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*The Education and Training Inspectorate -
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Providing Inspection Services for
**Department of Education
Department for Employment and Learning
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure**



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of an Inspection

**College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise,
Greenmount Campus**

Inspected: February 2009

CONTENTS

| Section | Page |
|---|-------------|
| PART 1 | |
| 1. INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| 2. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS | 2 |
| 3. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT | 2 |
| 4. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS | 4 |
| 5. QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING | 4 |
| PART 2 | |
| CURRICULUM AREA REPORTS | |
| 6. AGRICULTURE | 6 |
| 7. AGRICULTURE ENGINEERING (LAND-BASED TECHNOLOGY) | 8 |
| 8. FLORISTRY | 10 |
| 9. HORTICULTURE | 12 |
| 10. CONCLUSION | 13 |
| 11. KEY PRIORITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT | 13 |

A number of quantitative terms are used in the report. In percentages, the terms correspond as follows:

| | | |
|---------------|---|---------------------------|
| More than 90% | - | almost/nearly all |
| 75%-90% | - | most |
| 50%-74% | - | a majority |
| 30%-49% | - | a significant minority |
| 10%-29% | - | a minority |
| Less than 10% | - | very few/a small minority |

All of the data included in this report is supplied by the college.

PART 1

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) was formed in April 2004 as a result of the recommendations of a Review Panel chaired by Dr Daniel O'Hare¹. It is an amalgamation of the three former agricultural colleges located in Greenmount, Antrim; Loughrey, Cookstown; and Enniskillen. The CAFRE is an integral part of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) and has a service level agreement with DARD to provide education and training for the land-based and food industries.

1.2 The College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise is funded by DARD to deliver further and higher education, industry training, knowledge and technology transfer and benchmarking programmes. At the Greenmount campus, links have been established with the Northern Regional College and schools involved in the Area Learning Community to deliver Vocational Enhancement Programmes. Training for Success Programmes are also delivered in conjunction with the Department for Employment and Learning (Department).

1.3 Each campus of CAFRE focuses on specific disciplines with agriculture, horticulture, land-based technology and veterinary nursing being delivered at the Greenmount Campus. The Essential Skills provision at Greenmount is delivered by qualified Lecturers from the Northern Regional College.

1.4 The Greenmount campus of CAFRE is located on the outskirts of Antrim town and is situated on an extensive site of approximately 18 hectares of landscaped grounds which were originally laid out in the 19th century. In addition, the college has two college farms of approximately 1300 hectares; two horticulture development centres; a modern machinery and buildings centre and extensive teaching, residential and recreational facilities for the students including an educational resource centre. Students are recruited from across Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and Scotland. In September 2009, the number of students recruited onto the agricultural programmes inspected, increased by approximately 37% to approximately 40 students on each course.

1.5 The DARD commissioned the Education and Training Inspectorate (the Inspectorate) to evaluate the quality of the education and training provision of all three campuses over a three year period.

This inspection focused on the further education provision in the areas of agriculture, horticulture, floristry and land based technology provided on the Greenmount campus. The inspection team was joined by an Associate Assessor from Scotland to assist in the inspection of the agriculture and horticulture programmes. A large sample of students completed a confidential pastoral care questionnaire prior to the inspection, which provided them with the opportunity to comment on the quality of their learning experiences and the pastoral care arrangements in CAFRE. Members of the inspection team interviewed groups of students during the inspection. The Director also completed a questionnaire relating to the provision of pastoral care within the organisation. The inspection team met members of the senior management team, the heads of the two education branches, course managers, lecturers, and

¹ **REPORT OF REVIEW PANEL** Education and research and development in agriculture and food science - http://www.dardni.gov.uk/report_of_o_hare_review_panel.pdf

staff in the college with cross college responsibilities. A total of 32 lessons were observed. The inspection team reviewed self-evaluation reports, minutes of course team meetings, and other college documentation.

2. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by this organisation is very good. The organisation is meeting very effectively the educational and pastoral needs of the learners; and has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

The main strengths are the:

- very good management of the college; this includes the effective self-evaluative processes which have been implemented and which have identified appropriate areas for further development;
- very good college resources, facilities and links with industry;
- very good standards of most of the students' work;
- good retention and excellent success rates;
- good ethos within the college, this includes: the very good relationships at all levels; the highly motivated and enthusiastic students, the very good relationships between staff and students and the hard work and commitment demonstrated by the staff; and
- well-designed learning programmes with a good range of practical activities.

The main areas for improvement are the:

- need for the college to update the child protection policy to provide an adequate number of designated officers for child protection;
- need for the college to develop further the range of teaching and learning approaches; and
- need for the college to ensure that students obtain appropriate qualifications in literacy and numeracy in order to improve their employability.

OVERALL QUALITY OF PROVISION

3. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

3.1 The Director of the college has a clear vision for the development and direction of CAFRE. The management structure and reporting and accountability procedures are effective. Senior and middle managers and those with posts of specific responsibility, are highly committed and carry out their duties with a high degree of professionalism and enthusiasm. All staff are highly committed to the organisation and many give willingly of their own time to support the students.

3.2 The quality management system is well established, and is based firmly on the rigorous self-evaluations undertaken by the course teams. Quantitative data relating to key performance indicators is analysed effectively and used appropriately to inform evaluation outcomes. The Teaching and Learning Committees consider all the course team self-evaluations and use these to inform the production of an overarching evaluation of the college education provision at all levels. This forms a major element of the annual education report. The action plans which arise from the findings of the review and evaluation process provide well-defined actions. Progress towards the achievement of these actions is monitored regularly through course team and management meetings.

3.3 The college business plan reflects appropriately the vision aims and goals of DARD. The targets contained within the college business plan are informed by the annual programme review and evaluations which are undertaken on an annual basis.

3.4 The process of business planning as required by DARD is being extended appropriately by the development of a college strategic plan. Although this is currently in draft form there is good evidence to indicate that this will be a very useful document to guide the future developments of the college. It provides a good analysis of the internal and external factors which impact on the colleges work.

3.5 The College Advisory Group (CAG) comprises representatives from industry, education and key external agencies. The group provide invaluable expertise relating to industry requirements, labour market intelligence and current developments within the education and training sector which serves to support the college. The role of the CAG is to provide advice at operational level to the College Director and College Management Team. However, there is scope to extend their remit to also provide strategic advice to the Department on issues which impact on the work of the college.

3.6 The College Services Branch has responsibility for student services, which includes: student support and Careers Education; Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG); and also has and an audit role within the self-evaluation process. Now that the Branch has successfully standardised procedures across the three campuses within CAFRE, there is an opportunity to review this management structure to determine if these responsibilities are in the best location in the management structure to support the teaching and learning process.

3.7 An Information Learning Technology (ILT) strategy is currently being produced and is in early draft form. Timetables and electronic registers are linked to the Management Information System (MIS). The MIS provides data and reports on student attendance. Although these reports are available they are not yet used systematically by staff to initiate improvement. Work is currently being undertaken to develop more detailed reports which will help lecturers track their students' progress and achievements in a more systematic way. The Managed Learning Environment is also being developed through the integration of the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) with the MIS. This is at an early stage and appropriate areas for further development have been identified.

3.8 The college has an appropriate range of pastoral care policies including: anti-bullying, acceptable use of internet, residential and minibus guidance. However, the child protection policy should be reviewed as a matter of urgency. At the time of the inspection only one member of staff on each campus had been identified and trained as the designated officer for child protection.

3.9 The support officer is responsible for pastoral support services and has undertaken regular and extensive staff development on a range of related conditions and issues and has good links with external agencies for referral purposes. These support services are well publicised across the campus and comprehensive records are maintained. The services are easily accessed by students who can make appointments via text and e-mail. Another dimension of support officer remit is to deliver a pilot CEIAG programme which consists of four commercially produced units. This supplements the more specialist expertise and knowledge provided by vocational specialists which is delivered within the vocational programmes. It is appropriate that the college plans to evaluate the effectiveness of this pilot.

3.10 The students have 24 hour access to Care Call which provides them with a confidential counselling service. The extent to which the students avail of this service is regularly monitored by way of usage reports produced by Care Call.

4. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

4.1 A feature of the college is the motivation and enthusiasm of almost all of the students. This is manifested in the high standard of work observed in both the practical and the theory classes. Most students have the opportunity to complete a good range of additional short courses that improve their employability.

4.2 The students have appropriate opportunities to work independently and in teams with their peers. Most have a good understanding of career progression routes.

4.3 Students from both the agricultural and floristry courses have competed in national and international skills competitions with very good success.

4.4 In the level 2 programme areas inspected, over the last three years, the student retention is very good at 89% and the success rate is excellent with 97% of the students who complete the course achieving the award. In the level 3 programme areas inspected, over the last three years, the student retention and success rates are good at 84% and 88% respectively.

5. QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

5.1 Students are initially assessed at interview, normally with a parent present. The assessment includes the identification of any special learning support required by the prospective student and records the nature of the support to be provided by the college. Those students who do not have statements of special educational need are required to obtain at their own expense an assessment by an educational psychologist. The interview record is well maintained with detailed explanation of nature of the problem or issue and identifies clearly the support required.

5.2 Although the students are well supported through their vocational lecturers, there is no planned Essential Skills (ES) provision for students on level 3 courses who do not have level 2 literacy and numeracy qualifications.

5.3 The quality of learning and teaching inspected ranged from satisfactory to very good with nearly all the sessions being good or very good. The lecturers and instructors are hard-working and committed to the success of the students. The quality of the relationships between the staff and the students is excellent. The practical work is well planned and good use is made of the excellent resources provided by the college to develop the students' practical skills. In some of the theory classes there is a need for a wider range of teaching strategies which would engage the students more actively in their own learning and build more effectively on their previous experiences.

5.4 The use of ILT to enhance and support the learning is limited mainly to PowerPoint presentations. Blackboard has been adopted as the VLE; the use of this facility by lecturers and instructors is, however, underdeveloped for further education students.

5.5 The analysis of the learner questionnaires, completed prior to the inspection indicates that approximately 89% of the trainees report high levels of satisfaction with their experiences in Greenmount.

PART 2: CURRICULUM AREA REPORTS

6. CURRICULUM AREA: AGRICULTURE

Programmes Inspected: National Certificate (City and Guilds) in Agriculture
National Diploma in Agriculture

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The National Certificate in Agriculture (NCA) is a City and Guilds level 2 one year full-time course. The main aim of the course is to develop skills and knowledge associated with animal and crop husbandry. The course introduces production and management skills and while principles are taught in the classroom, the main emphasis is on the practical application on the farm. The National Diploma in Agriculture (NDA) is a three year EdExcel level 3 full-time sandwich course with the second year being spent in a work placement. The course prepares young people well through a broad-based programme of education and training, for a future in farming and equips them with the skills to provide technical services to the industry.

6.2 MAIN FINDINGS

The main strengths are the:

- high levels of student motivation and the very good relationships between staff and students;
- very good college resources and facilities;
- excellent range of additional courses, very good practical training and, in the case of the NDA students, the work placements during the second year, all of which improve the students' employability;
- very good standards of most of the students' work and excellent success rates; and
- technical expertise of staff and their commitment to ensure the students achieve their full potential.

The main areas for improvement are the:

- need to develop further the approaches to teaching and learning; and
- need to provide opportunities for a minority of level 3 students to obtain level 2 literacy and numeracy qualifications.

6.3 LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The courses are well managed by the Course Manager assisted by the Course Year Managers. Student recruitment in both courses has increased this year by approximately 37% to approximately 40%. The courses are well organised and are designed so that the students also achieve either a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) level 2 or 3 in recognition of

the practical skills they have gained in addition to their National Certificate or National Diploma. The NCA students are provided with ES classes if they do not already have a level 2 literacy or numeracy qualification. There is no ES provision for the minority of students on the NDA who do not have a level 2 literacy or numeracy qualification. The technical expertise of the staff is very high and they demonstrate a high commitment to their students. The resources and facilities provided by the college are very good. There are good links with industry that are manifested in visits to the industry and the year long placements that are an integral part of the NDA programme.

6.4 ACHIEVEMENT AND STANDARDS

Almost all of the students are very highly motivated and the standard of their work is very high. They acquire a wide range of practical skills both in the practical sessions and in the routine farm practical work. In this routine farm work the students are required to carry out a range of tasks including milking cows and feeding calves with some of the sessions starting at 6.00 am. Students were observed carrying out a range of activities including dehorning calves, and carrying out a pollution control and waste management audit to a high standard. Over the past three years the retention rates on the NCA programme are good at 87% and the success rates are excellent at 96%. The retention on the NDA programme has improved over the last three years from modest to good at 82%. The success rate for the NDA programme last year was excellent at 95%. Progression rates to employment and further and higher education are excellent.

6.5 QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING AND TEACHING

The quality of the provision for teaching and learning is very good with a good blend of practical and theory activities that consolidates the learning. The provision is further enhanced by an extensive range of relevant short courses that greatly improve the employability of the students. All of the NDA students spend their second year in an appropriate placement that is organised by the college. All of the third year students spoke very positively about their experiences during placement and the support they received from the college. The quality of the teaching and learning ranged from good to very good with the majority being good. The relationships between the staff and students are very good. The lessons are all well planned and organised; however, there is a need to develop strategies to engage the learners more effectively in their learning during the theory sessions.

6.6 CONCLUSION

In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by this organisation is very good. The organisation is meeting very effectively the educational and pastoral needs of the learners; and has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

7. CURRICULUM AREA: AGRICULTURAL ENGINEERING (LAND BASED TECHNOLOGY)

Programmes Inspected: First Diploma in Land Based Technology National Diploma in Land Based Technology

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The further education provision for land based technology provision comprises of two full-time EdExcel programmes: a one year First Diploma (level 2) and a two-year National Diploma (level 3), which complement well the college's apprenticeship provision. Progression to these programmes is from secondary schools across the whole of Northern Ireland. Enrolment is steady, with an average of 15 students recruited annually to each programme. Almost all of the students on the National Diploma hold at least four General Certificates of Secondary Education (GCSEs) at grade C or above. Most (85%) of the students on the First Diploma do not hold a level 2 qualification in English or mathematics.

7.2 MAIN FINDINGS

The main strengths are the:

- well-designed learning programmes;
- good to excellent standards of work;
- excellent retention and success rates for the First Diploma;
- quality of the relationships at all levels and the supportive learning environment which are very good;
- excellent workshops and learning resources; and
- hard-working, very committed and appropriately qualified staff.

The main areas for improvement are the:

- need to increase the range of learning and teaching approaches employed during the theory sessions; and
- need to develop the literacy skills of a minority of the students.

7.3 LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The quality of the leadership and management is very good; the programmes are coherent and well-organised. The programmes are monitored and reviewed regularly and effectively to ensure that they meet the needs of the learners. The well-established links and partnerships with employers across Northern Ireland, Scotland and England, and with land based colleges in England, ensure the content and structure of the students' learning programmes are aligned well to the needs of the agricultural industry. The quality of the learning resources is very good, particularly the workshops and the range of machinery used for training purposes. The

lecturers and instructors are hard-working and are very committed to providing the students with relevant and good quality learning experiences. They are appropriately qualified and experienced and have the necessary specialist skills and knowledge to support and develop the provision.

7.4 ACHIEVEMENT AND STANDARDS

The standards of the students' work are mostly very good. Their practical occupational skills are well-developed; they are able to carry out competently a range of routine maintenance and repair tasks to agricultural machinery. They have a very good understanding of the technical details and operating settings of tractors and agricultural implements. Most demonstrate good personal capabilities, including working as part of a team, taking responsibility for their own learning and development, problem solving, and good timekeeping. Many of the students also develop additional employability skills including proficiency in agricultural machinery operation, fabrication and welding. Most of the students' literacy and numeracy skills are satisfactory or better. Over the past year, retention and success rates are excellent at 92% and 100% respectively for the First Diploma last year. Due to course restructuring, retention rates on the National Diploma have improved significantly over the last three years, and are now excellent at 94%. The success rate however is modest at 62%. Progression rates to employment or higher educational programmes are good.

7.5 QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING AND TEACHING

The learning programmes are well-designed and provide the students with a broad and balanced curriculum. There are excellent opportunities for the students to develop both their practical occupational skills and technical knowledge. Each week the students are provided with suitable time in practical workshops to consolidate their technical knowledge, gain a range of hand skills, and to develop their capacity to diagnose and repair faults in agricultural machinery. In addition to their core programme, the students take short courses in health and safety, and machinery operation, which enhance their employability. There is also an 'Engineering Club' organised by the lecturers for the students to attend on a voluntary basis in the evenings. This provided the students with useful opportunities to use the college's facilities to design and manufacture basic agricultural implements of their choice. The students also benefit significantly from the extended periods of relevant work-experience to develop further their skills and knowledge and apply these in the workplace.

There is a conducive and supportive learning environment which promotes excellent working relationships between the students and their peers, their lecturers and instructors. The practical lessons, are well-structured, interesting and appropriately challenging, and are linked clearly to the students' theory sessions and industry practice. The students engage well in these problem-solving learning activities, and respond appropriately to questioning and extended discussions. On occasions, the range of learning and teaching approaches in theory lessons is limited. In particular, more effective use could be made of ILT to enhance and support the learning. As a result, the students are not engaged actively enough in the learning process. In addition, the use of the college's VLE to support the students' learning and assessment is underdeveloped.

Assessment activities are planned well; assignment briefs are clear with good guidance on assessment criteria. Feedback to students on the quality of their written assignments is mainly good. There are good opportunities within the students' vocational learning and assessment to allow them to develop further their communication skills, particularly for a minority who demonstrate weaknesses in their spelling and grammar; however these opportunities are not exploited fully.

7.6 CONCLUSION

In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by this organisation is very good. The organisation is meeting very effectively the educational and pastoral needs of the learners; and has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

8. CURRICULUM AREA: FLORISTRY

Programmes Inspected: National Certificate in Floristry

8.1 INTRODUCTION

The National Certificate in Floristry is a BTEC level 2 one year full-time course. The students attend the college for four days per week and spend at least a day on industry placement with an established floristry business. The aim of the course is to provide the students with the necessary skills for employment in the floristry industry. The Greenmount campus of CAFRE provides the only full-time floristry programme in Northern Ireland.

8.2 MAIN FINDINGS

The main strengths are the:

- highly motivated and enthusiastic students;
- well planned and organised teaching sessions;
- good range of practical activities which are well-managed; the standards achieved in these skills-based activities are excellent;
- high standards achieved by the students, the excellent retention rates and the good success rates;
- very good links with industry; and
- overall management of the course which is very good.

The main areas for improvement are the:

- need for an evaluation of an appropriate progression route for students; and
- need to build more effectively on the students' previous experiences, and their knowledge and understanding of the vocational area, and adapt the teaching strategies to cater for the wide range of these experiences.

8.3 LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The course is well managed and organised by a hard-working and effective course manager. The course manager and lecturers have worked hard, with notable success, to develop strong and productive links with industry. They have undertaken a thorough review and evaluation of the teaching programme and have identified appropriate areas for further development, including the need to provide the students with appropriate opportunities for progression on completion of this course.

8.4 ACHIEVEMENT AND STANDARDS

The success rates are good with 88% of students achieving the qualification over the past three years. Over the same period the retention rates have been excellent at 93%. In addition, a number of students do very well in national and international skills competitions. Most of the students demonstrate a good level of skill in literacy in their assignment and coursework materials and a number of good opportunities are provided for them to develop their numeracy skills. A small number of students enrolled on the course, however, do not have relevant qualifications in literacy and numeracy. In order to improve the employability skills of the students completing this course, there is a need to ensure that all students who have a deficit obtain appropriate additional qualifications in literacy and numeracy.

8.5 QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING AND TEACHING

The Greenmount campus has excellent purpose-built facilities for floristry education and training, including two floristry studios with appropriate facilities for refrigerated display and storage of cut flowers and a retail area for the teaching of display skills. There are good links with the Campus Horticulture Development Centre so students can see at first hand how cut flowers and other commercial plant materials are produced commercially. The lecturers' planning for learning and teaching is thorough and provides a good level of detail on the content and general teaching approaches to be employed during the more formal lecture sessions. During the inspection good attempts were made to engage the students in group and paired work. In the main, however, this is an area which could be developed further. In particular, the teaching staff need to take the students' wide range of previous knowledge, understanding and experience into account when planning for lectures and practical sessions. The standards achieved in the well-organised and managed practical sessions are very good.

8.6 CONCLUSION

In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by this organisation is very good. The organisation is meeting very effectively the educational and pastoral needs of the learners; and has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

9. CURRICULUM AREA: HORTICULTURE

Programmes Inspected: First Diploma in Horticulture
National Diploma in Horticulture

9.1 INTRODUCTION

The First Diploma in Horticulture is a one year full-time course aimed at providing students with a wide range of basic skills to prepare them for employment as landscape operatives, nursery workers or grounds persons or for further study. The BTEC National Diploma in Horticulture is a two year full-time course which incorporates a three month industry placement. The aim of the course is to provide the students with the necessary skills to gain employment in a number of sectors including careers in garden centres, nurseries, golf courses, landscape companies and local authorities.

9.2 MAIN FINDINGS

The main strengths are the:

- highly motivated and enthusiastic students, and the hard-working and committed lecturers;
- well-planned and organised teaching sessions;
- good standards of work achieved in the practical sessions;
- good retention rates and the excellent success rates; and
- overall management of the course which is very good; in particular good self-evaluative processes which have identified appropriate areas for further development.

The main area for improvement is:

- the need to introduce a wider range of teaching strategies into the classroom-based elements of the courses; in particular strategies which will engage the learners more actively in the learning process; and
- the low number of student enrolled on the First Diploma in Horticulture.

9.3 LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The courses are well organised, resourced and managed. A significant feature of the management of the courses is the extent to which the course manager, under the guidance of the senior management of the college, has conducted a comprehensive evaluation of the current provision. The inspection findings endorse many of the outcomes of this self-evaluation process.

9.4 ACHIEVEMENT AND STANDARDS

The standards achieved by the students at the end of their courses are excellent. In the past three years 93% of the students enrolled on the First Diploma course completed it; 96% of these students were successful in gaining the award. Over the same period a satisfactory number of the students, 78%, progressed to further qualifications, mainly the National Diploma course. The numbers on the First Diploma course are low with only four full-time students enrolled. The number of students completing the National Diploma course and gaining the award over the three year period is also excellent. Over this period 96% of the students enrolled completed the course and were awarded the qualification. The number of students completing this course progressing to other award-bearing courses is good. The majority of the students currently enrolled on the National Diploma course do not hold a recognised qualification at level 2 or above in literacy and/or numeracy. In order to improve the employability skills of the students completing both these courses, there is a need to ensure that they all obtain appropriate qualifications in literacy and numeracy.

9.5 QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING AND TEACHING

The facilities and resources provided by the college are excellent. In addition to the Horticulture Development Centre, a significant facility for the teaching of practical, technical and management skills, the course lecturers and instructors make effective use of the extensive campus grounds which include formal and informal garden settings, and golf and other sporting facilities. The relationships at all levels are excellent. The students are highly motivated and enthusiastic and make good use of the opportunities afforded to them, both in the formal and informal settings, to develop their practical skills. The standards achieved by the students in the well-organised and managed practical sessions are very good. The lecturers are well prepared for the formal teaching programme; the lectures are well-planned and the practical sessions are well-structured. The planning for the lectures would benefit, however, from a more detailed consideration of the students' previous learning and experience. In particular, there is a need for a wider range of teaching strategies in these more formal lectures which would engage the students more actively in their own learning and build more effectively on their previous experiences.

10. CONCLUSION

In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by this organisation is very good. The organisation is meeting very effectively the educational and pastoral needs of the learners; and has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

11. KEY PRIORITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

- Review the Child Protection Policy; and
- Planned opportunities for all students who do not have level 2 literacy and numeracy qualifications to obtain these qualifications.

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