

# **The Berkshire College of Agriculture**

**REPORT FROM  
THE INSPECTORATE  
1999-00**

**THE  
FURTHER  
EDUCATION  
FUNDING  
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL***

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## Grade Descriptors

Inspectors assess the strengths and weaknesses of each aspect of provision they inspect. Their assessments are set out in the report. They use a five-point scale to summarise the balance between strengths and weaknesses.

The descriptors for the grades are:

- grade 1 – outstanding provision which has many strengths and few weaknesses
- grade 2 – good provision in which the strengths clearly outweigh the weaknesses
- grade 3 – satisfactory provision with strengths but also some weaknesses
- grade 4 – less than satisfactory provision in which the weaknesses clearly outweigh the strengths
- grade 5 – poor provision which has few strengths and many weaknesses.

Audit conclusions are expressed as good, adequate or weak.

Aggregated grades for aspects of cross-college provision and curriculum areas, for colleges inspected during 1998-99, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1	2	3	4	5
	%	%	%	%	%
Curriculum areas	10	53	30	7	–
Cross-college provision	14	54	23	7	2

Source: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1998-99: Chief inspector's annual report*  
Sample size: 104 college inspections

## Student Achievements

Where data on student achievements appear in tables, levels of achievement are shown in three ways:

- as number of starters, which is the number of enrolments on qualifications where the student was expecting to complete the qualification that college year. For example, a student on a two-year programme who began their programme in October 1995, would appear in the results for 1996-97 because this is the year in which they expected to complete their qualification
- as a retention rate, which is the percentage of qualifications which students have completed as expected or where they are continuing their studies beyond the expected end date of the qualification. For programmes of study of two years or more, retention is calculated across the whole programme, that is, from the start to the end of the qualification
- as an achievement rate, which is the number of qualifications students have fully achieved as a percentage of completed qualifications with a known outcome. Partial achievements are not included.

# Summary

## **The Berkshire College of Agriculture**

### *South East Region*

#### **Inspected September 1999**

The Berkshire College of Agriculture, near Maidenhead, is a specialist college providing courses mainly for the land-based industries. The college produced its third self-assessment report for this inspection. The report is clear and well organised. All staff and corporation members were involved in the self-assessment process. Some sections of the report are more detailed and rigorous in their judgements than others. The report lacks supporting evidence and quantitative rigour. Inspectors agreed with many of the college's findings, but reported some additional strengths and weaknesses. In many areas action had already been taken to address weaknesses. The college has embarked on a period of significant change, in order to diversify its curriculum. Because of a decline in demand for traditional provision in agriculture, it has expanded into other areas, such as childcare.

Courses are now offered by the college in eight of the FEFC's 10 programme areas. The inspection covered four curriculum areas within two FEFC programme areas, and all aspects of cross-college provision. Prospective students are given comprehensive guidance to inform their choice of course. There is some good teaching, particularly in practical areas, but the proportion of lessons judged to be good or

outstanding is significantly lower than is usual. The estate is well used as a resource to support teaching and learning. Most courses are effectively managed. Students' achievements are high on full-time courses in animal care and equine studies, but poor on some part-time courses. Some improvements have taken place in the college's quality assurance system since the last inspection. There are strong links with external agencies. Communications within the college are good. Governors are fully committed to the college. They give careful consideration to finances and have taken prudent action to ensure the college's financial solvency. The college should address: teaching which is not effective, as reflected in the profile of lesson grades; low achievement and retention on some full-time and part-time courses; inadequate systems for tracking students' progress; the absence of a coherent quality framework; the need for an updated strategic plan; the absence of an annual operating statement; some shortcomings in procedural and other arrangements for the board.

The grades awarded as a result of the inspection are given below.

<b>Curriculum area</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Cross-college provision</b>	<b>Grade</b>
Animal care and veterinary nursing	3	Support for students	3
Equine studies	3	General resources	3
Horticulture and floristry	3	Quality assurance	3
Early years	3	Governance	3
		Management	3

## **The College and its Mission**

1 The Berkshire College of Agriculture was established in 1949. It is situated at the centre of the Thames Valley economic region. The college recruits across the region and from the outer boroughs of West London, providing subsidised transport services for its students.

2 The campus consists of a 200-hectare estate, at the centre of which is a grade I listed building. This provides much of the college's administrative accommodation and houses the learning resource centre. The estate itself comprises extensive gardens and grounds, sports fields, a farm, and woodland and conservation areas. Estate facilities are fully used to support practical training and include a number of commercial enterprises. The farm has recently been reorganised to reduce financial risk, and now includes extensive outdoor pig breeding and fattening units, a beef unit, and sheep flock. These enterprises are privately owned, but students have guaranteed access for their practical work and animal care duties.

3 The college's main specialist programmes include: agriculture and countryside; engineering (including marine engineering); veterinary nursing and animal care; horticulture, floristry and greenkeeping. Other provision includes leisure and tourism, business studies, early years and creative studies. Higher education programmes are delivered in partnership with Buckinghamshire and Chilterns University College.

4 The college has active links and working arrangements with local further education colleges, Thames Valley Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) and with the local education authority (LEA), the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead. An extensive adult education programme is delivered under contract to the LEA and the college has a range of training contracts with the TEC, including delivery of modern apprenticeships and New Deal options.

5 The college promotes a number of European links. Students can work in France and Hungary, and the college has a training contract for veterinary nurses with a college in the Netherlands. It also participates in a Pan-European Development Scheme for veterinary nursing.

6 The mission of the college, revised in 1997, focuses upon the individual as the learner. It aims through learning and skills development to raise aspirations and personal achievement. The college is committed to providing a high-quality service for all its students. Its strategic aims are to: develop the portfolio of programmes; develop staff potential; maintain a good standard and range of resources; remain financially viable; and promote and foster high quality across every aspect of delivery and service.

## **The Inspection**

7 The college's first inspection concluded in May 1997. It was inspected for the second time, during the week beginning 27 September 1999. Before the inspection, inspectors considered the self-assessment report and reviewed information from other directorates of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). Data on students' achievements for 1996-97 and 1997-98 were derived from the individualised student record (ISR). This was supplemented by data provided by the college on students' achievements in 1998-99. These were checked against primary sources of evidence, such as registers and pass lists issued by awarding bodies. Inspectors found the data to be reliable and largely accurate. The data were used to compile the tables in the curriculum area reports. The inspection was carried out by nine inspectors and an auditor working for a total of 40 days. They observed 47 lessons, examined students' work and evaluated a variety of college documents. Meetings were held with governors, managers, other college staff and students.

# Context

8 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1998-99. Of the lessons observed, only 46% were judged to be good or outstanding. This figure is significantly below the national average figure of 65% recorded for colleges inspected in 1998-99. The percentage of less than satisfactory lessons was 11%, compared with the national average of 6%.

## Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
NVQ	1	3	0	0	0	4
Other vocational	3	15	20	5	0	43
Total (No.)	4	18	20	5	0	47
Total (%)	8	38	43	11	0	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1998-99 (%)	20	45	29	6	0	100

Source for national average: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1998-99: Chief inspector's annual report*

9 The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1998-99.

## Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
The Berkshire College of Agriculture	14.2	89
National average, all inspected colleges 1998-99	11.2	78

Source for national average: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1998-99: Chief inspector's annual report*

# Curriculum Areas

## Animal Care and Veterinary Nursing

### Grade 3

**10 Inspectors observed 13 lessons, covering full-time and part-time courses from foundation to advanced level. They agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report. However, some significant strengths and weaknesses were overlooked.**

#### Key strengths

- good retention and achievement rates on most animal care programmes
- a good range of animals living in appropriate housing
- effective use of industrial experience in teaching

#### Weaknesses

- insufficient monitoring of learning
- limited and ineffective teaching methods in many lessons
- poor achievement on the veterinary nursing certificate course
- lack of formal recording systems for some aspects of animal care
- rooms too small for effective practical activities in animal care

11 The college offers full-time and part-time provision in animal care from foundation to higher national diploma level. Opportunities for progression to employment or higher education are good, and students may also progress to associated programmes within the college. For example, veterinary nursing is offered at levels 2 and 3.

12 Inspectors judged only three lessons out of the 13 observed to be good and two were less than satisfactory. In weaker lessons, teachers make insufficient demands of students and their monitoring of students' progress is inadequate.

In one lesson, students spent a third of the time reading handouts with little guidance from the teacher or checks on understanding.

13 In some of the better lessons, teachers link the learning clearly to other sessions. Some teachers, especially in veterinary nursing, enrich lessons by using their experiences and links to industry. For example, in one lesson the teacher shared experiences of the side effects and recovery time for a range of commonly used animal anaesthetics. Students' written work is well structured and is often wordprocessed to a high standard.

14 Students gain valuable experience through their duties within the animal care unit and on work placements. The opportunity to challenge and develop students' experience further is often missed, as the rotation of teaching groups around different types of animal in the college is poorly organised. A more structured approach to visiting students on work placement has recently been introduced. Work providers report on students' performance. This information contributes to the students' final assessment. The benefits which students derive from participation in college open days are not recognised in the self-assessment report.

15 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that student retention and achievement rates on most animal care programmes are good. Achievement on the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons veterinary nursing certificates are below the national average. It is particularly low on long courses where students are on day release, compared with short courses where students are on both long and short block release. The college has taken some action to increase pass rates. This includes rescheduling lessons to enable students on long courses to use the library and other resources.

16 The college has attracted support from national organisations which regularly fund prizes for outstanding student progress and achievement. In 1999, four veterinary nursing students received credit awards, out of only 10 awarded nationally. Links with employers have



# Curriculum Areas

been weak and informal. They have been improved by the introduction of more regular meetings of the employer liaison groups for animal care and veterinary nursing. The college effectively monitors students' destinations.

17 The college has a good range of animals for students to work with. There is some small-scale commercial work in dog-grooming and day kennels. Other resources include accommodation for a range of small mammals and a tropical area housing reptiles, amphibians and invertebrates. Larger animals within the animal care unit include llamas and goats. Other animals are available on the college estate.

18 While all animals receive a good standard of care and have appropriate housing, the animal unit itself is inappropriately located in a number of temporary and converted buildings. Rooms are often too small for groups to be

managed effectively during practical classes. Staff carry out risk assessments and health and safety checks verbally with students, before they handle the animals. However, there are no formalised recording systems for these activities. There is some good practice. For example, the reptiles are managed for handling and cleaning purposes on a 'traffic light' system which identifies the level of care and supervision required for particular species and individuals. This system has not been extended for use with other animal groups.

19 There have been many recent changes to the animal care teaching team. Staff have qualifications at least up to the level to which they teach and some relevant industrial experience. Teachers without formal teaching qualifications are encouraged to follow a programme of staff training, but those new to teaching need further support.

## A summary of retention and achievement rates in animal care and veterinary nursing, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
First diploma in animal care	2	Number of starters	49	42	44
		Retention (%)	94	98	94
		Achievement (%)	94	98	93
National certificate in animal care	2	Number of starters	27	20	23
		Retention (%)	79	87	96
		Achievement (%)	96	100	91
Pre-veterinary nursing certificate	2	Number of starters	16	17	20
		Retention (%)	76	85	83
		Achievement (%)	63	65	65
NVQ in caring for animals	2	Number of starters	12	*	44
		Retention (%)	63	*	100
		Achievement (%)	100	*	34
National diploma in animal care	3	Number of starters	26	30	42
		Retention (%)	81	79	84
		Achievement (%)	92	80	80
Veterinary nursing certificate long (part 1 and 2 )	3	Number of starters	97	82	30
		Retention (%)	95	89	86
		Achievement (%)	65	44	50
Veterinary nursing certificate short (part 1 and 2 )	3	Number of starters	85	83	84
		Retention (%)	100	99	100
		Achievement (%)	72	72	73

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999) \*data unreliable

# Curriculum Areas

## Equine Studies

### Grade 3

**20 Inspectors observed 13 lessons, including one tutorial, which covered the range of full-time and part-time courses. They agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report but considered some strengths overstated and identified some additional weaknesses.**

#### Key strengths

- good practical teaching
- well-planned assignments
- clear course documentation
- high pass rates on full-time courses
- effective use of the equine unit

#### Weaknesses

- some poor theory teaching
- inadequate course review procedures
- poor retention rates on full-time courses
- low achievement rates on part-time courses
- low achievement of additional awards

21 Full-time course provision has changed since the last inspection. The range of courses now offered in horse studies and equestrian management includes first, national and higher national diplomas and national and higher national certificates. This replaces the general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs) at intermediate and advanced level in business or leisure and tourism taken with full-time British Horse Society awards. British Horse Society awards are still offered on a part-time basis and as additional qualifications for full-time students. The college equestrian unit is recognised as a British Horse Society examination centre up to stage 3.

22 Inspectors judged teaching to be good or better in eight of the 13 lessons observed. Lessons are well planned and have an

appropriate range of learning activities. One lesson covering the safe handling of horses started with a short video on the subject. Students then worked in small groups, answering a series of written questions, requiring them to relate information from the video to the equestrian unit. The groups worked effectively. The teacher used well-directed questions and answers to enable all students to share their conclusions. In a few weaker theory lessons, teachers relied too much on dictating notes or students copying from the overhead projector, often at too rapid a pace for the slower students. Punctuality, as identified in the last inspection report, is still a problem for some students.

23 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that practical teaching is of a high standard. There is appropriate emphasis on health and safety and the development of students' skills. The equestrian unit is used effectively to enhance students' learning. In addition to its use for practical teaching, frequent reference is made to the unit during theory lessons, to strengthen the link between theory and practice. It is extensively used for routine duties and work experience for all full-time courses. Students are streamed according to their riding ability for equitation lessons.

24 Assignment briefs are comprehensive, following a common format. They include assessment criteria and key skills. Many assignments involve solving a practical problem in the college equestrian unit. Students' work is marked fairly, and feedback from teachers is comprehensive. Students value the learning they gain from assignments. Portfolios meet the standard required for each course, and internal verification is good.

25 Pass rates are good on all full-time courses, as noted in the self-assessment report. However, retention rates on both the first and national diploma courses are below national averages for similar courses. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report.

# Curriculum Areas

Achievement rates on part-time courses leading to British Horse Society awards are low.

Opportunities for full-time students to take additional qualifications, including British Horse Society awards, wordprocessing and computer literacy and information technology awards are good. Part-time students may study additional key skills. However, achievement rates for all additional awards are low. Progression to employment or to other further education courses is high. Few students progress to higher education.

26 Inspectors agreed that courses are well planned and well managed. Comprehensive course files are maintained for all courses. Schemes of work and lesson plans are good. A high proportion of effective practical work and an awareness of the needs of industry is evident. However, the course review procedure is inadequate. It fails to incorporate student or employer input and there are no formative

reviews during the year. Course reviews often fail to identify problems, such as low retention and achievement rates for additional awards, and are not used effectively to inform equine team meetings. The college's close links to industry have not been fully exploited. The industry liaison committee advises the college on new course development and resources but has little input to reviewing the content and quality of existing courses. Attendance at meetings by members from industry is sometimes poor. Little use is made of work experience off the site, except on the national diploma course.

27 The equestrian unit was purpose built in 1990. It is well managed and well maintained. The increase in student numbers has led to a shortage of horses for the more proficient students. Staff are well qualified and have relevant industrial experience. They form an enthusiastic and cohesive team.

## A summary of retention and achievement rates in equine studies, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
First diploma	2	Number of starters	*	16	18
		Retention (%)	*	94	72
		Achievement (%)	*	89	92
British Horse Society (long) in horse knowledge and care & horse knowledge and riding	2	Number of starters	80	24	18
		Retention (%)	83	67	77
		Achievement (%)	45	14	57
National diploma	3	Number of starters	*	*	33
		Retention (%)	*	*	64
		Achievement (%)	*	*	95
British Horse Society (long) in horse knowledge and care, horse knowledge and riding and preliminary teaching certificate	3	Number of starters	122	39	9
		Retention (%)	89	85	100
		Achievement (%)	22	28	33

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)

\*course not running

Note: British Horse Society awards in 1996-97 were a combination of full-time students on the GNVQ and British Horse Society course and part-time students. From 1997-98 onwards they are full-time students opting for additional awards and part-time students.

# Curriculum Areas

## Horticulture and Floristry

### Grade 3

**28 Inspectors observed 12 lessons. They agreed with some aspects of the college's self-assessment, but considered many of the strengths and weaknesses had been overlooked. Action has already taken place to address all the weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report.**

#### Key strengths

- the strong emphasis on the vocational relevance of teaching
- effective use of specialist resources
- improved retention and achievement rates in the national diploma

#### Weaknesses

- poor retention and achievement on many courses
- insufficient attention to meeting the needs of all students
- lack of industry involvement in course reviews

29 The wide range of full-time courses provides good progression from foundation to advanced level in general and amenity horticulture, greenkeeping and floristry. Part-time programmes include national vocational qualification (NVQ) levels 2 and 3 in sports turf maintenance and landscape and garden design, as well as Royal Horticultural Society certificates and diplomas. An entry level course provides for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. These students may progress through a recently developed foundation course, to higher levels. Opportunities exist to gain appropriate additional vocational qualifications such as customer service NVQs, and certificates of competence in pesticide applications.

30 Inspectors judged seven of the 12 lessons observed to be good or better. Most lessons are

well structured and enable all students to learn at a level appropriate to their ability. Teachers successfully introduce students to the lesson topic but some do not link lessons to other relevant parts of the course. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that a suitable range of teaching and learning methods is used. Teachers ensure in most lessons that there are frequent and effective references to the practical and commercial applications of the subject. In the weaker lessons, students have little to do. Learning is not checked through questioning, discussion or practical activity. Some staff take too little account of the range of student ability and do not draw on student experience to enliven the learning process. Schemes of work are often merely a list of topics and there is little information about how the subject will be taught.

31 Practical teaching is good and effectively organised. In a well-planned lesson on mowing, the teacher involved those students who were not driving in planning a method for mowing a difficult area of grass with many hazards. Good use is made of the extensive range of college facilities to develop students' skills. These include the landscaped grounds and gardens, which contain a comprehensive plant collection, and the golf greenkeeping academy.

32 Students' understanding of horticulture is extended through additional activities, including the planning and building of exhibition gardens at the Chelsea Flower Show. Work experience on the national diploma in horticulture course and in floristry is well managed and valued by students. Inspectors agreed there are good links with industry. Although employers are represented on the horticultural advisory committee, they are not involved in reviewing courses.

33 Courses are well planned and well managed. The wide range of assessment used is well matched to course objectives. Assignment briefs and assessment criteria are satisfactory for most courses. Most assignments include assessment of key skills and provide good opportunities for students to gain and

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apply knowledge. The majority of students' work is thoroughly researched and presented. It is marked and verified accurately but, in most cases, teachers do not provide sufficient written feedback to help students improve their performance. Reviews of students' progress and action-planning in tutorials are inconsistent. Course documentation and handbooks are informative but not comprehensive.

34 The retention and achievement rates on many courses are erratic, and below college targets and the national rates. Retention and achievement on the national diploma course has improved steadily over the last three years although enrolment fell by 40% in 1997. The self-assessment report did not acknowledge poor results on the first diploma for the last two years. Retention is below national averages for

NVQ level 2 in horticulture and floristry.

Retention in floristry has fallen from 94% in 1997 to 38% in 1999. Only two students have achieved the Royal Horticultural Society diploma in the last three years. The college is aware of the low pass rates on part-time courses and is developing strategies for improvement. In 1998, 78% of students who completed the national certificate and diploma courses in horticulture progressed to other further education courses or employment. Of national diploma students, 25% progressed to higher education.

35 Staff are appropriately qualified with industrial and commercial experience and a good level of technical expertise. There is a good range of specialist equipment and workshops, complemented by a wide selection of resources in the college's learning centre.

## A summary of retention and achievement rates in horticulture and floristry, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
First diploma in horticulture	2	Number of starters	19	19	17
		Retention (%)	89	68	76
		Achievement (%)	100	69	69
National certificate in horticulture	2	Number of starters	18	14	10
		Retention (%)	89	100	70
		Achievement (%)	81	79	100
NVQ in horticulture	2	Number of starters	48	62	52
		Retention (%)	65	73	79
		Achievement (%)	74	58	88
NVQ in floristry	2	Number of starters	32	41	39
		Retention (%)	94	73	38
		Achievement (%)	93	67	80
Royal Horticultural Society general certificate	2	Number of starters	76	50	73
		Retention (%)	74	98	75
		Achievement (%)	69	43	56
Royal Horticultural Society diploma	3	Number of starters	18	16	15
		Retention (%)	67	94	73
		Achievement (%)	0	0	18
National diploma in horticulture	3	Number of starters	19	20	12
		Retention (%)	74	90	100
		Achievement (%)	86	89	100

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)

# Curriculum Areas

## Early Years

### Grade 3

**36 Inspectors observed nine lessons. They agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report but considered that some strengths identified were overestimated.**

#### Key strengths

- high pass rate on the diploma in nursery nursing
- the good quality of portfolio work
- well-organised and effective course team

#### Weaknesses

- poor achievement on the certificate in childcare and education
- some inadequate classroom discipline
- insufficient learning resources

37 Development of early years programmes is part of the college's strategic aim to extend its curriculum base. Courses started in 1997 with the Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education certificate in childcare and education. This was replaced in 1999 by the Edexcel Foundation first diploma in care. This course has been allowed to run with small numbers of students, demonstrating a commitment by the college to the new development. The Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education diploma in nursery nursing and NVQs in early years care and education are also offered. The college is now a recognised NVQ assessment centre and intends to expand its range of care provision.

38 Inspectors judged only four of the nine lessons observed to be good. In these lessons, teaching is effectively planned using a range of activities and strategies for learning. The aims and objectives are clear and linked to assessment opportunities. Through discussion, students are encouraged to reflect on their

experiences of working with children.

Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the industrial experience of teachers is a strength, which they use well to enhance discussion. Students on one course were noisy and disruptive. Their lack of classroom discipline hindered learning for other students.

39 Practical activities and work experience are integral to all programmes. Students are encouraged to use skills acquired in college in their activities in the workplace. Reports on students' work experience confirm a high level of practical competence. A range of local schools, nurseries and families are used as placements in addition to the college's own children's day nursery.

40 Inspection took place during the last week of induction in this curriculum area. Students undertake appropriate activities during induction. For example, first-year nursery nurse students created a wall-mounted display of scenes from London using techniques suitable for young children. Students demonstrated a clear understanding of the course requirements and were gaining an appreciation of work in the early years sector.

41 Inspectors agreed with the college self-assessment that within the course team, leadership is strong and teamwork effective. Individual programmes of study are well organised with clear guidelines. All students receive a detailed assessment schedule. Written assignments are appropriate to the level of study. The quality of students' work is good. Teachers' comments are helpful and constructive. Grading is consistent. Students demonstrate good organisational skills in the presentation of their portfolios. They feel well supported by teachers.

42 For the one cohort of students on the diploma in nursery nursing for whom results are available, the success rate was 100%. The second cohort comprised 19 students in the first year, and 17 have returned for the second year.

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Students' achievements for the certificate in childcare and education were above the national average in 1998 but dropped to 43% in 1999. This weakness is acknowledged in the self-assessment report. The qualification has been replaced by the first diploma in care.

43 Staff are well qualified and have undertaken recent vocational updating. The college manages a nursery and an 'after school' and 'holiday' club. These are available as a learning resource and for work experience. Staff have close links with the local early years forum and social services. The benefits of these links are acknowledged in the self-assessment report.

44 There are insufficient learning resources to support early years courses. As a result, many students are over-reliant on teachers for information. One of the specialist rooms is too small to accommodate all the students. In addition the layout prohibits effective learning. It is also used as a storage space for art and craft materials. This causes disruption when these materials are needed by other students during a lesson. The room is shared with the 'after school' and 'holiday' club. There is a suitable range of books and journals in the learning resources centre but they are insufficient in number for the increase in

students. This weakness was identified in the self-assessment report. Many books are kept as reference copies to ensure that all students have access to them, but this practice restricts access for part-time students. Increasingly the Internet is being used for research by students.

However, staff need time to assess which websites provide the best quality information. There is limited use of CD-ROMs.

## A summary of retention and achievement rates in early years, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
Certificate in childcare education	2	Number of starters	*	8	8
		Retention (%)	*	75	88
		Achievement (%)	*	83	43
Diploma in nursery nursing	3	Number of starters	*	*	10
		Retention (%)	*	*	90
		Achievement (%)	*	*	100

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)

\*course not running

# Cross-college Provision

## Support for Students

### Grade 3

**45 Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report, although they identified a number of additional weaknesses.**

#### Key strengths

- comprehensive pre-course guidance to inform students' choice
- effective learning support for all students
- good arrangements for residential students

#### Weaknesses

- inconsistent tutorial practice
- inadequate systems for reviewing and recording students' progress
- limited opportunities for careers education and guidance

46 The college produces a well-designed and informative prospectus, supplemented by an Internet web page and individual course leaflets. However, the prospectus does not include a statement on the college's commitment to equal opportunities, nor does it include detailed information on fees. These weaknesses are not identified in the self-assessment report. Open days, careers conventions and specialist trade events throughout the country are used to promote courses at the college. Teaching staff attend these events and are able to give effective guidance at the point of enquiry. Links with industry, organisations and local employers ensure that students receive up-to-date information on employment opportunities.

47 The application and enrolment process is efficient. All full-time students are effectively interviewed. Part-time students are only interviewed if they requested it. Full-time student induction is well planned. It lasts between two and five days, depending on the

curriculum area. For consistency, a college scheme of induction activities is used. This includes ice breaker games, college familiarisation exercises and an introduction to support systems. Students are encouraged to review their main course options during induction to ensure they have made the right choice. Opportunities for students to be accredited for their prior learning are poor. The college identifies this weakness in its self-assessment report. All students receive a useful student handbook. However, some students are insufficiently aware of the college charter or its complaints procedure.

48 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that tutorial support is inconsistent, a weakness identified at the last inspection. Many tutorial programmes lack structure, and there is little evidence of action-planning or reviewing of students' progress. Learner contracts or records of achievement are not completed. In response to these weaknesses the college introduced a new tutorial model in September 1999. This is well designed. It brings together group and individual tutorial entitlement, and emphasises tracking students' performance. However, it is too early to assess its impact.

49 Careers education and guidance for full-time students is inadequate. A career's adviser is available for only 25 days each year to cover all college students. To supplement this, some tutors have devised their own programmes, but these include varying amounts of careers education. Careers education and guidance was revised as part of the tutorial review, to increase consistency, but it is too soon to assess its effectiveness. The range of careers materials in the learning resource centre is adequate. Support for students completing Universities and Colleges Admissions Service applications is good. Students' destinations are effectively tracked and a satisfactory number progress to the next level of education or employment.



# Cross-college Provision

50 Arrangements for identifying and supporting students with additional learning needs are good. Full-time applications are carefully screened and where necessary a member of the learning support team takes part in subsequent interviews. This procedure works well and is valued by students. All full-time students and most part-time students undertake a basic skills assessment for literacy and numeracy. The standard test used does not differentiate between different levels of course and therefore lacks sophistication. Students with identified needs are interviewed and offered support within two weeks of enrolling. Approximately 20% of this year's full-time students are receiving additional learning support. Few part-time students do so. All additional learning support is delivered in individual sessions which are timetabled outside the students' normal course hours. Other forms of delivery have yet to be developed. The weakness of over-reliance on this method of delivery is not identified in the college's self-assessment report. Basic record-keeping is good, although an effective value-added tracking system has not been sufficiently developed.

51 Residential students are well supported by a team of five full-time and five part-time male and female wardens. About 30% of full-time students are residents, mostly females in the 16 to 18 years age group. Systems for monitoring and supporting the welfare of residential students, including discipline, are effective. Staff wardens have an annual refresher course on basic first aid, fire procedures and drug abuse. Social and sporting provision for residential students is good. The arrangements for residential students work well and are highly regarded by students.

52 The college counselling service is effective and valued. Students are kept well informed of the range of services available. Usage statistics are analysed and used to inform planning. The student association is very active. It organises social and sporting functions, using the funds raised to enhance students' facilities and for

charitable donations. Meetings take place every month, and minutes are displayed on student noticeboards. Non-residential students are insufficiently represented on the student executive.

## General Resources

### Grade 3

**53 Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report, but identified one additional weakness.**

#### Key strengths

- good use of the estate to support curriculum delivery
- extensive sport and recreation facilities
- well-managed learning resource centre
- innovative collaboration with employers providing access to specialist resources

#### Weaknesses

- low rate of room usage
- cramped accommodation in the learning resource centre
- some poor-quality temporary classrooms
- poor access for people with restricted mobility

54 The college estate is attractive and well maintained. It is used effectively for practical activities, commercial farming experience and recreation. The general public and a range of other organisations use the facilities, and this provides some income for the college. A childcare nursery, run on commercial lines on site, is used to support early years programmes. Additional facilities include: a horticulture unit with a retail centre, a six-hole golf course, an animal care centre, a marine yard and an equestrian unit. Each area is managed in such a way that provides good support for the educational work of the college.

# Cross-college Provision

55 College buildings are of varying ages and quality. The mansion house at the centre of the estate is grade I listed, which restricts its use. Much of its accommodation is unsuitable for use as classrooms. The accommodation strategy is based on previous college priorities and has not been updated to reflect the new strategic direction. Room usage is low. This is identified in the self-assessment report. Occupation rates in approximately half of the rooms are below 30%, and some rooms are used for less than 20% of the time. Practical and specialist classrooms are well resourced and mainly fit for purpose. All classrooms have basic teaching aids. The large number of temporary classrooms used for theory lessons provide a poor teaching environment. The college did not identify this weakness in its self-assessment report.

56 The college's effective relationships with industry ensure that students have access to up-to-date equipment and practice. Since the last inspection, the college has reduced its financial risk by developing commercial links with farmers. An agreement with a manufacturer of ground-care equipment provides a demonstration centre for their machinery. In exchange, students have access to the latest equipment. The marine engineering section's links with manufacturers of outboard motors provide good access to relevant learning resources. A veterinary practice is based within the college estate. This is well used to facilitate learning for animal care and veterinary nurse students.

57 Inspectors agreed that the learning resources centre is managed effectively. The college has installed an efficient computerised cataloguing system since the last inspection. There are good links between curriculum areas and the learning resource centre staff to ensure that stock is up to date and supports study. However, investment in resources for new and growing curriculum areas, such as childcare, is inadequate. The learning resource centre is

located in the lower ground floor of the mansion house and there is no access for students with restricted mobility. The accommodation is cramped and overcrowded at peak times in the day. This weakness is identified in the self-assessment report.

58 The number and quality of computers has improved since the last inspection. There are 51 modern computers available for general use representing a ratio of computers to full-time students of approximately 1:11. Although this is a relatively low level of resource, students report few problems in gaining access to computers. Computers in the learning resource centre are available for 24 hours a day. The computer network uses a suitable range of software to support the curriculum. Access to the Internet is good, and the college is working with curriculum areas to identify relevant websites.

59 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that there are good sport and social facilities for both residential and day students. Outdoor facilities comprise a multi-sports area and sports pitches used by college teams and the land-based colleges' national rugby sevens competition, held annually. The Vaughan Morgan centre is a well-equipped student social centre. It has a shop, snack bar, bar, lounges with television, and entertainment and games facilities. There is also a sports hall, table tennis room, fitness centre and outdoor swimming pool. Residential accommodation for students is satisfactory. Ten hostels provide accommodation for up to 136 students in a range of single and double rooms. These rooms are of an adequate size, basically furnished. Although there had been improvements in the last year, many of the students expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of the food provided.

60 Most staff work areas are an appropriate size, but some are crowded. Staff have good access to computers in their workrooms. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment

# Cross-college Provision

report that access around the college for students and staff with restricted mobility is poor. The mansion house and the student social areas of the Vaughan Morgan centre are particularly difficult to enter. There are no lifts and some floors are inaccessible. Classes can be relocated to allow wheelchair users to be accommodated in suitable rooms. Some improvements have been made, including the provision of ramps and widening of doors.

## Quality Assurance

### *Grade 3*

**61 Inspectors considered that the self-assessment report identified most of the strengths and some weaknesses in quality assurance, but that important weaknesses were omitted.**

#### **Key strengths**

- recent developments in quality assurance activities
- strategies for sharing good practice across the college
- positive approach to annual staff review and staff development
- sound arrangements for internal verification
- comprehensive staff handbook

#### **Weaknesses**

- no clear framework for quality assurance activities
- lack of targets for individual curriculum areas
- insufficiently evaluative annual course reviews
- absence of service standards for support areas
- slow response to some issues from the last inspection

62 At the time of the last inspection, quality assurance was judged to be less than satisfactory. In the two-and-a-half years since the inspection, there have been some improvements. A quality policy is in place; the work of the academic board is more purposeful; lesson observation has been introduced; and whole-college targets have been established. However, staff are unclear about how the various quality assurance activities relate to each other. The college planning cycle lacks coherence, and there is no clear link between quality assurance processes and planning activities. This has hampered responses to issues raised in the previous inspection. In over two years, some have still not been addressed. This is not recognised in the self-assessment report.

63 The academic board has developed a strong focus on curriculum and quality matters since the last inspection. It is beginning to interrogate reports in more depth, and provide guidance on direction and priorities. The operation of quality assurance activities has not yet been reviewed, a weakness identified in the self-assessment report. The corporation has recently established a curriculum and standards committee, which brings together governor and staff representatives. It is too early to assess its effectiveness.

64 College-wide targets have been in place for the past two years. These relate to students' attendance, retention and achievements and also to tutorial support, planning of teaching and learning and lesson observation. The self-assessment report indicates that progress against some of the targets for 1997-98 has not been monitored. Review of 1998-99 targets is scheduled for later in the autumn term. Student retention and achievement targets were established at course level as part of the required target-setting exercise, but there are no curriculum area targets. This means that the academic board can only examine performance at either a whole-college level or by course,

# Cross-college Provision

making the identification of trends across curriculum areas difficult. Staff primarily focus on college-wide targets, which for some areas is inappropriate and does not support quality improvement. There is scant evidence of the use of national averages as a basis for assessing individual course performance. Staff tend to compare with their course's previous performance rather than comparing themselves with the sector.

65 There is clear documentation and guidance for producing annual course review reports. However, the completion and rigour of the reports varies considerably. The outcomes of student surveys are included in most reports, but the college has experienced difficulties in gathering employers' views. Some reports are insufficiently evaluative, and because staff provide students' achievement and retention data from their own records, there is a risk of presenting an inaccurate view of performance. Action plans are completed by course tutors, but these are not linked to other plans that they produce.

66 The academic board reviews external verifiers' reports and subsequent actions. Inspectors agreed with the college that the internal verification system is a strength. Assessment and verification activities are scrutinised and formative feedback provided to curriculum areas. Good practice is shared across teams. Other activities which promote the spread of good practice include peer mentoring and lesson observations across programme areas. A curriculum development project identified specific topics for working groups of staff to explore. Outcomes were disseminated to all staff at an event in the summer. Areas explored included flexible workshop delivery, integration of information technology with the curriculum, and work-based training.

67 Staff throughout the college have an annual development review with their line managers. The outcomes contribute to team staff development plans, which are implemented

effectively. Staff speak highly of the staff development opportunities available, but there is no formal evaluation of training against college objectives. All quality activities are supported by guidelines and documents presented in a useful staff handbook. This is available through the college intranet and is regularly updated.

68 The self-assessment report broadly reflects the judgements made by inspectors, but lacks supportive evidence. There was little sifting of strengths or weaknesses, and so some relatively minor points are given the same emphasis as significant issues. Insufficient attention is given to student retention and achievement data in the curriculum sections of the report. Support areas contributed to the self-assessment process and service managers were involved in moderation discussions. However, there are no service standards for support areas. The student charter identifies a few standards, but these are not monitored. The college has yet to achieve Investor in People status.

## Governance

### Grade 3

**69 Inspectors considered that the self-assessment report overstated some strengths, but that progress had been made in addressing some identified weaknesses. Inspectors also found additional weaknesses not included in the self-assessment report.**

#### Key strengths

- governors' strong commitment to the college
- prudent action to ensure the college's financial solvency
- the effective working group on governance
- comprehensive standing orders and codes of conduct for governors

# Cross-college Provision

## Weaknesses

- inadequacies in the appointment process for governors
- unsatisfactory aspects of clerking arrangements
- incomplete register of governors' interests
- insufficiently detailed monitoring of the strategic plan

70 The corporation has agreed a determined membership of 17 in line with the statutory modifications to the instrument of government, which came into force on 1 August 1999, shortly before the inspection. The current membership includes nine business and three co-opted governors, a staff governor, a local authority member and the principal. A search committee has been established for recruiting new governors. The process for recruiting new business and co-opted governors does not reflect all of the Nolan committee's elements of best practice, such as use of advertising and careful scrutiny of governors before reappointment. The corporation has not yet agreed how it will achieve the determined composition.

71 The committee structure has been revised to reflect the college's shift in emphasis away from farming and to improve the oversight of curriculum matters. There are separate committees for search, audit, finance and general purposes, personnel and employment, estates, curriculum and standards, and remuneration. Committees have well-defined terms of reference and operate within their allocated remit.

72 There is an external clerk to the corporation, who has a contract of employment and a clear job description. However, agendas and supporting papers for the corporation and committees are prepared by the principal, in consultation with the relevant chair, not the clerk. This represents a conflict of interest.

Papers for corporation and committee meetings are circulated at least seven days in advance. It is not always clear from agendas and minutes whether discussions were supported by written or oral reports. Minutes provide a good record of decisions made, but they do not convey the level of debate on key issues. Attendance at corporation and committee meetings by most governors is good.

73 The corporation has a comprehensive set of standing orders to guide the conduct of its business. However, the clerk to the corporation has on occasion failed to advise the corporation on the correct procedure to comply with the instrument and articles of government and its own standing orders. The code of conduct and code of ethics reflect the Nolan committee's recommendations on openness and accountability. Guidance on access to corporation business has yet to be implemented fully, since not all non-confidential minutes and papers are readily available to the public. Declarations, by all except one governor, are included in the register of interests. However, declarations by many governors do not adequately reflect their current financial and personal interests. The register is being extended to cover college staff who have significant budgetary responsibilities.

74 Governors have been purposeful in ensuring the solvency of the college. In the last year, they have taken a series of decisions on the college's farming interests to improve the financial position whilst safeguarding the provision of education and training in agriculture. The annual budget and the three-year financial forecast are approved annually by the corporation. The finance and general purposes committee scrutinises the college's financial position. The effectiveness of this scrutiny could be improved if management accounts were to include a balance sheet and an analysis of performance against the college's financial objectives.

# Cross-college Provision

75 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is adequate. The corporation substantially conducts its business in accordance with the instrument and articles of government. It also substantially fulfils its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC. The audit committee operates effectively.

76 The remuneration committee has no guidelines to advise the corporation on the remuneration of senior postholders. However, the corporation has received comparisons of salaries awarded for similar posts in other colleges in the region. Recent practice has been to award the same pay settlement to all staff, including senior postholders. A formal appraisal procedure for the principal and vice-principal by three senior governors was introduced in December 1998. The principal appraises the two other senior postholders.

77 Governors have made some progress in addressing weaknesses identified in the last inspection. A governors' working group has developed an induction and training programme. Governors have attended seminars and receive regular briefing notes prepared by senior staff. The working group also took the lead on the introduction of self-assessment for governors and the establishment of the board's curriculum and standards committee. Governors are demonstrating a growing awareness of their responsibility and role in raising standards. However, inspectors found that the corporation had not monitored progress towards achievement of the strategic plan, despite an action plan to do so before the inspection.

## Management

### Grade 3

**78 Inspectors found that the self-assessment report overstated some strengths but omitted others. Inspectors identified an additional weakness. At the time of the inspection, only limited progress had been made in implementing the action plan.**

#### Key strengths

- the college's good record of achieving growth targets
- robust and timely management information
- good communication across the college
- close monitoring of annual curriculum plans
- effective teamwork in programme areas
- strong links with external agencies

#### Weaknesses

- a strategic plan with few measurable targets and no annual operating statement
- longstanding uncertainties about roles and responsibilities of some senior managers
- the limited involvement of staff in planning
- inadequate cashflow reporting
- the recent high turnover of staff
- inadequate monitoring of equal opportunities

79 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is adequate. The budget planning process is clear and understood by staff. The latest three-year financial forecast shows a significant improvement in the college's financial position. However, it does not include a comprehensive sensitivity analysis of the main risks associated with the forecast. The financial accounting system does not currently meet fully the college's financial information needs.

# Cross-college Provision

A separate financial reporting system has been developed to produce reports for budget holders, senior management and governors. Although monthly management accounts allow the college's overall financial performance to be monitored, there has been inadequate cashflow reporting. The college maintains a wide-ranging set of financial regulations and procedures but has yet to adopt procedures for dealing with suspected fraud and irregularities, in line with the Council Circular 98/15, *Audit Code of Practice*. The internal and external auditors have not identified any significant weaknesses in financial control. Timely and accurate financial and data returns are made to the FEFC. Key staff have access to robust management information.

80 The college has achieved its growth targets since incorporation. Diversification of the curriculum has enabled the college to maintain its numbers of full-time students in the current year. However, the existing strategic plan has not been updated to provide revised and clear measurable targets to guide future growth and development. The lack of an annual operating plan further inhibits systematic monitoring of progress by management and also by the corporation. In the college's current state of change, this represents a significant weakness in the assessment of potential risks and opportunities. This is not identified in the self-assessment report.

81 The senior management team comprises the principal, vice-principal and two assistant principals, one responsible for the curriculum and the other for finance, management information systems and administration. The team meets regularly. Succinct minutes of meetings are maintained, but there is little evidence of actions being tracked to ensure their implementation. The enduring uncertainties about the roles and responsibilities of some senior managers inhibits progress in addressing weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report.

82 Working relationships between programme managers and their teams are good. Annual curriculum plans are prepared for each programme area. The assistant principal, (curriculum) ensures that these plans are in line with the strategic objectives of the college and regularly monitors their implementation with each programme manager. Progress reports are sent to the senior management team. A curriculum forum of programme area, study skills and student services managers considers curriculum and quality-related issues. A separate management forum composed of programme area and service managers considers cross-college and operational matters. While some good work is accomplished in these two groups, the arrangements do not promote an integrated approach to planning and quality improvement. Although communication throughout the college is good, there is insufficient opportunity for staff at all levels to participate in the strategic planning process, a weakness identified in the self-assessment report.

83 The college has good links with external agencies and is active in responding to the national agendas for widening participation and lifelong learning, in collaboration with Thames Valley Enterprise, the local TEC, and with the new unitary authority of the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead. The college is a member of a consortium of agricultural colleges working to implement a key skills project. Since 1998, the college has introduced two higher national diploma programmes (equine or animal studies with management) in partnership with the Buckingham and Chilterns University College.

84 The college has appropriate personnel procedures that are updated regularly. Those in relation to harassment are particularly good. Equal opportunities issues in relation to employment are carefully monitored and a detailed annual report on all personnel matters is provided to the board's personnel and

# Cross-college Provision

employment committee. However, there is no college group responsible for monitoring equal opportunities issues for staff and students. At the time of the inspection, the college's health and safety policy was undergoing a thorough review. The college has been very responsible in raising students' awareness of health and safety issues, and reporting annually on health and safety to governors. In the past two years, a high turnover of staff has prompted the corporation and management to monitor the situation carefully. There are signs of a gradual reduction in turnover.

## Conclusions

85 The college's self-assessment report provided an effective basis for planning and carrying out the inspection. Inspectors agreed with many of judgements made by the college but found a few additional strengths and some additional weaknesses. At the time of the inspection, the college had made progress in addressing some but not all of the weaknesses. Inspectors considered that the report provided a reliable guide to the quality of cross-college provision. However, they concluded that the college had been overgenerous in grading two of the curriculum areas.

86 Strengths and weaknesses identified during the inspection are listed under each section of this report. The main strengths and weaknesses are identified in the summary.



# College Statistics

## Student numbers by age (July 1999)

Age	%
Under 16	0
16-18 years	34
19-24 years	12
25+ years	53
Not known	1
Total	100

Source: college data

## Student numbers by level of study (July 1999)

Level of study	%
Level 1 (foundation)	5
Level 2 (intermediate)	22
Level 3 (advanced)	21
Level 4/5 (higher)	1
Non-schedule 2	51
Total	100

Source: college data

## Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (July 1999)

	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	11	238	21
Agriculture	348	409	63
Construction	0	14	1
Engineering	59	29	7
Business	7	14	2
Hotel and catering	0	14	1
Health and community care	34	16	4
Art and design	0	12	1
Total	459	746	100

Source: college data

## Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 5% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

## Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (July 1999)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	33	10	0	43
Supporting direct learning contact	12	2	0	14
Other support	74	7	1	82
Total	119	19	1	139

Source: college data, rounded to nearest full-time equivalent

# College Statistics

## Three-year Trends

### Financial data

	1997	1998	1999
Income	£4,850,000	£4,637,000	£4,565,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	£18.43	£16.61	£16.26
Payroll as a proportion of income	52%	51%	55%
Achievement of funding target	114%	104%	100%
Diversity of income	52%	49%	47%
Operating surplus	-£132,000	-£183,000	£235,000

Sources: Income – Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college (1998 and 1999)

ALF – Funding Allocations 1997-98 (1997), college (1998 and 1999)

Payroll – Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college (1998 and 1999)

Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1997-98 (1997 and 1998), college (1999)

Diversity of income – Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college (1998 and 1999)

Operating surplus – Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college (1998 and 1999)

### Students' achievements data

Level	Retention and pass	Students aged 16 to 18			Students aged 19 or over		
		1996	1997	1998	1996	1997	1998
1	Number of starters	157	155	8	177	144	104
	Retention (%)	87	82	100	76	74	88
	Achievement (%)	90	94	75	50	61	88
2	Number of starters	283	280	238	190	269	259
	Retention (%)	89	83	89	85	76	78
	Achievement (%)	73	77	69	68	74	66
3	Number of starters	84	197	143	206	184	172
	Retention (%)	83	84	85	92	82	87
	Achievement (%)	69	42	52	53	55	56
4 or 5	Number of starters	0	0	0	15	9	0
	Retention (%)	n/a	n/a	n/a	93	100	n/a
	Achievement (%)	n/a	n/a	n/a	43	89	n/a
Short courses	Number of starters	115	72	129	497	702	765
	Retention (%)	100	100	100	100	100	100
	Achievement (%)	82	75	78	84	73	87
Unknown/unclassified	Number of starters	83	78	72	90	28	25
	Retention (%)	92	78	83	90	82	96
	Achievement (%)	63	66	54	76	100	35

Source: ISR

n/a not applicable

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