

Myerscough College

Focused monitoring visit report

Unique reference number: 130743

Name of lead inspector: Bev Barlow HMI

Last day of inspection: 1 February 2011

Type of provider: Specialist college

Address: St Michael's Road
Bilsborrow
Preston
Lancashire
PR3 0RY

Telephone number: 01995 642222

FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

Myerscough College is a specialist land-based and sports college. The main site is near Preston, with several urban locations in Blackburn, Burnley, Liverpool and Manchester, and veterinary nursing schools in Dorset and Wirral. The college has an extensive range of high quality specialist resources to provide courses from entry level to higher education (HE), predominantly in land-based and sports subjects. The college enrolled around 2,600 further education (FE) learners in 2009/10. Around two-thirds are aged 16 to 18 from Lancashire and the surrounding area. In addition, almost 1,300 learners study HE courses, 1,023 are on Train to Gain and 725 are work-based learning apprentices.

The college was last inspected in May 2010. At that inspection the college was judged to be satisfactory overall. Outcomes for learners, quality of provision, and leadership and management were all judged to be satisfactory. Its capacity to improve was judged to be inadequate. Provision in the subject areas inspected was judged to be good in two, satisfactory in two and inadequate in the subject area animal care and equine. This report focuses on the themes explored during the monitoring visit.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has been made in using data to inform self-assessment and improve the clarity of quality improvement action plans so that effective actions are put in place to address areas for improvement?	Reasonable progress
---	----------------------------

The college promptly reviewed its data processing arrangements to ensure they are more robust and that students are not inappropriately transferred to a lower level course. A new information officer has been appointed and is working well with the subject area managers to support them in the use of data to inform self-assessment and monitor the impact of their actions. The use of data in the college's quality assurance systems is much improved, although a range of the targets in the quality improvement plans are insufficiently specific. Governors now receive a more detailed analysis of learners' performance across the college's FE provision and are monitoring the quality of provision more closely. The college recognises that it now needs to be more proactive in its response to data analysis in some areas. For example, a detailed analysis of the data on early leavers would help to inform developments in the advice and guidance procedures for future students. A wide range of actions has recently been introduced and staff at all levels are now focused on keeping students on their course and supporting them to achieve.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has been made in improving success rates for students aged 16 to 18 and reducing the achievement gap of females? **Reasonable progress**

Improving the success rates of students aged 16 to 18 is clearly a college priority. The new FE subject area managers are now accountable for the quality of the FE provision in their area. Students who are at risk of not achieving are clearly identified, given more specific targets and provided with additional individual tutorial sessions. A college wide 'at-risk' register is maintained by student support services staff who liaise very closely with subject area staff. Middle managers closely monitor the progress of these students at a weekly meeting and report progress to senior managers. A clear record of the broad range of supportive actions being taken by academic and/or support staff is evident. Attendance is closely monitored. Staff now have more contact with parents/guardians when a student is identified as causing concern. A college wide system has been introduced to add rigour and coherence to managers approving the withdrawal of students from their course. The college has introduced several female only enrichment activities to motivate and engage female residential students who do not achieve as well as males but it is too soon to judge the impact of these initiatives. A high proportion of female students are enrolled on equine and animal care courses. The actions to improve the quality of this provision are outlined below.

What progress has been made in improving retention rates and ensuring students are enrolled on the right courses? **Significant progress**

The college re-designed the enrolment and induction process for September 2010. The curriculum was revised to meet students' needs better and a more appropriate range and level of additional qualifications are now offered across subjects. Staff training was held to improve the consistency of advice at enrolment. A new six-week, cross-college induction programme now includes more detailed initial assessments and the completion of written and practical work to ensure students are on the right level of course. The number of students transferring or leaving their course during this early stage increased on previous years and was closely monitored by subject area managers and senior staff. The 'at-risk' register was established very quickly at the start of the year. College data show a significant improvement in retention when compared with the same date last year. Very few students have left college and retention is currently very high.

The college has introduced improvements to the advice and guidance process for potential students from September 2011. These include: new course entry criteria; subject-specific requirements such as work experience in a relevant industry; practical assessments and new prospectus details that clearly explain the academic rigour and course expectations at advanced level. Staff training and new documentation are now contributing to a more robust and consistent approach to interviewing prospective students.

To what extent has the college improved the delivery of the work-based programmes to increase the proportion of students that complete in the agreed time? Significant progress

In 2009/10 the overall success rate of apprentices continued to increase and was just above the national average. However, the number of apprentices achieving in the planned time remained too low. Since August 2010 managers have introduced a range of effective actions in work-based learning. A more robust enrolment and induction process now places greater emphasis on ensuring that prior learning is carefully accredited and a more realistic end date is agreed. A review of the delivery of additional qualifications and off-the-job training, increased assessor training and the investment in technology to increase the use of electronic portfolios have led to significant improvements. College data indicate that almost twice as many apprentices in this contract year have successfully completed their qualification in the time planned. For work-based learners on Train to Gain programmes the initiatives have also led to improvements in success rates. While the rate of improvement on Train to Gain is lower than that for apprentices, the data indicate success rates close to the high national average.

Quality of provision

What progress has the college made in ensuring that students' individual learning plans contain challenging and specific targets? Reasonable progress

Electronic individual learning plans have been developed further and are now more accessible to students and more user friendly. Students feel that their individual plans help them to judge their progress better, as they can see how well they have done in the past and what impact this will have on their future outcomes. Students negotiate their aspirational target grades with their tutor. Where students fall below their expected grade, they are given detailed actions with specific individual targets. These are then monitored to show how students have got back on track. The inclusion of additional learning support targets in students' individual learning plans has improved communication between staff and now gives a more complete picture of individual student progress. However, it is too early to see the full impact of the changes. The college is working on further developments to enhance the use of electronic learning plans and to encourage students to use them more frequently.

What progress has the college made to improve the quality of provision in equine and animal care? Reasonable progress

Significant changes have been made to the recruitment and selection process this year, with further refinements in place for next year. Staff now ensure that students are fully aware of the demands of the course and the commitment it requires. Early assessments are used to check that students are on the right course and at the right level. In animal care courses, there is more effective integration of theory and practical work and the assignments now include more practical and industrial

applications. Assignments are now spread out across the academic year to ensure an even workload. Good practice is shared within and between subject areas and across centres. Staff development has focused on improving aspects of teaching and learning. Students' electronic individual learning plans are used more effectively to monitor progress and identify support needs. Although it is too early to see the full impact of these changes on outcomes, early signs – such as retention figures and student feedback – are positive.

Self-assessment involves all subject area staff and highlights areas for improvement. Data are much more reliable and are used to monitor progress by staff at all levels. The action plan is monitored regularly, for example, at team meetings. However, some aspects need to be more specific with a stronger focus on demonstrating the impact of actions taken. In the subject areas there is a growing culture of empowerment and accountability.

What progress has been made to improve the consistency of teaching, learning and assessment strategies? Reasonable progress

Considerable time and effort have been given to improving the consistency of teaching and learning. Staff training has focused on sharing good practice and developing strategies to challenge more able learners and support those who may be finding the work difficult. Although this has led to improvements, managers are aware that further training is needed and they are working with individuals and small groups of staff to improve their practice. The internal lesson observation system is now more robust, with greater moderation and joint observations with staff from similar colleges. However, the observers need to continue to develop their focus on learning. Ungraded developmental lesson observations have been introduced and are effective in supporting staff in developing new approaches to teaching and learning.

A new assessment strategy has been developed to ensure consistent practice across subject areas. The new assistant heads, who are responsible for FE, have an overview of assessment and manage a more robust internal verification process. Assignments are now spread more evenly across the academic year and some are broken down into smaller chunks to make them more accessible to students. The assignment briefs students receive are clear and students told inspectors that they find the feedback from teachers useful in helping them to improve.

Leadership and management

How effectively have developments in leadership and management been embedded to demonstrate improvements in the college's capacity to improve? Reasonable progress

A new management structure was introduced in September 2010. At senior level there is clear responsibility and accountability for the quality of the college's FE provision. The governors' new committee structure enables them to monitor more

closely the impact of management actions. The college's revised vision now has a clear emphasis on inclusion and learners succeeding. This has been communicated well and staff understand their role in raising students' retention and achievement. All the new heads of subject areas are supported by an assistant who has a clear focus on, and responsibility for, leading and managing the quality of the subject areas' FE provision. Managers have a better understanding of the importance of having, and using, reliable data to inform self-assessment and quality improvement monitoring. The quality assurance process, including the use of data, is now more coherent. Data are now used to monitor the in-year performance of different cohorts and individual students. The self-assessment report is closely matched to the findings of the last inspection and there is clear evidence of learners' views being used to inform judgements and actions. The college's responses to the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection have clearly led to improvements, most noticeably in the use of data and the in-year retention rate. However, managers have yet to evaluate fully the effectiveness of the strategies to raise achievement. Further improvements need to be made in such areas as target setting and action planning.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It rates council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this report in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester, M2 7LA

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2011