

26 February 2007

Mr Peter Stewart
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Dear Mr Stewart

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 8 February. I am particularly grateful to the teaching staff for all their hard work in preparing the programme and background documentation and giving up a great deal of their time during the visit. Please pass on my thanks to all staff and learners 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; lessons observations; 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 and animal care and to suggest some areas for development.

Good practice observed included:

- effective strategies to sustain and improve success rates on most full-time programmes including to improve retention by ensuring that advice and guidance given to potential students emphasises the nature of each course of study and gives a realistic picture of the work involved

- good use of prior attainment information to predict minimum target grades and effective checking of progress on a termly basis to measure students' progress in line with their targets
- strong focus on improving teaching, learning and assessment through effective staff development including standard setting days and the work of a subject learning coach and an advanced practitioner
- the use of experienced vocational teachers who are industrially competent
- improvement in the teaching of theory by making very strong links between theory and practical, careful planning and the use of student centred teaching methods in theory lessons
- a high emphasis on creative and imaginative teaching methods making good use of the DfES Standards Unit land-based materials and through increasingly effective sharing of good practice
- increasing promotion of the use of information and learning technology (ILT) in lessons including the development of a web-based virtual learning environment with access for students from home
- good support for new teachers including mentoring, opportunities to shadow experienced colleagues and to undertake peer observations with extra time allowed for preparation and marking
- a rigorous lesson observation scheme including the use of observers from two local colleges and external observers
- increased provision at the college's two land-based sites, Milton and Wisbech, to provide courses at levels 1 to 3, the availability of specialist dog grooming provision at both centres and the growth in the provision of equine outreach courses to meet industry needs
- the use of realistic practical duties including using more experienced students as supervisors, with good recording and assessment practices in place which include opportunities for students to self-evaluate their performance
- the use of standardised assignments across both sites, which are reviewed annually to ensure they meet awarding body requirements
- the availability of a good range of animals including horses allowing students to gain wide experience of different types of animals
- good support for students with regular tutorials, good methods of recording outcomes and actions needed and the use of two dedicated weeks to support improvement in performance and to ensure students complete their work in a timely way.

Areas for development, which we discussed, included:

- sustaining and further improving retention rates, especially on one or two courses
- analysing final results in relation to predicted outcomes for each student to identify the progress made by individual students and by cohorts
- raising the profile of the virtual learning environment so that students make good use of this useful resource

- raising the profile of the principles of environmental sustainability across animal care and equine courses, over and above where this occurs naturally in the curriculum
- ensuring that the work of part-time teachers on equine outreach programmes is quality assured and included in self assessment
- developing electronic recording systems for animal records to allow easy access for students and to mirror best practice in industry.

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