07

Sector Skills Area 3: Agriculture, horticulture and animal care  
Subject area: Animal Care

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation during my visit on 11 December. I am particularly grateful to the teaching staff for all their hard work in preparing the programme and background documentation as well as giving up a great deal of their time during the visit. Please pass on my thanks to other staff and students who gave up their time to talk to me.

The visit provided much useful evidence for the good practice subject survey in agriculture, horticulture and animal care. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions but should we wish to include specific aspects of practice we will contact the college first. All college letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

The evidence used to inform judgements included: interviews with staff and learners; scrutiny of relevant documentation; observation of good practice examples and a lesson observation.

I agreed to provide a summary of my observations of good practice seen in animal care and to suggest some areas for development.

Good practice observed included:

- the provision of specialist provision in animal technology including support to sustain the provision through periods of fluctuating recruitment and with some smaller group sizes

- an effective, well managed and good quality franchise arrangement with a local specialist animal care college
- a proactive and innovative approach to curriculum development, supported by senior management, with a high emphasis on meeting industry needs through the curriculum and liaison with awarding bodies in the revision and updating of specialist animal care courses
- the use of high quality learning materials available through an increasing range of media including by distance learning, that are standardised across centres and regularly checked to ensure that information about legislation is updated, and to provide good support for the development of key skills linked to the curriculum
- increasing and effective use of information and learning technology (ILT) in teaching and learning including through the development of a virtual learning environment, the use of digital images and confident and productive use of ILT in lessons
- strong links between theory and practical teaching using the experiences of students productively and the expertise of practising industry specialists, such as veterinary surgeons, well and with good use of ongoing assessment to support learning
- comprehensive arrangements for tracking and monitoring the progress of students especially with portfolios and through assessment reviews
- very effective links with animal care industries through regular forums including an active industry board at the College of Animal Welfare (CoAW)
- effective sharing of good practice across CoAW centres and through the use of a 'brainwaves' section on the CoAW intranet to promote the use of brainstorming to develop new ideas
- a well established and rigorous lesson observation system using external specialist animal care input to ensure rigour with a strong focus on developing learning opportunities
- good development of generic teaching skills in addition to the high level of specialist skill and knowledge that teachers hold, through the acquisition of teaching qualifications.

Areas for development, which we discussed, included:

- further development of an applied science practical logbook in line with new awarding body requirements to include guidance on writing up scientific work
- analysis of findings from lesson observations of the way in which teachers are promoting equality and diversity over an above where this may naturally occur in the curriculum and using this to share good practice
- the promotion of environmental sustainability through teaching and learning within the curriculum
- continue to tackle gender bias in veterinary nurse training programmes and promote participation from under-represented groups such as those from minority ethnic heritage

- develop criteria for outstanding lessons, to be shared with teachers, to encourage them to have high aspirations and to help improve more good lessons into an outstanding category.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop land-based courses in the college.

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your LLSC and will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Philippa Francis  
Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools