

12 February 2007

Professor Gareth Rees
Principal
Askham Bryan College
Askham Bryan
York
YO23 3FR

Dear Professor Rees

Ofsted Subject Survey Programme 2006/07

Sector Skills Area 3: Agriculture, horticulture and animal care
Subject area: Animal Management

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation during my visit on 5 February 2007. I am particularly grateful 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 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 good practice examples; and a lesson observation.

I agreed to provide a summary of my observations of good practice seen in animal management and to suggest some areas for development.

Good practice observed included:

- successful strategies to improve success rates on the national diploma in animal management course, especially in the light of expansion of this provision at several new centres across the region
- development of the veterinary nursing programme and assessment centre including sustaining small cohorts during the early stages of development and building up the reputation of this provision within the region
- very good work in widening participation through productive collaboration with several colleges and a number of schools across the region where provision is not easily available

- innovative partnership work with schools in Ryedale including setting up an animal centre at a secondary school and careful planning of timetables and the curriculum to ensure that increasing numbers of pupils have access to an animal management vocational programme
- very effective collaborative work with employers across a range of animal management areas including a well-established and productive relationship with a local veterinary surgery and with the zoo at Flamingoland, resulting in many opportunities for students including for career progression and for research opportunities
- good development of the curriculum at level 1 and through including additional relevant and useful units to the first diploma course
- a robust system for observing lessons including rigorous moderation and good analysis of results to make improvements and to inform self assessment
- very good support for new teachers including through good support from a subject specialist mentor, the use of peer observations and informal observations prior to being assessed through the lesson observation scheme
- the use of standardised assignments across all provision in the centres to ensure full and clear coverage of learning objectives
- very good sharing of good practice within the course teams including across all centres
- a very extensive range of animals across all units including the zoo at Flamingoland
- experienced specialist teachers with good industrial and commercial credibility
- very careful analysis of the quality of teaching and learning, recognising where areas exist that need development and putting in place, through very useful staff training and careful planning, sound actions for improvement with a clear focus on improving learning
- good use of specialist help, including from teacher trainers from York City Council, to focus, through staff development, on improving generic teaching skills and encouraging a very creative approach to the use of teaching methods
- good links between theory and practical work, including through the use of classrooms, now available at the animal unit, enabling teachers to move from practical to classroom based teaching with the minimum of disruption
- good sound lesson planning with clearly stated aims and objectives with achievement of objectives often effectively measured at the end of each lesson
- the use of a dog simulator for practising resuscitation and other animal nursing techniques
- good use of information and learning technology (ILT) in lessons including through very effective briefings for research using web sites and increasing use of a web-based learning environment as well as a webcam to observe meerkats
- a proactive approach to environmental sustainability and good practice in minimising waste from animal bedding and recycling materials where possible

- good promotion of equality and diversity through the curriculum including study of different cultures and their approach to animal management
- prompt use of 1:1 tutorials early in the autumn term to ensure new students are well supported
- full health and safety checks including a visit undertaken before students go on work placement
- high emphasis placed on gaining relevant practical skills including through practical work at the zoo for level 3 students and good arrangements for recording completion of practical work and employability skills.

Areas for development, which we discussed, included:

- further improvement in retention at level 2
- completion of the electronic recording of all animal records in order for these to be accessible by students to support their learning
- analysis of the results of the system in place for measuring students' progress against target grades to provide additional evidence of the value that is added to each students' performance
- re-enforcement through lessons of the principles of environmental sustainability to students to encourage them to be more aware of the positive approach the college is taking to this aspect of its work
- ensuring that the good learning that takes place in key skills subjects during vocational lessons is used effectively to support portfolio development and ensure completion of qualifications
- clearer identification, through self assessment, of the evident strengths in teaching and 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

Philippa Francis
Her Majesty's Inspector