

26 January 2007

Mrs Jeanette Dawson
Principal
Bishop Burton College
York Road
Beverley
East Yorkshire
HU17 8QG

Dear Mrs Dawson

Ofsted Subject Survey Programme 2006/07

Sector Skills Area 3: Agriculture, horticulture and animal care

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation during my visit on 13 December 2006. 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 also pass on my thanks to 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 students, scrutiny of relevant documentation and observation of good practice examples.

I agreed to provide a summary of my observations of good practice seen in equine studies, agriculture and agricultural machinery and foundation programmes, and to suggest some areas for development.

Good practice observed included:

- a wide range of provision at entry level and an extension to provision at level 1 and 2 in most areas of learning, which has widened participation and promoted higher levels of diversity

- effective actions to improve recruitment onto agriculture programmes
- careful and thorough attention paid to dealing with issues that may impact on students' success resulting in improving retention rates
- improved provision of information, advice and guidance to students prior to joining courses including 'kick-start' days prior to enrolment where induction, initial assessment in areas such as riding skills, and individual interviews are undertaken
- effective use of open events such as equine and canine shows to encourage new students to visit the college and to build a strong relationship with prospective students
- an extensive schools link programme which works effectively to develop a good relationship with pupils
- good guidance on progression resulting in very high progression rates to high education
- increased use of students' feedback including through student forums resulting in the effective use of students' views in planning aspects of learning such as the operation of yard duties on the stable yard
- careful planning of enrichment to motivate students, including through participation in sports teams and equine events
- excellent links with industry including the appointment of an employer engagement director
- hosting of regular events for the land-based industry including conferences and dissemination events, farm demonstrations, business clubs, riding events and industry consultation days
- the ability to attract commercial funding for research and the development of teaching and learning materials including in conjunction with major companies, other specialist colleges and commercial partners
- the effective use of heat exchange equipment in lessons
- high quality practical teaching making excellent use of the very good practical resources
- effective internal standardisation of riding and practical competence levels by teaching and yard staff in the equine section the results of which are shared with students
- very good use of employer feedback through their involvement with training days, assessment of students on work placements and input into annual course reviews
- high pass rates on a wide range of relevant additional qualifications
- high involvement of students in organising and running college-based events such as horse trials and an annual stock competition ensuring the development of good team work skills
- good promotion of environmental sustainability including gaining the 'Green Gown' award
- development of the role of a designated sustainability officer, a cross college sustainability group and a comprehensive sustainability policy which covers building, resources, campus management and curriculum

delivery and content and promotes cross curricular environmental sustainability education and training

- the inclusion of an input on sustainability during induction for all students
- the development of an additional qualification in environmental sustainability which is delivered successfully to countryside students
- particularly good tracking and monitoring of students' performance
- very good support for students with learning disabilities and/or difficulties including a home visit which is made by the course manager to all students as part of the initial assessment.

Areas for development, which we discussed, included:

- sharing of good practice across the college
- formalising aspects of some systems.

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

Bryan Davies
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