

28 March 2007

Professor D Butcher  
Principal  
Writtle Agricultural College  
Chelmsford  
Essex  
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Dear Professor Butcher

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 20 March. I am particularly grateful to you and your staff for all your 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 other 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 horticulture, floristry and animal care and to suggest some areas for development.

Good practice observed included:

- a wide range of innovative teaching and learning activities to enhance theory lessons, particularly in animal management and floristry which included three dimensional modelling, interactive presentations, quizzes, games and role plays

- good use of information and learning technology (ILT) in teaching and learning materials in animal management which learners are able to access from home using their college email account and which are clearly referenced to key skills
- a clear focus on development of employability skills through the use of real-life activities and projects both on the campus and through the use of good off-site visits as well as extended work placements and opportunities to gain useful additional qualifications
- effective participation in high profile national and local events to promote learners' work, to develop commercial awareness and competence, and to further develop learners' enjoyment
- very supportive staff who respond effectively to learners' individual learning needs both in classes and in frequent 1:1 tutorials
- effective embedding of key skills into animal management assignments including guidance on how these will be assessed
- teaching staff with good, up-to-date industry knowledge and regular and frequent contact with the industries they serve which they use well to bring reality and commercial practice to their teaching
- good curriculum planning at levels 2 and 3 to widen participation and to accommodate practical and academic preferences and abilities.

Areas for development, which we discussed, included:

- the sharing of good practice across subjects and disciplines
- the development of systems for effectively measuring value added
- consistency in the application and use of ILT across all subjects and disciplines.

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