

23 March 2007

Mr Clive Cooke  
Principal  
Merrist Wood Campus  
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Stoke Park  
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Dear Mr Cooke

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 2007. I am particularly grateful to you and all your 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 also pass on my thanks to all the 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 countryside, animal care, floristry and equine and to suggest some areas for development.

Good practice observed included:

- a particularly well-developed teaching and learning strategy with clear and measurable outcomes which is clearly linked to staff appraisal and target setting and is well understood by all teachers

- a very strong focus on maximizing learners' employability by ensuring that courses meet employers' skills needs first and then mapping course contents to awarding body requirements
- very good use of information learning technology (ILT) to support staff demonstrations through the use of overhead cameras in floristry classes and excellent use of interactive whiteboards to engage and enthuse learners in animal care
- a well developed virtual learning environment which is very well received by learners and used effectively by all teaching staff both to store information such as animal care databases and to promote learning through links to websites and learning materials
- excellent use of learners' feedback to manage the performance of courses through ongoing monitoring and evaluation and by collecting learner feedback against each of the *Common Inspection Framework* aspects
- very good use of equality and diversity impact measures which are linked to specific curriculum areas and include a comparison of success rates for residential and non-residential learners to monitor any potential disadvantage/advantage of being resident at the college.

Areas for development, which we discussed, included:

- further develop mechanisms for measuring value added.

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

Jo Parkman  
ALI