



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE



Office for Standards
in Education

Inspection report

Bicton College

Dates of inspection: 4–8 October 2004

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Basic information about the college

Name of college:	Bicton College
Type of college:	Specialist land-based further education college
Principal:	Peter Sadler
Address of college:	Bicton College East Budleigh Budleigh Salterton Devon EX9 7BY
Telephone number:	01395 562300
Fax number:	01395 567502
Chair of governors:	John Lee
Unique reference number:	130651
Name of reporting inspector:	Simon Cutting
Dates of inspection:	4–8 October 2004

Part A: Summary

Information about the college

Bicton College is a specialist land-based college, established in 1947 and situated in East Devon. The main campus is on an estate of approximately 200 hectares and the college also uses several centres away from the main site. The college provides full-time, part-time and short courses and work-based learning programmes. It is organised into four directorates: finance and human resources; standards and development; teaching and learning; and business services. Within the directorate for teaching and learning, there are three departments consisting of agriculture, agricultural engineering, animal care and veterinary nursing, countryside, horticulture and floristry and equine and outdoor leisure. There are separate curriculum areas covering skills for life and inclusive learning. Work-based learning is managed within academic departments.

Full-time and part-time courses are provided from entry to advanced level in a range of subjects, including agriculture, agricultural and construction plant engineering; animal care and veterinary nursing; countryside management and arboriculture; equine studies; horticulture; floristry; outdoor leisure management; information and communications technology (ICT); and playwork and childcare. There are separate curriculum areas covering skills for life and inclusive learning, including courses at foundation level. Foundation degrees in agriculture, animal sciences, equine studies, horticulture, outdoor leisure management, playwork and environmental arts and crafts, together with a certificate of higher education (HE) in most of these subjects, are provided in partnership with a local university. The college provides training for a national charity involved in veterinary nursing. Devon is mainly rural with many diverse communities. The college's mission is 'to enable our learners to be successful through lifelong learning, putting them at the heart of everything the college does'.

The college provides vocational education and training for land-based and related industries in the county and beyond. In 2002/03, 25% of students aged 16 to 18 and 36.5% of students aged 19 or over came from outside of Devon. There were 4,628 students enrolled on further education (FE) courses. Of these, 15% were on full-time programmes and 85% on part-time or short courses. Overall, 42% of students enrolled in 2002/03 were male. However, 58% of students aged 16 to 18 were male compared to 39% of students aged 19 or over. Students enrolled on 8,558 qualifications in 2002/03. Some 36% enrolments were on programmes at level 1, 31% at level 2 and 12% at level 3; 20% were enrolled on other courses. A further 102 full-time and 5 part-time students were on HE courses. There were 189 learners on work-based learning programmes. In 2002/03, less than 1% of students were from a minority ethnic group, 6% had a disability and 7% had a learning difficulty.

How effective is the college?

Education and training in outdoor leisure management is good and is satisfactory in equine studies, agriculture and agricultural engineering including work-based learning; animal care

and veterinary nursing; horticulture, floristry, countryside and arboriculture. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The college's key strengths and areas that should be improved are listed below.

Key strengths

- effective leadership through a period of significant change
- good retention rates on most courses
- high rates of attendance at lessons
- many opportunities to access additional qualifications by full-time students
- good practical teaching in floristry, horticulture, countryside, arboriculture, agriculture and agricultural engineering
- effective links with local schools
- wide range of specialist resources for most courses
- good pastoral support
- good communications across the college.

What should be improved

- the proportion of good or better teaching
- use of initial assessment to plan support for literacy and numeracy
- completion of key skills portfolios of evidence
- standards of students' work
- target setting in tutorials
- management of the veterinary nursing curriculum
- slow progress towards framework achievement for work-based learners
- quality of specialist resources in agriculture and agricultural engineering.

Further aspects of provision requiring improvement are identified in the sections on individual subjects and courses in the full report.

Quality of provision in curriculum and occupational areas

The table below shows overall judgements about provision in subjects and courses that were inspected. Judgements are based primarily on the quality of teaching, training and learning and how well students achieve. Not all subjects and courses were inspected. Inspectors make overall judgements on curriculum areas and on the effectiveness of leadership and management in the range: Outstanding (grade 1), Good (2), Satisfactory (3), Unsatisfactory (4), Very Poor (5).

Area	Overall judgements about provision, and comment
Agriculture and agricultural engineering	Satisfactory. Work based learning contributory grade: satisfactory . Pass and retention rates on most courses are high and much of the practical teaching is good. A wide range of additional qualifications is undertaken which improve students' prospects of employment. Use of initial assessment information to plan support for learning is ineffective and work-based learners make slow progress towards framework achievement. Some farm buildings and much of the agricultural engineering equipment need replacing.
Animal care	Satisfactory. Pass rates are high on the national certificate in animal care. Too much teaching is dull and uninspiring. There are good specialist resources for veterinary nursing. The management of the veterinary nursing curriculum is poor. Progression to higher-level courses is good. Students receive good personal support to meet their individual needs but there is insufficient target setting for students in tutorials.
Horticulture, floristry, countryside and arboriculture	Satisfactory. Retention rates are good on most full-time courses and pass rates are very good in floristry. Practical teaching is good and makes effective use of the practical resources. Theory lessons lack structure. Literacy and numeracy support is ineffective. Students gain access to an extensive range of additional vocational qualifications that increase students' employment prospects.
Outdoor leisure management	Good. Equine studies contributory grade: satisfactory . Pass rates on all full-time courses are good. In outdoor leisure management, students develop good analytical and evaluative skills, but there is insufficient differentiated teaching. Retention rates in 2003/04 are low on the first diploma in horse care. Staff have wide-ranging vocational experience that effectively supports their teaching. There is insufficient reinforcement of safe working practices in equine practical work.

How well is the college led and managed?

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The principal, appointed in July 2003, has effectively led an extensive programme of change and has made good progress in addressing the weaknesses identified in the last inspection report. Success rates all improved in 2003/04 and are at or above the national averages. The governors are appropriately engaged in strategic planning. The education and standards committee works effectively to raise standards. Governors and managers are successfully addressing the financial performance of the college. Many of the developments in curriculum management, quality assurance and the use of management information, and in the promotion of equality and diversity, are well considered. It is too early to judge the full impact of these measures on students' performance. There are still too many inconsistencies in the effectiveness of college operations. The 2003/04 college self-assessment report is realistically self-critical. Inspectors agreed with all its main judgements. The college provides satisfactory value for money.

To what extent is the college educationally and socially inclusive?

The college's response to educational and social inclusion is satisfactory. Students are drawn from a wide geographical area and there is a good balance of male and female students. The college offers programmes for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and for mature students. Effective use is made of outreach facilities in rural areas including a bus equipped with seven information technology (IT) workstations. Progression routes from level 2 to HE are in place. Action to promote access to level 1 provision is insufficient. The college provides successful vocational training programmes for pupils aged 14 to 16. The college partially meets its obligations under the Race Relations (amendment) Act 2000: a race equality plan is in place; however, the associated action plan has yet to be fully implemented. Analysis of data to compare the achievement and retention rates of different groups of students is inadequate. The college has made appropriate responses to the requirements of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 (SENDA). Access for people with restricted mobility has been improved but remains poor in some areas of the college.

How well are students and trainees guided and supported?

Guidance and support for full-time students are satisfactory. Initial advice and guidance are thorough and informative, and use well-presented information. Students receive effective personal support. Tutorial support for part-time students has improved and meets students' needs. Group tutorials contain a range of well-chosen and useful activities. On many programmes, target setting and monitoring of students' progress through tutorials are weak. The college provides an excellent welfare and warden service for residential students. A team of wardens provides effective personal support and makes good use of innovative schemes to encourage and develop students' social responsibility and personal skills. The programme of leisure and social activities for students is excellent. Initial assessment is comprehensive but results are not always used effectively. Classroom support assistants give

appropriate support to students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Support for literacy and numeracy is poorly planned and focuses too much on helping students to complete course work and assignments. There is too little structured careers education.

Students' views of the college

Students' views about the college were taken into account and a summary of their main comments is presented below.

What students like about the college

- good college estate and practical teaching resources
- good IT resources in the learning resources centre
- good mix of practical and theory teaching
- good social and out-of-hours activities
- friendly and supportive staff
- wide range of enrichment activities available
- the adult environment and a feeling of independence.

What they feel could be improved

- dining arrangements for resident students
- quality and price of canteen food
- the number of car parking spaces
- organisation and clarity of course timetables
- challenge to do better.

Other information

The college inspection report will normally be published 12 working weeks after the formal feedback of the inspection findings to the college. Once published, the college has two months in which to prepare its post-inspection action plan and submit it to the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The college's action plan must show what action the college will take to bring about improvements in response to issues raised in the report. The governors should agree it before it is submitted to the local LSC. The local LSC should send to Ofsted only action plans from colleges that have been judged inadequate or have been awarded a grade 4 or 5 for curriculum provision, work-based learning and/or leadership and management.

Part B: The college as a whole

Summary of grades awarded to teaching and learning by inspectors

Aspect and learner type	Graded good or better (Grades 1 to 3) %	Graded satisfactory (Grade 4) %	Graded less than satisfactory (Grades 5 to 7) %
Teaching 16–18	61	35	4
19+ and WBL*	39	57	4
Learning 16–18	53	43	4
19+ and WBL*	48	48	4

Key: The range of grades includes: Excellent (Grade 1), Very Good (Grade 2), Good (Grade 3), Satisfactory (Grade 4), Unsatisfactory (Grade 5), Poor (Grade 6) and Very Poor (Grade 7).

**work-based learning*

Achievement and standards

1. The college offers a range of full-time and part-time courses and work-based learning programmes, mainly in land-based subjects and outdoor leisure management and sport. Vocational courses lead to foundation qualifications, national vocational qualifications (NVQs), first and national diplomas and national and advanced certificates. The college also provides courses leading to professional qualifications, including those of the British Horse Society (BHS), the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) and the British Veterinary Nursing Association (BVNA). Short courses are provided in many subjects, leading to technical certificates including the safe use of pesticides, the operation and maintenance of a range of land-based machinery, and tree climbing to perform aerial operations. Courses are offered at entry level and levels 1, 2 and 3. There are 126 learners on work-based learning programmes that lead to NVQs, apprenticeships and advanced apprenticeships. Retention and success rates for 2003/04 have not yet been validated by the LSC.

2. Retention rates for students aged 16 to 18 are at or above the national average in 2002/03, but with an underlying downward trend. Retention rates for adult students at level 1 and 3 are in the top 10% of colleges, but are average at level 2. College data for 2003/04 show the college has been successful in improving retention rates on many courses. Although still above the national average, retention rates for adult students on level 3 courses have declined. Female students are more likely to stay to the end of their programme of study. Pass rates for students aged 16 to 18 were in the top 10% in 2002/03 on level 1 courses. Pass rates at level 2 and 3 are near the national average and have declined. Overall pass rates for adult students are mixed: at level 1 they have been consistently high; they have fallen considerably below the national average at level 2 and remain low at level 3. The

college's data for 2003/04 show that pass rates for students aged 16 to 18 are well above the national average at all levels. Pass rates for adult students remain high at level 1 but remain low at level 2 and 3 despite some improvement at level 2. Attendance at lessons is generally good.

16 to 18 year olds

3. Retention and pass rates for level 1 courses are satisfactory. Students' achievement of personal skills on foundation courses are good and are celebrated at weekly presentation ceremonies. Students welcome this recognition. Most students on level 2 and 3 courses make satisfactory gains in knowledge and understanding. Standards achieved in practical and theory lessons are generally adequate. However, too many lessons do not sufficiently challenge students to work to their full potential. Standards of practical work in floristry are particularly high. Practical work in animal care helps students to develop appropriate handling skills. Programmes of work experience duties for students in animal care and equine studies do not effectively support the development of their competences and do not offer sufficient challenge to work at comparable industrial speeds or to match industry standards.

4. Over half of work-based learners are in agriculture and agricultural engineering. There are a small number in horticulture, environmental conservation, animal care and horse care. Retention and pass rates of apprentices and advanced apprentices improved in 2001/02. Achievement rates of advanced apprenticeships improved, but they continued to decline for apprenticeships. Progress towards the achievement of apprenticeship frameworks is slow. Learners achieve satisfactory levels of practical skills and are supported well by their employers. Their portfolios of evidence are well structured and contain good evidence of practical skills. Although pass rates for veterinary nursing external examinations at level 2 and 3 are good, students on these courses make slow progress towards completing their NVQ.

5. College data for 2003/04 show pass rates of application of number external tests at level 1 and 2 to be high, at 86% and 78% respectively. Pass rates of IT key skills tests at level 1 and 2 are low and are variable for communication key skills. Pass rates of the key skills award in IT at level 1 and 2 are above the national average, but are poor in application of number and communications. Many students do not complete their portfolio of evidence. Very few students have been entered for key skills at level 3 in the past 2 years.

6. Between 2002/03 and 2003/04, enrolments on short courses have increased sixfold. Many full-time students aged 16 to 18 take short courses to gain additional qualifications to improve their employment opportunities. College data for 2003/04 show high pass rates of 92%.

Adult learners

7. Many adult students study similar courses to the students aged 16 to 18. The pass rates for adult students at level 2 and 3 are significantly lower than for students aged 16 to 18,

and are near the national average. Pass rates on floristry courses and on the part-time general certificate in horticulture are good.

Quality of education and training

8. Inspectors graded teaching and learning in 72 lessons, and attainment in 70 lessons. Over 95% of the teaching and learning observed was graded satisfactory or better. Just over half of these lessons were graded good or better, and very few lessons were graded very good or excellent. At 4%, the percentage of lessons where unsatisfactory teaching and learning was observed compares favourably with the last inspection, where 16% of lessons were graded as unsatisfactory. Grades awarded for attainment follow a similar pattern to teaching and learning but with a slightly higher percentage of unsatisfactory grades.

9. The quality of teaching is considerably higher for students aged 16 to 18 than for adult students, except for in horticulture, where the quality is broadly similar. Teaching by part-time staff is generally better than by full-time staff in horticulture, floristry, countryside and arboriculture. Theory teaching in outdoor leisure management is more effective than practical. By contrast, practical teaching is better than the teaching of theory in animal care, agriculture and agricultural engineering and horticulture, floristry, countryside and arboriculture. The best teaching is in agriculture and agricultural engineering, where over two-thirds of teaching was good or better. In animal care, almost all of the teaching was only satisfactory with only a very small proportion of good teaching. Overall, a small amount of unsatisfactory teaching was observed, which was largely as a result of unsatisfactory planning and failure to ensure that adequate learning was taking place.

10. In many lessons, the relationships between teachers and students are productive and create an enjoyable learning environment. Revised and standardised lesson planning documentation is used adequately but teachers rarely plan effectively to challenge and inspire students. In a significant number of lessons, teaching does not place sufficient emphasis on meeting the needs of all students. In these lessons, teachers fail to extend the skills and knowledge of the more able students and do not effectively support the students who need extra support.

11. In outdoor leisure management theory lessons, students develop good analysis and evaluative skills and quickly develop their confidence. In lessons in equine studies and agriculture, the teaching of key skills integrated into vocational areas works well. In key skills lessons in other subjects, opportunities are missed to use naturally occurring instances to develop and reinforce specific literacy and numeracy skills. Teachers link theory to practice well in agricultural subjects but this is poorly co-ordinated in the teaching of animal care. Questioning techniques to check on and reinforce learning are underdeveloped in most teaching.

12. Staff are vocationally well qualified and a number have an above average spread of vocational expertise in both the land-based and outdoor leisure areas of learning. Just over a third of teachers are new to the college. There are too few full-time and part-time staff with

teaching qualifications and no members of staff currently hold appropriate basic skills qualifications.

13. The extensive college estate is used effectively within teaching to create many learning opportunities for students. An ongoing programme of improvement is under way. Ambitious plans to redevelop a number of areas have been costed and agreed, based on careful analysis of curriculum needs. Improvements to teaching facilities over the last year include the addition of dog kennels and an adequate covered area for equine practical teaching as well as an increase to the amount of teaching space within the animal care unit. Weaknesses in the suitability of riding horses for teaching and the limited range of animals identified have been resolved since the last inspection. The college farm, with some old buildings and insufficient up-to-date equipment, remains an area in need of development. The majority of classrooms contain, as a minimum, an internet-connected computer. A number also have projectors and interactive whiteboards. Most classrooms are refurbished to an acceptable standard, though many are old and in need of further external maintenance. Appropriate refurbishment of Bicton House residential accommodation has taken place. In the gym, changing and showering facilities are inadequate for non-resident students. Effective and adequately resourced arrangements exist both for planned and ongoing maintenance of the estate.

14. Significant improvements to information and learning technology (ILT) resources are in place. An attractive and useful staff and student intranet is used well. A full-time ILT co-ordinator post was created recently to promote the use of ILT. Book, and other learning media, stocks have been increased threefold in the last year in response to curriculum requirements.

15. Access in some teaching buildings for students with limited mobility remains inadequate or poor, due to their structural features. Efforts to resolve many of these issues have been delayed owing to consideration of plans for redevelopment which avoid expensive modifications to existing buildings. Timescales for ensuring necessary improvement to access are tight and unrealistic. A high emphasis on health and safety procedures is evidenced by the appointment of a health and safety manager and a thorough review of all policies and procedures. Adequate risk assessments are carried out regularly and displayed prominently in all areas.

16. Regular assessment of students' work clearly matches awarding body assessment criteria. Teachers use a variety of assessment methods and strategies which are appropriate for practical and written work. Course handbooks provide students with clear and consistent information about assessment methods and procedures, including the appeals process.

17. Assessment is planned throughout the year to ensure balanced coverage of tasks and to distribute students' workload evenly. In previous years, assessment was grouped towards the end of courses. In the last two years, too many students have not had marked work returned within the four weeks specified in the college assessment policy. At the time of inspection, work set had been returned within the appropriate timescale. The quality of assessment feedback to students is variable and is not always sufficiently detailed to guide

improvement. Some feedback focuses exclusively on personal development issues, without being sufficiently clear on what students need to do in order to improve the standard of their work. Results of assessments are systematically recorded and are used to provide regular reports for full-time students and for those with a legitimate interest in their progress.

18. All full-time and part-time students on courses of more than 60 hours duration complete an initial assessment of their literacy, numeracy and IT skills. The assessment takes account of prior qualifications and experience. Teachers receive results promptly. Course tutors do not always use this information to effectively inform lesson planning and individual programme planning for students. Individual learning plans are not always adequately detailed.

19. The management and co-ordination of key skills has improved from the previous year. A revised teaching model, which includes weekly sessions for all full-time students taught by a combination of vocational and essential skills staff, ensures an appropriate emphasis on key skills development. Whilst the results of initial assessments and general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) grades are used to inform the level of key skills for which students study, these do not result in sufficient challenge for the more able students.

20. Most students are set a minimum expected grade at the start of their course, but the monitoring and review of progress towards targets is generally weak. The college is introducing a system which identifies students' progress relative to their prior attainment. Much target setting is not sufficiently specific or challenging.

21. Workplace assessments for work-based learners in agriculture and agricultural engineering are appropriate. Learners value regular, constructive feedback on their progress. However, some trainees are making slow progress towards achieving the full framework.

22. Assessment and internal verification procedures meet awarding body requirements, and actions identified for improvement are implemented by course leaders and adequately monitored by the quality systems manager. The internal verification of assignment briefs by programme, key skills and learning support staff is not applied sufficiently consistently in line with the college's own policy. Internal verifiers' feedback to assessors is of variable quality and focus. Feedback too frequently refers to students' work rather than quality and validity of the assessment process and outcome.

23. The college offers an appropriate range of education and training for the land-based and outdoor leisure industries from entry level to HE. Entry level provision in land-based subjects is designed for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and has extended the college's links with special schools. Progression to a land-based skills foundation level programme was introduced in September 2004. This programme allows students to sample a range of vocational options and undertake work experience. However, the course has not been effectively marketed and has recruited poorly, except in animal care. There is no level 1 provision in outdoor leisure.

24. Links with local schools are strong. The college works with ten local schools to provide a two-year programme of vocational study for pupils aged 14 to 16. It has been very successful and has recruited well. Achievement rates for these students are high. The college also offers a range of work-based learning programmes as well as other part-time and short courses for adults. Some of the horticulture and floristry part-time courses are offered at alternative venues in Devon, but most courses are only available at the main college site. The programme of short courses is provided in response to employers' requests and as additional qualifications for full-time students. There are few part-time or short courses in animal care.

25. Most links with employers are good. Employer liaison groups meet annually to review the quality of courses in their area of work and to make proposals for development. However, there was insufficient consultation with local employers before taking the decision to close the college's Veterinary Nursing Approved Centre (VNAC). The college is committed to the further development of realistic working environments for training, such as the existing florist and plant retail centre, and plans to develop a commercial equine competition centre and a working veterinary practice.

26. Full-time students can choose from a wide range of sporting and leisure activities to enrich their programme of study. A programme of relevant and interesting subject-based visits by course groups, including residential study tours, is organised. On some programmes, these are new initiatives that have started since September 2004. These activities also develop the personal and social skills of students by addressing important topics such as health education and personal development.

27. Information about the range of courses available is well presented in clearly written prospectuses. Initial advice and guidance for students is thorough and informative and has been improved as part of an initiative to improve retention rates. The college has recently reviewed and improved the policies and procedures to ensure that students are directed towards an appropriate level of course. Some low retention rates in previous years were attributed to students being placed on an inappropriate course. Induction has been improved and tutors make good use of an induction assignment to assess students' study skills and ability to work to deadlines.

28. Initial assessment is comprehensive. However, the information gathered is not used effectively. Individual learning plans contain sparse information about the results of initial assessment and do not record how support needs that have been identified will be met. Help with literacy and numeracy is available. However, no targets are set for the development of literacy or numeracy skills. The support offered focuses on the completion of coursework or assignments rather than addressing specific difficulties with literacy or numeracy.

29. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported through the work of learning support assistants during classroom and practical work. For example, help is provided with note taking or to ensure that students remain focused on their work. The support staff work unobtrusively and often contribute to the progress of the whole class. Individual students receive effective help and guidance from personal tutors and teachers. There are excellent welfare and warden services. Wardens are friendly and approachable.

The college fully recognises its responsibilities to meet the requirements of the Child Care Standards Act. There is a wide range of sporting and leisure activities for resident and non-resident students.

30. A revised tutorial system was introduced at the start of 2004/05. Tutors are provided with clearly written handbooks as well as extensive and useful material from which to build a group tutorial programme. The new system uses a combination of 'cause for concern' notes and an 'at risk' register to identify students who require additional tutorial support. Although pastoral support is good, personal tutors rarely set clear learning targets with students to assist them to improve their performance. Some individual tutorials are brief and there is only cursory discussion of the students' progress and action planning. The new tutorial programme includes group tutorials in career planning, and students also receive useful guidance from tutors and effective assistance with applications to HE. However, there is still insufficient structured careers guidance, and some staff and students are confused about how to obtain advice or who is responsible for providing careers information.

31. Progress reviews for work-based learners are frequent and include monitoring of health and safety and equal opportunities. However, too often, the employer or supervisor is not involved sufficiently. Additional learning support is provided during the periods of off-the-job training at the college. However, the support needed or provided is poorly recorded in individual learning plans.

Leadership and management

32. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Since the appointment of the principal in July 2003, the college has made good progress in addressing the weakness identified at the last inspection in October 2002. The appointment of a new senior management team was completed in May 2004, only a few months before the inspection, and the pace and scope of change since then has been significant. Changes have been introduced effectively and sensitively, with a blend of urgency and consultation, and successfully produced strong support from staff. However, many of the changes need to be embedded before further improvements in success rates can be consistently demonstrated. Success rates for 2003/04 are above the national benchmark for all categories of programmes and all demonstrate considerable improvement compared with the previous year.

33. Through restructuring, senior management posts now have a much greater emphasis on responsibilities relating to the quality and delivery of the curriculum. The teaching departments have been re-organised to form three coherent groups. These changes have been well communicated to staff, who have a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities of managers, as well as the reasons for the changes. Strategic and operational plans are clear. Priorities are set out well and links are made to other policies such as staff development planning and target setting.

34. Communication is much improved. The principal has introduced a monthly meeting with all staff. Plans are shared with staff in draft form, and comments are encouraged. Developments to the college intranet, supported by related staff development, have resulted

in its widespread use by staff for information, communication, and practical tasks, such as booking teaching resources of all kinds. Access to the system from outside the college is particularly appreciated by part-time staff. Staff comment positively on the accessibility of all managers and, as a result of all these improvements, feel fully engaged in college developments.

35. Governance is satisfactory. Governors are appropriately engaged in the college's strategic planning processes. Since the last inspection, there has been a significant improvement in the effectiveness of the education and standards committee. It regularly receives detailed data that show student recruitment, pass and retention rates, and robustly examines reports from managers that it requests on areas of weaker performance. Governors monitor the financial performance of the college closely. Membership of the governing body has changed significantly in the last two years, which enables the college to recruit governors with an appropriate range of skills. Changes include an increase from two to six female members. Governors review their need for training and development, and some attend external training events. The college organises briefings on aspects of the college operation prior to most full corporation meetings, but there is no formal governor training plan.

36. Curriculum management is satisfactory in most areas of the college. It is particularly effective in outdoor leisure programmes. The management of the veterinary nursing curriculum is weak. The management of work-based learning is satisfactory, but monitoring the achievements of trainees is insufficiently rigorous. Standardised agendas for curriculum team meetings ensure appropriate links to the strategic priorities of the college. Requirements for target setting and monitoring have recently been introduced, but are not yet consistently applied.

37. Improved quality assurance arrangements have been introduced. These include the widespread use of standardised procedures for processes such as the production of lesson plans, schemes of work and the reporting and monitoring of performance. There is now a comprehensive annual schedule for quality assurance. However, inconsistencies in the application of some procedures indicate that they are not yet sufficiently embedded. The academic board has not operated effectively until the last few months, and not all the mid-year programme reviews scheduled for December 2003 took place. Some that were completed lacked rigour. Although most complaints are dealt with promptly, a few are not progressing according to the timescale set out in the college policy. The college has recognised this and recently revised its procedures.

38. A lesson observation scheme using college staff was re-introduced last year but the college quickly identified that the results were unrealistic and substituted external resources instead as a basis for evaluating its teaching and learning. A significantly revised internal scheme, involving both graded and peer observation, has been in use from September 2004.

39. The 2003/04 college self-assessment report, produced in September 2004, is realistic, accurate and self-critical. Grades awarded to all the curriculum areas and leadership and management and many of the judgements are a close match to inspection findings. In some areas, the proportion of good and less than satisfactory teaching was overestimated and

there was insufficient input from employers in some curriculum areas, such as veterinary nursing. Most staff were involved in the production of programme self-assessment reports, which contributed to the departmental and college report.

40. The college annual appraisal scheme has been ineffective until the last few months. Although the scheme has recently been amended to link it to college priorities, most records show little direct evaluation of that aspect. Not all appraisals were carried out last year. Up until six months ago, staff development had been inadequate. Considerably more resources are now allocated to it and the new senior managers have generated a vigorous programme of activities. Targeted intensive staff training programmes to improve the quality of teaching and learning has taken place over the last six months and some impact is evident, most notably in reducing the amount of unsatisfactory teaching and in supporting the significant number of new and inexperienced teachers. New staff are well supported by a mentoring scheme.

41. The college has made appropriate responses to the requirements of the SENDA. There are policies and action plans to address the alterations needed to the college estate. Some of these include extremely challenging timescales. Staff development activities have taken place to raise awareness of the college's responsibilities. In response to the Race Relations (amendment) Act 2000, the college's racial equality policy was only approved in July 2004, well beyond the time it was required to have such a policy in place. The associated action plan has yet to be fully implemented.

42. The promotion of equality and diversity is inconsistent. The college is successfully implementing plans to develop its inclusive approach to learners. A new childcare facility has been opened for students and staff. In some parts of the college, students undertake curriculum assignments designed to develop their awareness of issues of equality and diversity, but in others there is little such work. The college has recently agreed a range of equality and diversity impact measures but much work is yet to be done to embed them. There is insufficient analysis of student data according to gender, ethnicity or disability: a weakness recognised in the college self assessment report. The college also understands the need to challenge vocational gender stereotyping by amending some of its visual publicity, which currently reinforces it.

43. The provision and use of management information has improved since the last inspection, particularly in the second half of 2003/04. Monthly reports are made to managers and course teams for enrolment, attendance and retention. Information from student questionnaires are analysed centrally and circulated to departments and programme teams. Action plans are generated using this data, which are then carefully monitored by senior managers. The college accepts that the use of this data is underdeveloped, and it needs to be made more readily accessible for staff use; for example, only managers are able to gain access to the data electronically.

44. The financial management of the college is satisfactory. A range of actions has been put in place to improve the financial performance of the college. Curriculum changes have increased the income generated by students, which was previously very low in comparison

with similar colleges. A new resource allocation model has been developed that links department budgets to the income earned by students. Improvements have been made in staff and room utilisation to improve the effective use of resources. There has been small, but increasing, revenue surplus in the last three years, although restructuring costs in 2003/04 will offset the surplus for that year. College reserves have grown from a negligible base to approximately £800,000.

45. On the basis of students' improved achievements, satisfactory provision in all curriculum areas with relatively little unsatisfactory teaching and learning, group sizes just above the average for specialist land based colleges and improvement in the effective use of teaching staff and accommodation, the college provides satisfactory value for money.

Part C: Curriculum and occupational areas

Agriculture and agricultural engineering

Overall provision in this area is **satisfactory (grade 3)**

Contributory grade for work-based learning is **satisfactory (grade 3)**

Strengths

- high pass and retention rates on most courses
- much good teaching in practical lessons
- improved prospects of employment through achievement of a wide range of additional qualifications.

Weaknesses

- slow progress towards framework achievement for work-based learners
- poor farm buildings and agricultural engineering equipment
- ineffective use of initial assessment to plan support for learning.

Scope of provision

46. There are 132 students on full-time programmes in agriculture, agricultural engineering and foundation. These include 21 students studying the college 'Routes' programme at pre-entry and entry level and 16 students on the certificate in land-based studies programme; 27 students on the first diploma in agriculture or the first diploma in land-based technology; and 68 students on the national diploma in agriculture or the national diploma in land-based technology. National diploma courses are scheduled to last three years, with the middle year spent on an industrial work experience placement. There are 75 work-based learners, comprising 55 apprentices and 17 advanced apprentices and 3 on NVQ programmes. These learners are working towards NVQs in livestock production and mixed farming at levels 2 and 3, livestock management at level 4 and service engineering qualifications at levels 2 and 3. The 'Routes' programme covers pre-entry and entry level and a certificate in land-based studies is offered at level 1. A range of agriculture-related short courses is also offered.

Achievement and standards

47. Retention rates on full-time courses are good and pass rates on the full-time engineering programmes are high. These rates have been consistently above national averages for the last two years. Progress towards achievement of apprenticeship frameworks

is slow. Of the 31 learners who started their programme in 2001/02, 4 are still in training. This is well past their planned completion date. Some learners who are still in learning are making slow progress. The standard of students' lesson work and assessed work is satisfactory. In a few theory lessons, the more able students are insufficiently challenged and too little encouragement is given to the less able students. Teachers and students often make effective reference to their own work practice and experience. Students ask relevant questions and express their views confidently. They work well together. Students on the pre-entry and entry programme develop good personal skills. In their third year, students on the national diploma in agriculture course effectively supervise younger students on duties around the farm. Work-based learners are confident in explaining the NVQ content and key skill element of the programme. Their portfolios are well structured and contain good evidence of practical competence.

A sample of retention and pass rates in agriculture and agricultural engineering, 2002 to 2004

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2002	2003	2004
Rough terrain telescopic materials handler operation	entry	No. of starts	21	32	28
		% retention	100	100	100
		% pass rate	19	84	86
First diploma in agriculture	2	No. of starts	*	7	10
		% retention	*	86	90
		% pass rate	*	100	89
First diploma in agricultural engineering **	2	No. of starts	10	**	**
		% retention	100	**	**
		% pass rate	90	**	**
First diploma in land-based technology	2	No. of starts	*	8	9
		% retention	*	75	89
		% pass rate	*	83	88

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2002	2003	2004
National diploma in agricultural engineering ***	3	No. of starts	15	***	***
		% retention	87	***	***
		% pass rate	92	***	***
National diploma in land-based technology	3	No. of starts	*	9	9
		% retention	*	67	89
		% pass rate	*	100	100
National diploma in agriculture	3	No. of starts	11	10	12
		% retention	100	90	83
		% pass rate	82	100	90

Source: ISR (2001 and 2003), college (2004)

* course did not run

** name changed in 2002 to first diploma in land-based technology

*** name changed in 2002 to national diploma in land-based technology

Quality of education and training

48. There is much good practical teaching that is linked well to theory lessons. In practical lessons, risk assessments are carried out comprehensively and there is a strong awareness and application of all aspects of safety. Work-based learners develop practical skills well. A learner demonstrated manoeuvring a tractor safely and confidently, showing effective use of a tractor-mounted mixer to make concrete for a new cubicle house, correctly answering searching questions. The level of attention to the use of correct health and safety procedures was high. Integration of key skills development in agriculture teaching is generally good but there is insufficient emphasis on key skills in a few vocational lessons. Key skills are poorly integrated on the certificate in land-based studies course. Relationships between teachers and students in most lessons are good and teachers use positive comments and praise to boost students' self-esteem. In a few lessons, teachers use ineffective questioning techniques and do not check learning regularly.

49. Some buildings and equipment are old and no longer reflect current industrial practice and do not illustrate to students how the modern farming industry operates. This is recognised by the college and a machinery replacement plan has been agreed and is about to be implemented. A farm development plan is being produced. Students have good access to ILT in the learning resource centre. This is used effectively to research assignment work. The college estate is used well to support students' practical and project work.

50. Assessment in the workplace for work-based learners is good. Assessors make good use of direct observation of learners' competence. Full-time course handbooks clearly describe assessment schedules for the year. Whilst most teachers provide constructive written feedback, this does not always explain exactly what a student has to do in order to improve their grade. Internal verification procedures are carried out adequately. However, feedback to assessors is more related to students' than assessors' performance and does not always lead to improvement. Whilst assignment briefs indicate where a student might gain evidence for key skills, teachers do not always identify the same opportunities during teaching.

51. There is a satisfactory range of provision with progression routes through to HE. Level 1 provision is limited to the level 1 in land-based studies and there are no agriculture or agricultural engineering learners on this programme in the current academic year. Programmes adequately meet the needs of learners and local circumstances and there is effective employer liaison and support in work-based learning. Full-time students take a wide range of additional qualifications that improve their employability. These qualifications are incorporated into individual students' learning plans from the start of the year at no extra cost.

52. Pastoral support is good. Tutors are readily available to students and regular tutorial sessions take place. Recording of targets for activities other than assessment are inadequate. Initial assessment identifies learning needs but the results from initial assessment are not used as a basis for planning support and target setting in tutorials. This information is not used to help develop schemes of work and lesson plans. In the 'Routes' programme, information from diagnostic assessment is not effectively integrated into individual learning plans to develop appropriate and clear vocational targets.

Leadership and management

53. Leadership and management of this curriculum area are satisfactory. Communication systems are improving and staff are positive about developments. A range of appropriate capital development and replacement plans is being prepared. The college has recently introduced standardised policies and procedures for quality assurance. Although adequate, the use of these is underdeveloped and has yet to have a full impact on improving quality. Teams meet regularly and meetings have a standard format. Minutes from team meeting at individual course level sometimes lack detail. Action plans resulting from regular student feedback are acted upon promptly. The self-assessment report accurately identifies many of the strengths and weaknesses. The section manager receives regular management reports generated through the management information system. These reports are now being used to influence management decisions and monitor performance more effectively. A number of changes to the qualifications offered at foundation level have contributed to staff having an unclear picture of performance over time, particularly with regard to student recruitment, retention and achievement rates.

Animal care

Overall provision in this area is **satisfactory (grade 3)**

Strengths

- high retention and pass rates on national certificate in animal care
- good support for individual students' needs
- good specialist resources to support veterinary nursing courses
- high rates of student progression
- good range of animals that support practical teaching.

Weaknesses

- much dull and uninspiring teaching
- insufficient co-ordination of theory and practical work
- weak target setting in tutorials
- poor management of the veterinary nursing curriculum.

Scope of provision

54. The college offers full-time and part-time courses in animal care and veterinary nursing. In animal care, 120 students are enrolled on full-time courses. At level 2, the college offers a first diploma and national certificate and, at level 3, a national diploma and a national award. Most students are aged 16 to 18 and attend full time. Additional qualifications offered include manual handling, Awarding Body Consortium (ABC) certificate in animal care and a certificate in donkey care. Six learners are following work-based apprenticeships. There are 30 students who attend day-release veterinary nursing courses and six students who attend by block release. Part-time courses available include canine studies and basic grooming.

Achievement and standards

55. Retention and pass rates on the national certificate in animal care are good. Pass rates on first and national diploma are close to the national average. Students on veterinary nursing courses make slow progress towards completing their NVQs. Pass rates in the animal nursing assistant course are good, at above 90% for the last two years. Pass rates in most veterinary nursing external examinations are good but are declining, the level 3 pass rate in 2004 was low as only four of the eight completing students took the exam. There are low completion rates on the work-based apprenticeship. Standards of students' work are

adequate. In coursework, too much work is copied from the internet. Practical skill development is satisfactory and students develop appropriate animal handling skills. The programme of unit duties intended to develop further competence is limited.

A sample of retention and pass rates in animal care, 2002 to 2004

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2002	2003	2004
First diploma animal care	2	No. of starts	20	24	*
		% retention	90	71	*
		% pass rate	78	88	*
National certificate in animal care	2	No. of starts	21	22	30
		% retention	81	95	100
		% pass rate	94	100	97
National diploma in animal management	3	No. of starts	42	35	29
		% retention	69	63	69
		% pass rate	86	91	90

Source: ISR (2002 and 2003), college (2004)

* course did not run

Quality of education and training

56. Almost all teaching is satisfactory and only a small proportion is good or better. Health and safety awareness in teaching is high and reinforced well, especially in practical sessions. Risk assessments are comprehensively completed for all sessions and are prominently displayed in practical areas. The teaching of theory and practical is insufficiently co-ordinated, which results in too little reinforcement of theory through practical work. Teachers who teach practical work are often not fully aware of what related theory has been taught. For example, in a practical veterinary nursing lesson on emergency resuscitation, students were unable to participate fully in a role play activity as they had insufficient knowledge of the technique to use. Much teaching is dull and uninspiring. Insufficient variety of activity and an over-reliance on completing gapped hand-outs by copying from an overhead projector fails to inspire and maintain the full interest of students. Well-prepared hand-outs and study packs, most of which are of good quality, provide useful reference notes for students. Schemes of work are varied in quality; the best are thorough, others lack detail with much repetition of teaching methods and activities.

57. The animal care resources have been considerably improved from an unsatisfactory state at the time of the last inspection. A new kennel block and a building that has been redeployed to provide additional teaching space, including a classroom, an animal room and an indoor dog training area, are now available and enhance teaching. The uneven cobbled surface in the animal care unit has been replaced and there have been significant improvements in the number and range of animals and the management of the resources. Species include a good range of small mammals, goats, snakes, lizards, fish and birds as well as some more exotic mammals including ring-tailed lemurs. Good resources are in place to support veterinary nursing courses including a purpose-built veterinary surgery. It is fully equipped and used for demonstrations and preparing for practical examinations.

58. Effective and prompt initial assessment of learning and personal needs ensures good awareness of the needs of individual students. This leads to the provision of good learning support. Students are regularly assessed, with a good mix of in-class tests, practical assessments and regular assignments. A new programme of tests and assignments has been introduced in veterinary nursing to meet the needs of the awarding body. Assignments are not always marked and returned within the time specified in the college policy. Key skills development is identified in assignment work, but opportunities to assess key skills in practical sessions and duties are missed.

59. Progression routes from level 1 to HE courses in animal care are good. The college has introduced a level 1 land-based course with an animal care option. Progression rates are high; for example, in 2003/04, well over two-thirds of students completing a level 2 programme progressed to further courses. There is a good range of provision in veterinary nursing with block-release and day-release courses offered. Little use of the accreditation of prior learning results in some students repeating tasks they have completed on previous courses. There is little provision for part-time learning.

60. Support for students with personal issues is good. Staff are readily available to help and there is a wide range of advice and support services available, including careers, finance and personal guidance. Students value highly the support available to them. Tutorials are regular and well planned. Recording of tutorials has improved in the current academic year, but little effective target setting takes place to promote improvement and challenge performance.

Leadership and management

61. Curriculum management is satisfactory. Quality assurance has improved through the college-wide revision of many procedures and associated documentation and greater consistency of practice is being achieved. The self-assessment process involved all staff and provided a useful analysis for making improvements. Planning of practical sessions is satisfactory. The management of veterinary nursing qualifications is weak. Awarding body guidelines have not been followed and four students have studied the NVQ level 3 course without having the appropriate entry requirements. All students on veterinary nursing programmes have been enrolled with the college for the NVQ in veterinary nursing; this aim is identified on their learning plan. Many of the students have made slow progress in

achieving this qualification which has delayed examination success for some. The college has decided to cease operating as a VNAC. This decision was made without full consultation with employers, some of whom are unhappy with the decision.

Horticulture, floristry, countryside and arboriculture

Overall provision in this area is **satisfactory (grade 3)**

Strengths

- very high pass rates on floristry programmes
- high retention rates on most programmes
- good practical teaching that makes effective use of practical resources
- extensive range of additional vocational qualifications.

Weaknesses

- weak integration of key skills in teaching
- poorly structured theory lessons
- ineffective literacy and numeracy support.

Scope of provision

62. The college offers a wide range of courses in horticulture, floristry, countryside and arboriculture from level 1 to foundation degree level that meet the needs of students with widely differing levels of ability. Full-time courses include a new level 1 programme, first diplomas, national and advanced national certificates and national diplomas. Part-time courses include NVQs in horticulture, environmental conservation, floristry and tree work, and RHS general and advanced certificates. Students can gain access to a range of additional qualifications such as pesticide application and use of chainsaws. A total of 493 students are enrolled: 105 on full-time courses, 375 on part-time courses and 13 on work-based learning in apprenticeships and advanced apprenticeships. Most courses have a mix of students aged 16 to 18 and adult students.

Achievement and standards

63. Retention and pass rates on most courses are at or above national averages. Pass rates on floristry courses are very good. All students who completed the national certificate in floristry course passed in the last 2 years. Pass rates for key skills awards for horticulture and countryside students and for NVQ level 2 in amenity horticulture are low. The retention rate on royal horticultural society courses is high. Pass rates on the RHS general certificate are high, but are low on the advanced certificate. Pass rates on industrial short programmes that lead to technical certificates are high. Attendance and punctuality are good. The standard of students' practical work in floristry is very good. The standard of students' work in theory lessons is at a level expected relative to the stage of the course they are on. Some students in sugar crafts have gained national recognition in competition work.

A sample of retention and pass rates in horticulture, floristry, countryside and arboriculture, 2002 to 2004

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2002	2003	2004
Foundation in floristry	1	No. of starts	*	8	27
		% retention	*	50	96
		% pass rate	*	0	96
National certificate in arboriculture	2	No. of starts	*	*	16
		% retention	*	*	94
		% pass rate	*	*	87
National certificate in floristry	2	No. of starts	4	14	17
		% retention	100	92	88
		% pass rate	75	100	100
National certificate in horticulture	2	No. of starts	24	14	14
		% retention	88	86	93
		% pass rate	81	42	85
Certificate of competence in chainsaws and related operations	2	No. of starts	*	458	364
		% retention	*	100	96
		% pass rate	*	91	90
RHS advanced certificate	3	No. of starts	24	43	23
		% retention	67	65	96
		% pass rate	0	20	**
National diploma in countryside management	3	No. of starts	8	7	19
		% retention	100	71	68
		% pass rate	75	80	85

Source: ISR (2001 and 2003), college (2004)

* course did not run

** pass rate not yet available

Quality of education and training

64. Most practical teaching is good and makes effective use of practical resources. Teaching and learning in floristry is consistently good or better. Too many theory lessons in horticulture and countryside are poorly structured and students lack motivation and become disinterested. Little account is taken of students' individual learning styles. Teachers do not sufficiently adapt teaching methods to meet individual students' needs. In the less effective lessons, the use of gapped handouts becomes repetitive. In the better lessons, good use is made of ILT by teachers. For example, in one horticulture lesson, an interactive whiteboard was used effectively to help students to identify parts of flowers and in another lesson a teacher had developed illustrated handouts and provided a computer for further research on plant identification as an extension exercise for those students who completed their work early.

65. The integration of key skills development work into teaching is ineffective. Lesson plans rarely identify key skills teaching points and opportunities to develop or assess key skills during lessons are missed. The importance of health and safety is effectively introduced during induction. Risk assessments are used well in practical lessons but in some lessons the reinforcement of safe working practices is low.

66. A wide range of college resources is used effectively to support learning. Staff work well to create good learning environments in classrooms and make good use of the extensive college estate. The floristry and plant retail shop is well managed and provides good opportunities to develop students' learning. Access to some floristry and horticulture classrooms is poor. Students have access to a good range of learning resources for private study. Staff are well qualified and have valuable recent industrial experience which is used well to bring commercial relevance to their teaching. Learning support assistants attend some lessons to support individual students to work towards achieving of their qualifications. However, this support is ineffective in helping students with their literacy and numeracy skills. Learning support assistants are not sufficiently trained to support this need.

67. Assessment of students learning is satisfactory and is used appropriately to monitor students' progress. Assignment planning is detailed and students are made aware of the assessment criteria early in the programme. Arrangements to regularly inform parents or guardians about the progress made by students aged 16 to 18 are inadequate. Progress reports to employers lack detail and are insufficiently helpful. The college has introduced a revised internal verification policy and procedures. Strategies are in place to address some of the poor internal verification practice in countryside studies and some improvement is evident.

68. There is an appropriate range of full-time and part-time courses that take account of local rural industry needs. Progression opportunities exist from level 1 to level 4. Promotion of the new level 1 course in horticulture is poor and uptake is low. There is an extensive

range of additional qualifications available to full-time students which enable them to better progress into employment. Full-time students can take many of these qualifications free of additional charges. Students appreciate the access to a good range of enrichment activities. These include sporting and social activities, local visits and opportunities to attend talks on drug and alcohol awareness.

69. Students are given detailed and clear initial advice and guidance. Support for students is satisfactory. Initial assessment of individual learning needs is thorough and results are quickly passed onto tutors. Learning support assistants work effectively with students who need additional support to develop their vocational skills and to be successful in their learning. Insufficient attention is given to the development of literacy and numeracy skills. The induction programme works well. Students are introduced to all aspects of the college, complete team-building exercises and undertake visits to local businesses that are relevant to their course. The college has revised the tutorial system. Tutorial practice is inconsistent. In the less effective tutorials, students do not receive sufficient support to help them to identify what they need to do in order to make effective progress. Target setting is insufficiently challenging and action plans do not identify the support students need in order to effectively progress. Procedures to monitor punctuality and attendance are effective.

Leadership and management

70. Staff have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities and speak positively about the college's plans for development. Communication between staff and managers is good. Staff meet regularly with their managers and use standing agenda items to ensure important issues are discussed. Meeting records provide a clear account of what has taken place. Programme files are comprehensive and well maintained. Demanding targets for recruitment, attendance, retention and achievement rates have been set but are not fully understood by staff. Improved quality assurance procedures are in place to raise standards; these include programme reviews and departmental development plans. However, most programme reviews are poor and many are incomplete. Not all staff have received a recent appraisal of their performance. Staff appreciate the opportunities now available for personal development and the training that has been introduced to improve the standards of their work. Staff have been observed by external consultants in a lesson observation scheme. This has been used to establish an internal scheme using both graded and peer observations. The self-assessment report accurately identifies many strengths and weaknesses.

Outdoor leisure management

Overall provision in this area is **good (grade 2)**

Contributory grade for equine studies is **satisfactory (grade 3)**

Strengths

- high pass rates on full-time courses
- extensive range of specialist resources for outdoor leisure management
- good achievement of additional outdoor leisure qualifications by full-time students.

Weaknesses

- insufficient reinforcement of safe working practices in equine practical lessons
- insufficient differentiation in theory sessions to meet students' needs in outdoor leisure management
- low retention rate on first diploma in horse care.

Scope of provision

71. A range of full-time courses at level 2 and 3 are offered in equine studies, outdoor leisure, sport and recreation. At level 3, 52 students are enrolled on a national certificate in the sport (outdoor education) course and a further 52 on national diploma in horse management. At level 2, 18 students are enrolled on a NVQ in sport and allied occupations, 21 students are on a certificate in outdoor recreation and a further 7 are on first diploma in horse care. Students on outdoor leisure management courses take a wide range of additional qualifications offered by national governing bodies in canoeing, sailing, climbing, mountain leadership and first aid.

Achievement and standards

72. Pass rates on all full-time courses are well above national averages. Pass rates on the national certificate in sport (outdoor education), national diploma in horse management and first diploma in horse care were 100% in 2003/04. Pass rates on these courses have been consistently high over the last three years. Pass rates of additional qualifications in outdoor leisure management practical are high. Over 400 additional qualifications were successfully completed by students in 2003/04.

73. The retention rate on the first diploma in horse care is low. Only half of the students who started in 2003/04 were retained. Retention rates on other courses are above national averages. Students show adequate levels of attainment. Students in outdoor leisure

management show enthusiasm and motivation for their studies and display an eagerness to learn new skills and techniques. In equine studies, standards of work in routine yard duties are satisfactory but students rarely show high standards of personal turnout or the ability to work at comparable industrial speeds, even for simple tasks. Attendance rates in lessons are high and punctuality is good.

A sample of retention and pass rates in outdoor leisure management, 2002 to 2004

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2002	2003	2004
First diploma in horse care	2	No. of starts	14	11	18
		% retention	86	82	50
		% pass rate	100	100	100
Certificate in activity leadership	2	No. of starts	11	11	25
		% retention	82	100	92
		% pass rate	100	45	78
Progression award in sport and leisure	2	No. of starts	31	16	21
		% retention	90	75	90
		% pass rate	50	83	79
National diploma in horse management	3	No. of starts	27	17	19
		% retention	85	82	89
		% pass rate	100	93	100
National certificate in sport (outdoor education)	3	No. of starts	*	*	24
		% retention	*	*	88
		% pass rate	*	*	100
National diploma in outdoor recreation	3	No. of starts	28	23	**
		% retention	75	78	**
		% pass rate	100	100	**

Source: ISR (2002 and 2003), college (2004)

* course did not run

** course replaced by national certificate in sport (outdoor education)

Quality of education and training

74. Nearly two-thirds of teaching is good or better with a small proportion of very good teaching. The remaining third of teaching is mostly satisfactory. Students have developed productive working relationships with teaching staff. Most lessons are well planned and involve students well. A minority of lessons, particularly theory lessons, are dominated by the teacher and fail to engage all the students. In these lessons, too little variety of teaching activities and some unchallenging work result in a lack of stimulation of students and do not stretch the more able students or those with significant prior knowledge. In one theory lesson for outdoor leisure management students, ineffective use was made of students' experience on work placement. This resulted in low levels of learning within the group and limited development of evaluation skills.

75. Teaching in outdoor leisure management reinforces health and safety procedures and good industrial practice. In equine practical lessons, safe working practices are insufficiently reinforced and a small amount of poor planning of lessons results in failure to ensure that all students learn adequately. Teaching of key skills works well and students develop their research and analytical skills effectively. In an outdoor leisure management lesson, students made a clear and effective analysis and evaluation of vocationally relevant job adverts.

76. An extensive range of specialist resources for outdoor leisure management courses is used effectively in teaching. Specialist climbing and water-based equipment is well maintained and checked regularly for safety. Equine facilities include an improved outdoor riding arena and suitable horses that are suitable for the range of students' riding levels. Outdoor leisure management and equine studies staff are vocationally well qualified and hold relevant sports awarding body instructor/coach status.

77. All students are interviewed and initial assessment is thorough. Equine studies students receive an initial riding assessment which is used effectively to inform practical groupings. Teachers set vocationally relevant assignments and provide regular homework for students. Effective written feedback is provided on assignment work including information on how to improve grades. Work is annotated with appropriate corrections to spelling and grammar. Revised internal verification procedures have had a positive impact on assessors' performance.

78. The range of outdoor leisure management programmes at level 2 and 3 is good. The availability of an extensive range of additional courses that lead to national sports governing body awards are highly valued by students and improve their employment prospects. Level 2 and 3 programmes in equine studies are well established but the provision of part-time and short courses is small. Level 1 provision is available through a generic land-based course with subject options; however, no students have made use of this route to date. There are good links with the equine industry and excellent links with outdoor leisure management industry locally and nationally. Employer feedback is very positive and analysis of students'

destinations shows very good progression into employment. Progression rates to HE of outdoor leisure management students are low.

79. Links with work placement employers are good and industrial liaison advisory groups meet annually. Work placements for all learners provide good-quality training opportunities. Students take an active part in enrichment activities. These include field trips, visits and for equestrian students, teaching clinics. Guest speakers are invited to the college to give talks that enable students to find out about current issues in their vocational field.

80. Students receive good initial guidance from subject-specific staff to help them choose the correct course. An effective induction programme enables students to settle into their course quickly. Tutorials are used to monitor students' progress but targets set for students are too vague and are insufficiently challenging. Students obtain useful careers advice from lecturing staff as well as from the college careers advisor. An effective team of college wardens cares for the pastoral needs of all students and appropriately refers those with personal issues either to personal tutors or to the college counsellor as necessary.

Leadership and management

81. Leadership and management of outdoor leisure and equine studies are generally good. Course management is effective and productive. Management of the equine practical unit is satisfactory but there is often too little enforcement of safe working practices and low standards of work are insufficiently challenged. For example, during routine yard duties untidy mucking out and careless initial disposal of waste create hazards.

82. New members of staff have a mentor and are well supported in their teaching. Minutes of meetings are recorded but with variable quality. In some cases, action points are not identified or followed up. Management information is readily available on students' performance and attendance. Course teams set appropriate targets that are based on this information and are judged against college targets. Staff appraisal and planning of staff development is good, particularly in outdoor leisure management. Self-assessment reports are completed promptly and are mainly accurate. However, support and stable yard staff were not sufficiently involved in the development of the equine studies self-assessment report.

Part D: College data

Table 1: Enrolments by level of study and age 2002/03

Level	16–18 %	19+ %
1	31	38
2	46	24
3	13	12
4/5	0	1
Other	10	25
Total	100	100

Source: provided by the college in 2004

Table 2: Enrolments by curriculum area and age 2002/03

Curriculum area	16–18 No.	19+ No.	Total Enrolments (%)
Science and mathematics	307	51	4
Land-based provision	644	1,695	26
Construction	5	12	0
Engineering, technology and manufacture	26	18	1
Business administration, management and professional	1	392	5
Information and communication technology	321	523	10
Retailing, customer service and transportation	43	29	1
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	368	1,436	21
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	0	0	0
Health, social care and public services	183	1,337	18
Visual and performing arts and media	0	29	0
Humanities	0	0	0
English, languages and communication	337	52	5

Curriculum area	16–18 No.	19+ No.	Total Enrolments (%)
Foundation programmes	675	74	9
Total	2,910	5,648	100

Source: provided by the college in 2004

Table 3: Retention and achievement

Level (Long Courses)	Retention and pass rate	Completion year					
		16–18			19+		
		2000	2001	2002	2000	2001	2002
1	Starters excluding transfers	104	4	34	165	76	105
	Retention rate %	100	100	88	90	91	87
	National average %	84	82	80	80	70	68
	Pass rate %	97	100	74	48	74	71
	National average %	58	62	59	53	54	50
2	Starters excluding transfers	147	170	135	306	323	347
	Retention rate %	88	84	83	75	71	66
	National average %	77	77	77	71	72	70
	Pass rate %	62	60	51	56	54	38
	National average %	56	59	57	49	53	53
3	Starters excluding transfers	157	75	58	176	41	47
	Retention rate %	82	81	77	73	66	80
	National average %	73	75	75	70	66	59
	Pass rate %	75	75	66	41	35	48
	National average %	58	62	63	47	45	45
4/5	Starters excluding transfers	2	1	0	11	8	7
	Retention rate %	50	100	0	100	75	100
	National average %	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Pass rate %	0	100	0	0	75	100
	National average %	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Note: summary of retention and achievement for the last three years by age and level of course, compared against national averages for colleges of the same type (that is general FE/tertiary colleges or sixth form colleges).

Sources of information:

1. *National averages: Benchmarking Data 2000/01 to 2002/03: Retention and Achievement Rates in Further Education Colleges in England, Learning and Skills Council, September 2003.*
2. *College rates for 2000/01 to 2002/03: College ISR.*

Table 4: Quality of teaching observed during the inspection by level

Courses	Teaching judged to be:			No of sessions observed
	Good or better %	Satisfactory %	Less than satisfactory %	
Level 3 (advanced)	53	41	6	32
Level 2 (intermediate)	55	45	0	29
Level 1 (foundation)	60	20	20	5
Other sessions	50	50	0	6
Totals	54	42	4	72

Notes