

23 March 2007

Mr J Latham
Principal
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Dear Mr Latham

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 12 and 13 March. 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 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, 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:

- a wide range of courses offered across all levels, with flexible modes of attendance and maximising the use of different funding streams
- very good employer links through employer advisory committees and the Duchy Council which ensure that curriculum design is appropriate and that the College's strategic planning is informed by the industries it serves

- teachers with very strong industry links and contacts, which they use effectively to develop schemes of work linked to industry placements, and to deliver practical projects on a wide range of employers' premises
- very strong personal support for learners
- good links with schools including a programme of "School Activity Days" for primary schools which is well publicised and has good uptake and a "Future Pathways" programme for year 10 and 11 pupils which is expanding rapidly with high retention rates and progression rates to college courses post-16
- a good "student voices" process with regular course reviews where feedback and action planning is effective and through effective student representation on Duchy Council and corporation
- research projects including micro propagation, vertical growing techniques and hydroponics, which are used effectively to enhance the curriculum and involve learners from a range of courses as part of their practical programme
- the Rosewarne Energy Project, which includes growing approx 18 hectares of miscanthus to fuel the heating of 16 classrooms and 2 workshops, as a good example to learners of sustainability combined with a strong emphasis on recycling and waste management in the land-based areas
- the use of a wide range of expert guest speakers and professionally produced literature through the college's Rural Business School
- the effective use of an Advisory Teacher in the college's drive to increase the number of staff with teaching qualifications
- effective use of standardisation days to improve the quality of assessment and internal verification
- good practical skills teaching and high levels of attainment on the Level 1 equine course
- attainment of a high level of practical skill which meet the needs of employers
- good tracking and monitoring of key skills achievements and good embedding of key skills into assessments
- the use of an effective programme which engages young people not in education or training with clear progression routes for learners to full-time courses.

Areas for development, which we discussed, included:

- the use of e-learning, including information and learning technology in the classroom and use of the college's virtual learning environment
- the use of centrally held data on learner destinations to improve planning
- the corporate approach to key strategies such as improvement of retention, "curriculum days" and e-learning.

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

Keith Boulnois
Additional Inspector